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THE CULTURE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENT MOTHERS

by

BARBARA OMOLADE

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City
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Abstract

THE CULTURE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENT MOTHERS

by

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Adviser: Professor Judith Lorber

In this study, African American adolescent motherhood, is considered a social phenomenon rather than merely a social problem related to reproducing poverty and racism. This study presents an analysis of teen mothering that explores the influence of adolescent and motherhood cultures on young Black women.

In the dominant adolescent culture within the Black community as well as among other social groups, teen sexual freedom is openly displayed and advocated. Moreover adolescent female preoccupation with romance and beautification reinforce and strengthen adolescent sexual practices and help explain why young women become pregnant.

On the other hand, the historic cultural patterns of motherhood among African American women help to explain why Black pregnant teens decide to become mothers. The culture of Black motherhood created by adult women is composed of networks and patterns that support diverse forms of family formation including those of adolescent mothers.

The cultural approach of this study provides the context for understanding an ethnography of residents in a shelter for homeless teen mothers. These young women are addressing the tensions between single mothering or romantic coupling; and balancing mothering, working, and going to school.

Furthermore, motherhood among young Black women is occurring within the context of significant transformations in gender among all social groups especially the separation

of sexuality and parenting from marriage. The cultural dimensions of Black teen motherhood highlighted in this study are viewed against the backdrop of these gender changes and shifts in the economy especially the downsizing of the public sector and changes in welfare policy.

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Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

Isaiah 40:28-29

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Introduction

The experiences of adolescent pregnancy and parenting are among the most significant social phenomena in late twentieth century American life. Teen motherhood, widespread in most societies, has traditionally involved married adolescents. However, nearly all of the one million contemporary adolescent mothers in the United States are unmarried and poor. Because these young women depend more on public assistance than husbands or their families for financial support, teen pregnancy and parenting have become central to public policies concerned with the family, welfare, and poverty. In spite of its prominence in public discourses, teen motherhood's underlying social contexts and the voices of teen mothers themselves are marginalized and unexamined. This is particularly true for Black teen mothers who are almost always regarded as mere incubators of the underclass.

In this study, an ethnography of a group of Black teen mothers residing in a shelter in an urban community provides the centerpiece for examining the personal, cultural, and moral meanings of Black teen motherhood. This "thick ethnographic study" of Black teen mothers (Geertz, 1973) underscores a central theme: Black teen motherhood is a social phenomenon that cannot be solely explained by a social problems analysis focused exclusively on poverty and unemployment. This study assumes that the cultures of adolescence and motherhood are critical influences in

understanding the development of mothering among young Black women. Although connected to economic dislocation and racial stratification, Black teen mothers are only one of many groups of young people who use sex and parenting to facilitate the difficult transition from childhood to adulthood.

All American teens are caught in "a developmental asynchrony in the attainment of the biological, legal, and social status of adulthood in modern society" (Rosenheim, 1992:202). Regarded as "an enforced delay in maturity," the lengthy adolescence among American youth is nevertheless necessary to prepare them to meet the complex demands of modern society (Apter, 1990:25). Sexual intercourse and parenting among adolescents in contemporary society are not acceptable because they interfere with "the normative ages at which society expects people to have achieved major cultural transitions, such as graduating from school, entering the work force, getting married, having a child..." (Hamburg and Dixon, 1992:21).

This study specifically focuses on how a distinct youth culture and patterns of adult mothering are connected to the socialization of African American females into womanhood. Since the social and cultural changes in sexuality, morality, and appropriate gender roles impacts all adolescents, understanding Black teen mothers can help unravel the impact of the complex processes of gender transformation taking place in the overall society.

Background

"While U.S. rates of teenage sexual activity and age of 'sexual initiation' approximate those of comparable developed countries, the teenage pregnancy, abortion, and childbearing rates in the United States are substantially higher" (Fine, 1993:97). According to various studies,

compared to youths who postpone child-bearing, teenage mothers have lower educational attainment, less income, higher unemployment, are more dependent on welfare, are more likely to experience psychological problems associated with pregnancy, have higher levels of completed fertility, are more likely to abuse or neglect their children, experience higher rates of marital dissolution and are more likely to have daughters who also become unwed teenage mothers (Taylor, 1991:219).

During the last thirty years, the rate of marriage especially among African-American adolescents has dramatically declined. "In 1960 about fifteen percent of all births to teenagers were to unmarried mothers....As of 1989 67 percent of teenage mothers were unwed when they gave birth" (Testa, 1992:6). In 1986, in Chicago, "...virtually no black teenage mothers are married at the time of delivery" (Franklin, 1992:65). Nationwide, in 1989, "only four percent of Black mothers between fifteen and seventeen years old were married" (Hamburg, 1992:23). Secondly, "in 1989 Black females accounted for 15.8 percent of the adolescent female population but were responsible for 30.4 percent of all teenage births. By age eighteen, 26 percent of Black females have given birth and 40 percent have a child before age twenty

years old". Thirdly, "Black teenagers also account for 39 percent of all repeat births to adolescent mothers" (Gibbs, 1992:72).

Since the 1970's "research and policy attention to teen pregnancy and childbearing has turned away from a focus on the consequences to mother and child...to negative consequences to 'society' caused by welfare dependency among teen age mothers"(Huling, 1988:7). The focus on the economic impact of teen childbearing has influenced social science research and public perceptions about the typical teen-age mother. The focus of the popular media on teenage mothers who are Black and welfare expenditures to teenage mothers in large cities has shaped the public's current image of the typical welfare recipient as a black teenage mother (Huling, *ibid.*, 8). However,

this stereotype has obscured the reality, of the roughly 500,000 births annually to teenagers, the preponderance are to females eighteen to nineteen years old. They account for 60 percent of the total; adding in births to girls of 17 brings the total to 80 percent (Rosenheim, 1992:203).

In addition, "over two-thirds of the mothers are white, and 34 percent are married (Rosenheim, *ibid.*).

During the 1990's, discussions about Black teen parenting have shifted once again, this time to focus on the responsibility of the fathers of children born to Black teen mothers. Framing the discussion in terms of employability and marriageability of Black men continues to side-step the impact of society-wide gender transformations on Black women.

The use of Black teen motherhood as a proxy for addressing joblessness of men and the decline of marriage among Black people ignores Black women's own ambiguity about marriage and sexual and reproductive choices.

This study neither holds Black teen mothers responsible for the reproduction of the underclass, nor regards their decisions as symbols of female liberation. It rather attempts to understand their perspective and its cultural contexts. The tension between personal choice and social constructs in the lives of Black teen mothers is a text for illuminating how individuals experience, interpret, and construct selves within social arrangements organized and imposed by others as well as by themselves.

Gender, a distinct social category, is a dynamic element within racial and class categories and groups (West, and Fenstermaker, 1995), hence, a gender analysis is essential for framing the beliefs and choices of these young Black women. In this study Black teen mothers and their mates are assumed to be a group of social actors "doing gender" by carrying "out a complex of perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of manly and womanly natures"(West, and Fenstermaker, 1995:9). These young mothers interact with youth and motherhood cultures to frame their seemingly haphazard gender activities into order and meaning.

Adolescent Culture

This study assumes that a crucial component of contemporary Black female gender identity is developed within the context of a Black adolescent culture, which is an integral part of adolescent society in the United States. Yet adolescents from all communities and status groups construct autonomous subcultures and cliques that have their own mores and attitudes. These subcultures organize and structure adolescence by providing the means for teenagers to function during the extended period between childhood and adulthood. Subcultures allow adolescents to experience autonomy and to construct an identity outside adult control and supervision. In addition, teens are part of a consumer market that reinforces subculture membership and expresses the feelings and attitudes of teenagers irrespective of their racial, class, and regional differences. Most importantly, the market and subculture work together to shape the adolescent's notion of romance, sexuality, and gender roles.

In 1961, James Coleman conducted one of the first extensive research studies to describe the emergence of an adolescent subculture characterized by "the simple fact that adolescents are looking to each other rather than to the adult community for their social rewards..." (Coleman 1961:11). The students in the working and middle class midwestern high schools that Coleman observed used school primarily as a site for developing their associations, elaborate cliques, and groups. Lacking material means, the teens used

rewards and punishments include popularity, respect, acceptance into a crowd, praise, awe, support and aid, on the one hand, or isolation, ridicule, exclusion from a crowd, disdain, discouragement, disrespect (Coleman 1961:314).

Coleman's study revealed a double standard of gender behavior where "the boy is the pursuer, the girl is the pursued" (Coleman, 1961:122). While girls worked harder to get better grades than boys, "the girl who is admired and sought after by boys is the active girl, not the girl who is still conforming to adult standards by her concern with studies and good grades" (Coleman 1961:171-172). The values of girls' culture was molded by the over-riding importance of being successful with boys (Coleman 1961:41). Girls who conformed to parental and teacher expectations were often rejected by their male peers. Adolescent subcultures continued to relegate girls to passive female roles and behaviors in heterosexual relationships.

Since the Coleman study, teen life has become even more dominated by autonomous groups and cliques. However, contemporary adolescent sexual cultural has been radically altered by the decline of taboos, stigma, and penalties against premarital sex. By engaging in heterosexual intercourse, which then leads many to motherhood, adolescent girls have broken away from merely swooning and idealizing about romance. For many teenage girls, having sex is the rite of passage for becoming an adult woman.

According to a 1986-87 Minnesota Adolescent Health Survey, sixty-four percent of female high school seniors and

sixty-one percent of male high school seniors have had sexual intercourse. Nearly forty percent of these sexually active girls used no contraception, and twelve percent of twelfth-grade females had been pregnant. Ninety-four percent of the nearly thirty-six thousand teenagers in the study were white, and eighty percent of the students surveyed lived in two-parent households (Harris, Blum, and Resnick 1991).

This study demonstrates that adolescent sexual intercourse and pregnancy are quite widespread and not limited to urban, Black, or impoverished teenagers. The emphasis on sexual intercourse among teens is part of the sexual revolution occurring among adults who are more tolerant of extramarital sex, divorce, single parenting, and homosexuality. In addition, while teens are "pulled" toward sexuality by their biology and social groups, adult entrepreneurs, influenced by general sexual liberalization, "push" and market sex to adolescent consumers.

In his study of Northton, a Black inner city neighborhood, Anderson observed that "the basic sexual codes of Northton youths may not differ fundamentally from those of other young people, but the social, economic, and personal consequences of adolescent sexual conduct vary profoundly for different social classes" (Anderson, 1991:113). Indeed, the gender patterns revealed in the white adolescents studied by Coleman and the Minnesota Health Survey resemble gender behavior among Black teens in Northton. Anderson notes that

the girls have a dream, the boys a desire. The girls dream of being carried off by a Prince Charming who will love them, provide for them, and give them a family. The boys often desire sex without commitment or babies without responsibility for them...The girl's faith in the dream is nurtured by daily watching of television soap operas...The heroes and heroines may be white and upper middle class, but such characteristics only make them more attractive (Anderson, 1991:113 and 115).

The sexual codes expressed by and among Black youth are embodied and reflected in "hip-hop", the contemporary culture created by Black, mainly male, adolescents. The most well known form of "hip-hop" is rap, a rhythmic poetry full of rage and sexual rawness, chanted against a steady beat by male rappers who boast about their sexual prowess, emphasize violence, and hurl challenges to both white and African American adult value systems. There are also female rappers who express comparable themes (Lott, 1992; Rose, 1994).

Rap videos, romance novels, television, and movies contain messages to adolescent girls about the importance of attracting and sexually pleasing a man. In addition, teenage girls are told by the media and their families that mating and mothering are the most important goals of being a woman.

Feminist psychologist Carol Gilligan suggests that Black girls have higher self-esteem than white girls who "experienced a severe drop in their feelings of self-worth as they approached adolescence" (Gilligan, 1991:13-14).

Sociologist Janie Victoria Ward explains "one factor that might help Black girls is that they are often surrounded by

strong women they admire" (quoted in Daley, 1991:B1). Black teen girls may be able to maintain their self-esteem when compared to white girls because they are influenced by models of womanhood that foster mothering and marriage, as well as high labor market participation and education. The presence of working wives, single mothers and high powered professional women who have overcome obstacles, creates conflicts in the lives of young Black women. Urged to be both dependent and self-reliant they are encouraged by their peers to have sex, get a man, and become a mother, while urged by adults to go to college and get a high paying job.

Black Motherhood

Unpacking the cultural history of African American motherhood and its influences on the reproduction of mothering among Black teen girls is another goal of this study. Black feminist writer Barbara Christian observes that

African American motherhood can thus be seen as contested terrain between three distinct points of view -- the African American community's view of motherhood; the white American view of motherhood; and the white American view of Black motherhood (Christian, 1994:98).

This study situates contemporary Black teen motherhood within these complex and intersecting views, but privileges the African American community's view of motherhood.

In describing the characteristics of Black motherhood, Patricia Hill Collins (1987,:5-6) identifies four "enduring themes." Firstly, Black mothering goes beyond the biological mother to include "othermothers" in the care and social

reproduction of children. "Organized, resilient, women-centered networks of bloodmothers and othermothers are key in understanding the centrality of women in African-American extended families." (pg. 5) Secondly, unlike the American ideal of motherhood, Black mothering includes providing the economic resources essential to a Black family's well-being. Thirdly, this more extended form of mothering has provided a "foundation for Black women's social activism". (pg. 6) Lastly, African-American mothering is a symbol of power that stretches mothering from its specific family-based dimensions to include uplifting the race and protecting the Black community.

These practices add status and strength to Black women who are mothers. Christian notes that "because of the history of slave mothers, such sanctification surrounds African American motherhood that the idea that mothers should live lives of sacrifice has come to be seen as the norm." (Christian, 1994:103) Irrespective of circumstances or desire, motherhood has become essential to the Black female experience and the most important model of womanhood for many Black teen girls.

Black Social World

The daily experiences of Black teen mothers and the adolescent and mothering cultures that impact on their lives are located within the Black social world. More than a neighborhood or community, the Black social world is a complex backstage physical and symbolic domain usually hidden

from white people and rarely portrayed with accuracy in the media or social sciences that usually define it as simply an ethnic ghetto. Attention is focused on those who interact negatively with its public institutions, such as schools, hospitals, and police departments. The everyday experiences and familial, political, and social institutions of ordinary people remain unseen. The Black social world is the principal site for individuals and their families to address their physical and emotional needs.

Most Black female teenagers live in this social world in families with at least a mother and siblings. They have nearby relatives and know their fathers. Unfortunately, homelessness, death, addictions, and violence have caused disturbingly high numbers of Black youth, including Black teen mothers, to be placed in foster care and group homes. The lives of a group of the most precarious young Black mothers, those who are homeless and receiving public assistance, is the concern of this research study.

Field Research

The Black social world that is the site for this study is Black Brooklyn, which houses one of the largest urban Black communities in the world. Its sprawling boundaries contain a multi-ethnic population of a half-million residents with diverse social experiences. Large groups of recently arrived immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean have joined families who migrated from southern United States between the 1930's and 1950's, who, in turn, came into communities

populated by Black people who had resided in Brooklyn for generations.

This ethnography is about the experiences of a group of African American adolescent mothers who reside in Black Brooklyn in a shelter (hereafter referred to as The Shelter) for seventeen homeless teen mothers between 17 and 19 years old and their children. Although not all the mothers at The Shelter are of African descent, or from Brooklyn, most are from Black or Latin communities throughout New York City. While at The Shelter, they go to school, shop, and take care of their medical and other needs within the local area.

The Shelter grew out of a teen mother project that was part of a 25-year-old, community-based organization supporting Black single mothers. I was an early member of this organization and participated in its teen mother project. For this study, I worked as a volunteer education counselor at The Shelter from March until November 1995 and was able to talk with and observe most of the teen mothers who were residents at that time, and I also observed and spoke with the staff and former residents.

The Shelter provides apartment-like living spaces, child care, security, workshops, and counseling. Its programs attempt to change the behavior and influence the life choices of teen mothers when they first become mothers. Some of the residents even give birth while at the shelter. The Shelter operates as an institutional "other mother" guided by the ways adult Black mothers care for their teen daughters who

become mothers. The founding director of the Shelter believes that practical and concrete support to young mothers will enable them to become caring, competent, and self-sufficient. Her program provides residents with information, support, and encouragement to negotiate welfare, education, health care, and housing systems and bureaucracies. Life skills for home management and parenting are offered in both formal and casual ways.

Homeless teen mothers were selected to be studied because they encounter most of the problems associated with early childbirth: interrupted schooling, reliance on public assistance, dislocated and impaired family systems. Shelter residents are referred by the Social Service Department of the New York City Human Resources Administration. While much could be learned from comparing the experiences of homeless Black teen mothers in a variety of shelters and programs, this Shelter's connection to a community-based Black women's organization reflected the values and expressions of the culture of Black motherhood. The Shelter's small setting and minimal administrative structures facilitate the study of Black teen mothers as "more or less autonomous social actors who cope with their situations, ascertain meaning from their lives and map out their own actions" within a community of women like themselves (Blumer, 1969:51).

Theoretical Framework

Though gender is absent as an explicit analytical category, the studies of Black adolescents by African

American sociologists W.E.B. Du Bois, Charles Johnson, E. Franklin Frazier, and Joyce Ladner offer a useful model and rationale for this study of Black teen mothers. First of all, their work privileged the individual personality and subjectivity of African American youth. Secondly, they paid attention to observations about the community environment and family lives of their subjects. Furthermore, these sociologists located their ethnographies within the overall context of public policies and discourses about racial stratification and economic inequality.

Black female subjects, such as teen mothers, require a quilted and interwoven theoretical framework that reflects the combined constructions of race, gender, and class not merely as simultaneous and multiple oppressions, but as the basis of cultural sites and positions of resistance, identity, and agency.

Some of the theoretical strands of a quilted analysis used as the basis of this study include: symbolic interactionist notions of "self" intertwined with segregation-era African American sociologists' discussions of the "personality" of Black youth and feminist notions of female standpoint (Blumer, 1969; Collins, 1990; Frazier, 1967; Gorelick, 1991; Johnson, 1967; Smith, 1987). The notion of the social reproduction of class resulting from adolescent rebellion and defiance is integrated with an analysis of Black motherhood as a "habit of survival" (Scott, 1991; Willis, 1977). The descriptions of adolescent society merge

with ethnography's of Black youth and analysis of rap music and Black culture (Anderson, 1990; Coleman, 1961; Rose, 1994; William and Kornblum, 1985). Goffman's (1959) description of the backstage has helped to explicate the Black social-world context of participant observations within the Black community (Anderson, 1990; Cayton and Drake, 1993; Ladner, 1972). Lastly, the overall framework is informed by both scholarly and political definitions of culture (Cabral, 1973; Geertz, 1973; Hays, 1994; Solomon, 1992).

Summary

This study uses a cultural analysis to explain and describe African American adolescent mothers who are neither symbols of impoverishment, nor proxies for concerns about welfare policy or Black male unemployment. This study privileges the integrity of Black teen mothers as subjects in their own right with their own perspectives, dilemmas, and experiences. Moreover, this study locates teen motherhood within a dynamic Black social world with a distinctive matrifocal family organizational system or culture of motherhood that is over three hundred years old. It also locates Black teen motherhood within more recent adolescent cultural trends that have encouraged teenagers to "do gender" in their own way and without adult intervention. Increasingly adolescent behavior matches the gender transformations taking place among adults, in which sex, marriage, and childbirth are separate occurrences.

The decision by young women to become single mothers in a post-industrial society with its expanded employment opportunities for women suggests contradictions in gender construction, the political economy and women's roles and choices that go far beyond the boundaries of the Black community.

This study has two dimensions: one, an examination of the internal social organization of Black teen motherhood through its cultures and the experiences of a specific group of young mothers; two, an argument for a phenomenological approach to Black teen motherhood that privileges gender yet connects it to political and economic structures that effectively explore the impact and implications of Black teen motherhood for the entire society.

Organization of the Study

Part I consists of: Chapter 1. the literature review that critiques underclass theory and feminist theories of gender. Chapter 2. the research design describing the methods and theories used in this study.

Part II links the experiences of teen girls and mothers with adolescent and motherhood cultures within the African American community. Chapter 3 focuses on Black adolescent culture. Chapter 4 describes how the culture of Black motherhood fosters the reproduction of motherhood among teen girls.

Part III describes the results of the field research with homeless Black teen mothers in the Shelter. It is

introduced by Chapter 5, an autobiographical statement of the experiences of a former Black teenage mother. Chapter 6 describes the Shelter program as a institutional form of "othermothering". Chapter 7 describes the varying experiences of young mothers in the Shelter. Chapter 8 focuses on the experiences of former residents after they leave the Shelter.

The conclusion brings together the cultural perspectives of Black teen motherhood with recent reforms in welfare and public assistance to indicate the significant role of the political economy in shaping constructions of gender and race.

Introduction

Teen motherhood is a predicament that female adolescents both choose and find themselves in. Its negative consequences result in interrupted schooling, diminished employment opportunities, high rates of welfare dependency and social stigma. Since nearly all Black teen mothers are unmarried or single, and since many Black poor women are single mothers, theories concerning race and poverty usually view teen motherhood among African American women as the product and producer of the underclass.

This chapter critically examines underclass theory and its analysis of teen motherhood and poverty among Black women. While there are certainly connections between how adolescent females make reproductive decisions and the perpetuation of poverty, Black teen motherhood is more accurately understood a pattern of socialization into gender roles that is occurring within the Black community and in the general society.

The omission of gender as an analytical category has seriously undermined underclass theory's ability to adequately explain the contexts and choices of young Black women. However, as this chapter demonstrates, feminist theories about gender that fail to specify the historical and cultural context of women's experiences are also limited. In order to accurately study Black teen motherhood, theories of race and gender must work in tandem to inform both underclass

theory's concern with enduring forms of impoverishment and feminist concerns with the distinctive experiences of women in the construction of gender.

The analysis described in this chapter assumes that Black teen motherhood is not simply a social problem of racial victims locked into the permanent pathology of an underclass, but a social phenomena with rationales and forms not unique to the Black poor.

Underclass Theory and its Antecedents

Since the late 1980's, the themes developed by William Julius Wilson in his study, The Truly Disadvantaged, have become central to discourses about the underclass and impoverishment among African Americans. He describes the "underclass" as

individuals who lack training and skills and either experience long term unemployment or are not members of the labor force; individuals who are engaged in street crime and other forms of aberrant behavior, and families that experience long-term spells of poverty and/or welfare dependency (Wilson, 1987:8).

Wilson locates the joblessness and dependency of the Black poor within economic changes involving the shift of location and importance of manufacturing industries and "the increasing polarization of the labor market into low-wage and high-wage sectors." He further observes that urban centers are being transformed from "centers of production and distributions of material goods" into "centers of

administration, information exchange and higher-order service provision" (Wilson, 1987:39). The manual and manufacturing jobs that previously supported the working poor, especially its male members, no longer exist for most residents in urban areas. Although service sector jobs in both the low-and high-wage sectors have increased, the well-paying ones require skills, resources, or access these residents lack, and the low-paying ones tend to hire women and immigrants.

These economic transformations have been accompanied by changes in the state's response to the needs of dislocated workers. Previous groups of workers were helped by New Deal government programs and the expanding economy during and after World War II. However the government no longer plays a pro-active role in job creation and in support for public institutions such as schools, housing, and hospitals. Even long-standing entitlement programs to individuals and families such as the Aid to Families and Dependent Children and Home Relief have been radically reduced or dismantled.

Wilson has theorized that these economic and political changes have precipitated social transformations that have created an underclass of "truly disadvantaged individuals and families" who are isolated and concentrated within inner city areas. According to Wilson, in the absence of the social buffers of the working and middle classes, problematic gendered behaviors have developed that include increased out-

of-wedlock pregnancies and childbirth among women, and more criminal behavior among men (Wilson, 1987:20-62).

Although Wilson uses the term "underclass" to distinguish between contemporary and past forms of poverty among African Americans, his "concern with casual sex, unwed mothers, and incompetent parenting echo complaints about the urban poor that have influenced American social policy since early in the nineteenth century" (Katz, 1993:469). Moreover, African American scholars of the segregation era such as W.E.B. Du Bois, E. Franklin Frazier, and Charles Johnson linked racial prejudice to economic marginality and assumed, like Wilson, that the sexual and familial behaviors of the Black poor caused and represented social problems requiring both political and economic solutions.

While recognizing the hard work and sacrifice of women who were heads of their families and households, these Black scholars were most concerned about the number of Black men who didn't or couldn't assume the traditional patriarchal role of husband and father. They concluded that "illegitimacy" was a form of family disorganization that held back Black stability and racial progress among African Americans.

The tradition began with W.E.B. Du Bois's study, The Philadelphia Negro (1899), the first example of urban sociology and the scholarly examination of a modern American city. His goal was to provide the public with information

about Black people that could be used to guide efforts to solve the social problems facing Blacks in an urban setting. From 1896 to 1897, Du Bois examined the occupation and daily life of those living in the 7th ward of Philadelphia. Du Bois conducted house to house canvassing by administering six sets of questionnaires focusing on family, individuals, home, street, organizations, and domestic work. In his 1909 study, The Negro American Family, the first sociological study of the subject, Du Bois sought to place the Black family in a historical context that demonstrated its progress since the end of slavery. Du Bois used census tracts, interviews, and observations from field research to make the connections among housing, family stability, and class.

Through his pioneering sociological studies, Du Bois established the paradigm that dominated all subsequent studies of African American life. In describing the development of Negro problems (sic), Du Bois defined a social problem as "the failure of an organized social group to realize its group ideals, through the inability to adapt a certain desired line of actions to given conditions of life." Accordingly, the social problems facing Black people consisted of "two distinct but correlated parts: first, ...they have not reached a sufficiently high grade of culture." Secondly, "...there has always existed in America a conviction -- varying in intensity, but always widespread -- that people of Negro blood should not be admitted into the

life of the nation no matter what their condition might be"(Cited in Green and Driver, 1978:71).

Du Bois attributed Black cultural lack to the legacy of slavery: "the Negro home and the stable marriage state is for the mass of colored people of the country and for a large percent of those of Philadelphia, a new social institution" (Du Bois,1899:71). In his research, he observed large numbers of wives and single mothers deserted by their husbands and mates, and said that "the causes of desertion are partly laxity in morals and partly the difficulty of supporting a family" (Du Bois,1899:69). Du Bois' theory that Black social problems developed from a combination of white racism and Black cultural and moral deficits became the basis of nearly all subsequent studies about Black family life, especially among the poor.

E. Franklin Frazier elaborated on Du Bois' paradigm in his research demonstrating the relationship between historical conditions and contemporary social patterns. He described the development of two family systems among African-Americans: one, a patriarchy that was like most white families and the other, an adaptive maternal family organization that was considered deviant and dysfunctional. Although some patriarchal families did develop among the slaves, under nearly all "conditions of slavery, the Negro mother remained the most dependable figure in the family" (Frazier, 1966:32). After slavery single motherhood continued

among unmarried women and deserted wives who "became responsible for the maintenance of the family group" (Frazier, 1966:88). Frazier observed that as African-American populations urbanized, the maternal family organization associated with rural folkways and "illegitimacy" became a serious economic and social problem. Dependency and disorganization accelerated within families headed by single mothers as they moved into the cities. He concluded that the social problems facing the urban poor could be best addressed by stable marriages and families headed by employed men and the removal of racial obstacles that prevented them from doing so.

The scholarship of the Black family developed by Du Bois, Frazier, and others had a profound impact on white social scientists and public policy makers who studied the Black poor, such as Gunnar Myrdal (1962) and Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1967). There is a direct line between Frazier's analysis about the connection between the family disorganization of the poor and racial exclusion and Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 report recommending policies and programs to strengthen male roles in families as a means of social advancement for the Black poor. Using Frazier's paradigm, Moynihan argued that "family deterioration" i.e., single mother families, was a major obstacle to Black progress and recommended policies that would decrease the growth of the maternal family organization (or Black

matriarchy) and increase the resources of the two-parent, male-headed, African-American family.

Since the Moynihan report, the rates of Black single mothers, viewed as the main indicator of Black social problems, have increased along with the concerns of scholars and policy makers about the connection between poverty, racism, and sexual and marital choices. In his theory of the underclass, Wilson has "focused on female-headed families, out-of-wedlock births, and teenage pregnancy because they have become inextricably connected with poverty and dependency" (Wilson, 1987:29).

Christopher Jencks has developed categories describing underclass behaviors based on differences from middle class norms. According to his schema, Black women are part of "the jobless underclass if they receive their money from irregular work, crime, public assistance and handouts" and in the reproductive underclass if they are young or unmarried mothers (Jencks, 1992:144). Another study indicates that families headed by single mothers are more likely to experience social isolation and spatial concentration because of the "persistence of weak attachment to the labor force over time" (McLanahan and Garfinkel 1989: 92-104).

While it is useful to distinguish between poor women's weak attachment to the economy and intense participation in childbearing and family life, these arenas are interconnected. Women's employment patterns and sources of

income are influenced by their family type and household organization. Poor single mothers must limit or delay their participation in the labor force because the low-wage paying jobs available to them often lack health-care benefits and adequate wages to cover child care and transportation. In many cases, even employed mothers need welfare payments to supplement their income. "Given the economic realities, it is also not surprising that many who are working in these low-wage jobs decide to rely on or return to welfare, even though it's not a desirable alternative for many of the black single mothers" (Wilson, 1997:31).

Black teen mothers, a "greater proportion of single mothers than ever before" (Wilson, 1987:70), have little choice but to use welfare to sustain their families. Once viewed as a necessary social program for helping widows and poor women, welfare is now considered by many politicians and citizens an encouragement to the undeserving poor, such as teen mothers, to engage in a life style of idleness and sexual promiscuity (Gordon, 1987).

As Duncan and Hoffman point out, "National data still supports the claim that schooling and delayed childbearing are sufficient conditions for most women, black and white, to avoid poverty as adults." However, "teenagers", such as teen mothers, "who break this rule are punished economically as never before" (Duncan and Hoffman, 1991:172-173).

In an attempt to slow down the rates of unmarried childbirth, especially among teen mothers, policies curtailing welfare payments to indigent mothers have become widely accepted by the public. This form of economic punishment to teen mothers is accompanied by a constant barrage of negative attitudes and publicity about their experiences. Policy makers argue that "ending welfare as we know it" will undermine what they believe is the financial incentive for out-of-wedlock births (Murray, 1984). In addition, the cost and inavailability of adequate child care and housing as well as the lack of entry level jobs usually hampers the young mothers' ability to become economically self-sufficient.

In light of the economic punishment and social stigma of teenage motherhood, troubling questions are continually raised: why do they choose to become mothers without getting married or getting adequate schooling and employment? How does the economy and government policies influence these choices?

In the case of Black teen mothers, Wilson views the joblessness of Black men as the key to addressing these questions. He asserts "that the problems of male joblessness could be the single most important factor underlying the rise in unwed mothers among poor black women" (Wilson, 1987:73). "Black women, especially young Black women are facing a shrinking pool of 'marriageable' (i.e., employed) black men"

(Wilson, 1987:105). Although Wilson attributes this shrinking pool of men to structural transformations of the economy, his theory critiques the decision of both men and women to engage in sex without marriage or jobs. His analysis of these troubling choices indicate a cause-and-effect relationship between poverty and deviant behavior, which suggests he believes the condition of the underclass is caused as much by their behavior as by the inavailability of work.

Distorted Notions of the Poor

Michael Katz has noted that research about the poor "always has reinforced images of social pathology because it has focused on bad behavior: long term welfare dependence, drugs, crime, out of wedlock pregnancy, low educational achievement, unwillingness to work (Katz, 1993:21). Du Bois, Frazier, Moynihan, and Wilson, and others have followed rather than critically examined this scholarly tradition.

In developing his theory of the underclass, Wilson has carefully crafted a notion of class that includes a group so deviant, disadvantaged, and morally damaged by economic dislocation and unemployment that its social location is below the working class. Rather than a sector of the working class whose race has limited their ability (or will) to find work, underclass theory suggests that a new class has developed from the neighborhood clustering of the long-term unemployed, single-mother families, and social misfits. The assumption of underclass theory is that class reproduction is

developed by distinctive behaviors among the poor which profoundly isolates them from the traditional working class and its moral norms.

In his study, *Social Science, Social Policy, and the Heritage of African American Families*, Andrew Miller indicates that "the idea of an underclass implies the existence of an overclass that defines and sets ideological standards under which society in general is expected to live" (Miller, 1987:255). Distorted notions about the connections between class and behavior assume that (white) middle class families are not merely economically better off than poor (Black) ones, but are also morally superior to them. Ironically, the same scholars who recognize that Black fathers and husbands are racially discriminated against in the labor market nevertheless blame them for being unable to construct families and households like white men who have privileges as workers and professionals. In much of the scholarship about the Black poor, the white family is uncritically venerated and admired, although the policies and practices most responsible for creating economic and racial inequality were developed by its patriarchs.

Miller also observed that "African-American families shoulder more blame for the emergence of an underclass than any other institution" (Miller, 1987:255). Moreover Black single and teen mothers are especially "blamed for the population explosion, for escalating welfare costs, for the

existence of unwanted babies, and blamed for the tenacious grip of poverty on blacks in America" (Sollinger, 1992:25). One reason Black teen and single mothers are so stigmatized is "because they are considered proxies for non employed men who are the primary concern of many analysts" (Mc Lanahan and Garfinkel, 1989:96). Another rationale is that families headed by poor Black women are considered "incapable of rearing children to be healthy, productive adults" (Miller, 1987:255).

While the stress, demoralization, and limited resources facing such families can not be dismissed or minimized, many remain viable. But "concern with 'deviant' family structures...connected to a level of racial scapegoating and displacement" has placed the conduct of poor Black family members under greater scrutiny and accountability than others in society (Miller, 1987:267).

Racial scapegoating assumes that Black families are morally and organizationally worse than white families, who are presumed to have few deep-seated problems. "By pinning black juvenile delinquency and antisocial behavior on improper family structure, the social authorities of white America both denied racial injustice and displaced its own family inadequacies" (Miller, 1987: 258). The class and racial privileges of white middle-class and upper-class families can help them discretely hide socially problematic behaviors while maintaining a public persona of order and

piety. It is important to recognize that violence, drugs, and crime occur within all families, classes, and communities, not merely among poorer groups and female headed households.

Distorted notions about the behavior of poor people are linked to distorted notions about their environment. Underclass theorists assume that geographic distance between the classes has prevented the poor from learning normative or middle class behavior especially regarding employment and family practices. It is assumed that unemployed poor people could learn how to work and where to find work by their association with networks of regularly employed workers.

Patricia Fernandez Kelly points out two important reasons that neighborhoods matter: first, "people derive their knowledge from the physical spaces where they live"; secondly, social and cultural capital are toponomical that is dependent on physical and social location". In her study,

...impoverished ghetto women are clustered in neighborhoods that are spatially segregated by race and class, molded by relative isolation and diminished capacity to gain access to resources controlled by larger social groupings (Kelly, 1995:215).

However, three factors mitigate against the social isolation of such poor populations. Exposure to popular culture and mass media counters their social isolation of the poor. Although they may be physically separated from the middle class as neighbors, the mass media provides the poor

with greater access to their values, behavior, and ideas than ever before. Television talk shows, news programs and documentaries, as well as soap operas, sitcoms, and made-for-television movies expose the poor to both the myths and the realities of middle class. In fact, the electronic media has penetrated rather deeply into the Black social world, challenging its traditional institutions such as the church, and its patterns of community and family self-help. It is the contention of this study that the mass media has greater influence on gender behaviors and relationships than families or neighborhoods. Through a variety of cultural mediums and messages gender patterns such as teen mothering has spread of among adolescent social groups of diverse class backgrounds.

Another mediating factor against the social isolation of the poor is their interaction with the institutional representatives of the state, such as teachers, police officers, and doctors, who reinforce middle-class values by rewarding those who follow them and punishing those who do not. Teachers, for example, model middle class language, standards, and behavior to poor children, requiring their adoption in order to become successful students.

A third source of poor and middle-class interactions occurs in the programs, churches, and activities of elected officials, politicians, community activists, ministers, and volunteers from middle class Black organizations. Determined to "give something back" to the poor who remain in inner

cities, these volunteers provide educational and employment resources. Churches continue to break down the social isolation of the poor and help to socialize them for jobs and to stabilize their families. Finally, many poor individuals and families are part of extended family networks consisting of working and middle-class members that help to diminish their social isolation.

In fact, the horrific impact of the drug culture, especially crack cocaine usage, increase use of guns, domestic violence and abuse are mainly responsible for poor people being unable to thrive and become successful workers and family members. Unlike other classes, the poor can not discretely address their family problems and addictions. Since they are frequently dependent upon public assistance and institutions for support, their problems receive greater public scrutiny than those in the middle and upper classes. groups.

In addition, the state and the economy have failed to provide economic opportunities for poor Black people that include breaking down racial and class discrimination. Nevertheless their social world is not bereft of exposure to middle class individuals, values, or institutions. It is not the social isolation of the poor that prevents them from being employed, it's the lack of sufficient entry-level jobs and the racial and class bias of potential employers in those jobs that are available. Moreover, the Black poor who are

employed must continually fight against negative stereotypes about their families, sexuality, and neighborhoods.

Fernandez Kelly does admit that "the insularity of the poor also leads to the creation of a rich symbolic repertory that helps to transform vulnerability into precarious displays of individual affection, self-individuation, and status" (Fernandez Kelly, 1986:216). These displays are not merely isolated individual expressions, they emerge out the context of a dynamic, not static Black social world. In fact, the culture of motherhood that has enabled Black families of all class backgrounds to survive has most often functioned within the destitution of poor communities.

Distorted notions about poor Black women and their environment persist because underclass theory narrowly frames racial and class dynamics. By seeking no other data and imagining no other process operating than Black teen mothers having babies out-of-wedlock because they and their lovers are too poor, to marry, underclass theorists miss the point that the lives of the poor like those of other social actors, are not totally dictated by economics.

While underclass theory seeks to make a simple cause-and-effect relationship between the economy and family type, Black women have always attempted to break, buffer, and mediate this relationship by organizing their own sexual, familial, and communal patterns. Not all of these strategies are successful and productive, but poverty should not be

indiscriminately linked to sexual deviance and used to predict the character and morality of individuals and groups.

If it seems to outsiders that young Black girls are recklessly having sex and babies, it might be because family formation and intimate relationships are more important to *them* than their relationship to the economy. If their familial relationships appear deviant, it is critical to understand that not only has there been a transformation in the economy, social changes in the larger society have redefined normative gender behaviors and family organization (Luker, 1996).

Although Black teen mothers may have made unwise gender choices without considering their financial or marital status, the desire to be a mother transcends class and race. "Motherhood as an institution with significant and powerful symbolic content in our culture has an impact on all women" (Fineman, 207). In order to understand Black teen mothers more completely, a gender analysis that looks more closely and critically at internal family dynamics and women's perspectives and standpoints is necessary.

GENDER

Empirical and ethnographic research about the poor usually include descriptions of women's experiences; however, using gender as an analytical category involves more than including information about women's lives. Gender refers "to

socially constructed relationships and practices organized around perceived differences between the sexes" (Glenn, 1994:3). Gender analyses grew out of feminist challenges to traditional theories that considered families as natural, universal, and unchanging units shaped only by affection and kinship (Zinn, 1991:130).

...As a central analytic concept, feminist scholars have documented the ways relations of gender are played out in structural and institutional domains, such as the economy, family, and political and legal systems, as well as in social interaction and identity (Glenn, 1994:3).

One of the major assumptions of feminist approaches to gender is that sexuality, gender roles, and gendered behavior and arrangements are constructs of social arrangements, institutions, and social practices and not manifestations of a "natural" order of biological and essential givens of human life. Judith Lorber adds that gender is "a set of oppositional relationships that sustain and are sustained by institutionalized patterns of behavior" (Lorber, 1991:355). West and Zimmerman's (1991) ethnomethodological approach suggests that both sex and gender are socially developed statuses that are an outcome of learned behavior and socialization.

Amott and Matthaei assert that beliefs about the sexes impact their roles and statuses.

These beliefs are turned into self-fulfilling prophecies through sex-role socialization: the biological sexes are

assigned distinct and often unequal work and political positions, and turned into socially distinct genders (Amott and Matthaei, 1991: 13).

Because of women's ability to give birth and lactate, many societies assign women to raise children, maintain households and support in their families. "In contrast, men usually concentrate on inter-familial activities, and gain political dominance..."(Amott and Matthaei, 1991: 13). However, this paradigm of women confined to mothering and domesticity, and men to the public arena is not universal. Before the emergence of private property, market economies and colonization, "considerable overlap between the public and domestic domains" existed in many societies, especially in Africa (Sudakarsa, 1987:28).

Feminist analyses are based on gender relations in societies with oppositional and separate spheres for men and women and patriarchal kinship systems. According to feminist usage, patriarchy "refers to any system of male superiority and female inferiority" (Rothman, 1994:140). However, patriarchy is technically defined as the rule of fathers as protector, disciplinarian, and provider for both male and female family members. Accordingly, human societies have been able to survive in part because gender roles linked to biology have provided an efficient means of defining and organizing the duties and responsibilities of men and women into distinct but complementary spheres.

Rothman distinguishes between male domination,

a nearly universal pattern, and specific forms of kinship systems. Under patriarchy, "paternity is the central social relation. Women derive status from their legal and customary relationships to men and children are born to men, out of women", in matrilineal systems, "people are not men's children coming through the bodies of women, but the children of women" (Rothman, 1994:141). Within either system, both marital and maternal familial relationships determine women's status and position. Studies by African feminists suggest that while women were expected to marry and mother, they were also obliged to participate and even lead in political, military, economic, and religious arenas. Moreover, motherhood conferred public and social status as well as involving the role of private nurturer (Sudakarsa, 1987; Steady, 1987).

Discussions about the complex gender arrangements and kinship systems in many societies are omitted from many feminist theories of gender. Yet, these discussions underscore the fact that gender is not the same in all societies, and women's roles, activities, and status are not constant. Historical forces, social dynamics, and culture have influenced gender. In order to study the experiences of "doing gender" among Black social actors, the focus of deconstructing differences so central to feminist approaches to gender theory must be shifted. Rather than using women's oppression under patriarchy as the dominant reference point

for understanding gender, the historical experiences of both Black men and women under racial oppression suggest other interpretations and approaches to gender.

Gender in Black

The Atlantic slave trade, European colonialism, and racism reorganized gender for all social actors: conquered and conquerors, masters and slaves. During the colonial and ante-bellum periods race and gender were organized into a dual patriarchal system composed of the racial patriarchy and the Black male patriarchy. The racial patriarchy and the white male ruling elites and yeomen created an overarching system of racial and male privilege that subordinated and violently controlled Black men and women.

Every instance of gender construction among enslaved and conquered Africans, whether patriarchal or matrilineal, was violently challenged. By law and custom, enslaved Africans were denied control of sexuality, gender roles, and gender arrangements. Since they were denied the right to marry and establish families of their own, the enslaved could claim no recognized authority over the practices and processes which transform and socialize males into men and females into women.

The unique relationship of Black women to patriarchy is a key element in understanding gender among African Americans. As a result of the lack of Black male patriarchal power, Black females were not regarded as "women" in the

traditional sense, that is women dependent or related to men as wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters. The racial patriarchs exploited the productive and reproductive capacities of ungendered Black females who had been violently removed from customary and legal systems of protection of their men and their societies.

As a result of the enslavement and forced removal from Africa, Black women and men had to redefine and expand traditional gender roles and construct new forms of motherhood (and fatherhood) and family in order to survive and resist the sexism and racism of the racial patriarchy. A tradition of female networks of support and a culture of motherhood developed in order to provide stability for the Black family in the absence of husbands and fathers and the outlawing of marriage among slaves. In order to create and shape selves as human, which implied a masculine and feminine identity, enslaved people were forced to carve out private spaces in the slave quarters where they could do gender on their own terms. Since the end of slavery, the descendants of the enslaved have gradually changed their condition and positioned themselves within the dominant society; however, life in the Black social world has continued as much as possible, in spite of and oblivious to white racism. In fact, "the right to be gendered" - the struggle to become recognized as men and women - is central to any understanding of gender among African-Americans. For within their own

social world, African-Americans can act like and become men and women.

Black Feminist Theory

Just as theories about the Black poor were distorted by the absence of a gender analysis, theories of gender not grounded in a knowledge of the history of race relations and the perspectives and experiences of oppressed racial groups are biased. Race and gender are not parallel and discrete social phenomena requiring conceptually separate analyses, but systematically intertwined experiences, ideas, and social processes that inform each other. The inclusion of a gender analysis requires racial and class analyses to be re conceptualized and when used together, "the fundamental paradigmatic shift" in scholarship occurs that Black feminist theorizing has emphasized (Collins, 1990:222).

Black feminist theory provides basic approaches for studying Black women. First, African American women are placed at the center of the analyses. Experiences with poverty and racism are viewed from their perspective, which is not identical with nor subsumed under those of policy makers or Black male social theorists. The second idea implied from the focus on women is that "cultural experience is essential to a grounded analysis of African-American women's lives" (Brewer, 1993:15). These experiences so "crucial to Black women's ways of knowing and being in the world" involve more than the expressive arts and include the

development of patterns of social reproduction within families, groups, and institutions in the Black social world. The linking of the everyday experiences of Black women to the structural constraints of institutions and the political economy is the third element of a Black feminist analysis. This analysis explicates the interplay among the agency of Black women social actors, their cultural experiences, and white and Black social institutions. Lastly, "the conceptual anchor of recent Black feminist theorizing is the understanding of race, class and gender as simultaneous forces" (Brewer, 1994:16).

These themes of Black feminist theory are woven into the personal, cultural, and representational levels of this study of Black teen motherhood. These young women are not considered members of the underclass but are viewed as social actors "doing gender" within the Black social world, the site of the cultural experiences that make up their daily lives. They have personalities and selves shaped by the adolescent and motherhood cultures they perpetuate and help to create. Black teen motherhood is assumed to be a social phenomena connected to national gender patterns and dilemmas and as such, provides a point of entry for discussing the moral issues associated with gender construction.

Conclusion

Since the ethnography in this study involved welfare recipients living in a homeless shelter, the most destitute and dislocated of all Black teen mothers, the setting is ideal for explaining issues of agency and poverty. The lives of poor Black women, like those in the shelter are organized by two relationships: one, to the political economy and the other, to the family. The history of African American families, as well as the experiences of contemporary teen mothers, indicate that consistent participation in the labor market is not always required by social actors in order to do gender. Because they operate at the level of private and intimate interactions, the cultures of adolescence and mothering that impact gender have a dominant role in the lives of social actors.

They don't always have agency in transforming social structures such as the political economy, but they can and do create a culture which "though malleable exists within the social structure's possibilities and constraints" (Hays, 1994: 69). Their culture shapes the world social actors live in.

Black teen mothers can, therefore, be described as sexually active youngsters attempting to fulfill, not deviate from, pro-natalist and idealized models of motherhood in the Black community and in the society. For these young women, "doing gender" consists of intimate and personal activities that reflect choices and desires to construct "selves" or

personalities which flesh out and define their femininity and womanhood. They are attempting to attain social recognition for performing the traditional acts of womanhood in all societies: having a mate and birthing a child.

Young women who are poor and Black are not mere puppets pulled by structural trends and public policies that make them marry or have children. Although there are structural activities that do occur behind the backs of Black teen mothers (as well as all other social actors), their choices, rationales, and attempts to make sense of themselves and their world often take place unseen by sociologists and unexamined by their theories.

Introduction

This chapter describes the creation of a research design for the ethnographic study of Black teen mothers. The study consists of two inter-related parts: descriptions of adolescent and mothering cultures, and participant observations at a shelter for homeless Black teen mothers.

The framework for my study was shaped by the persistent presence of Black teen mothers in my neighborhood superimposed against the backdrop of current media debates about welfare reform, gangsta rap, and babies having babies. Studies by scholars and moralizing by politicians add to the curious mix of social science and opinion that has informed these topics. But there is more: the stories of teen mothers at the Shelter where I conducted field research, and of adult friends and family members who were, and are, teen mothers easily merge with my own memories, not of being a teen mother, but recalling the daunting struggle to make sense of being young, Black, and female.

The first part of this chapter describes how the theories in this study were created from enlarging my impromptu, open-ended, and uneven look at the actions and environments of teen mothers in my family and neighborhood. The second part describes how a method for studying teen mothers was developed by rejecting my preconceived plans and employing an approach appropriate to the specific setting and situation at the Shelter.

The Theoretical Design: A Cultural Approach

While conducting this study, I lived in the same African American community in central Brooklyn as my research site, a 15-minute walk from my apartment. This is a sprawling diverse community of vibrant working-class immigrants from the Caribbean crowded into large apartment buildings and of middle-class professionals who own brownstones and large houses. This area also teems with teen and single mothers, many of whom are welfare recipients. A high crime rate and illegal drug activity thrives alongside shops and stores, churches and associations.

I have lived in the same apartment for twenty years and raised three children through adolescence into adulthood and am now raising my fourth child, who is 12 years old. I shop, worship, and relax in this community. Although I am not close to my neighbors, we, the long timers, greet each other. I have watched some young women on the block grow up and become teenage mothers. Moreover, teenage mothers are also part of my own extended working-class African American family. These personal experiences shape the theories, methodologies, and conclusions of this study. They have infused and informed how I see my subjects. I am not an impartial observer; as C. Wright Mill suggests, "I don't claim to be detached; I try to be objective" (Cited in Frazier, 1967:xv)

Studying Black teen mothers has involved seeing them and other Black youth from my perspective within community and family settings. Not all these encounters have become a formal part of my sociological study. However, they have informed my research and blurred the boundaries between the personal and the sociological. In this sense, I am reading a great deal into the mundane experiences of my neighbors and family members by transforming mere looks and conversations into a sociological gaze. My personal encounters in the Black social world takes on sociological significance when they are described and analyzed in terms of social patterns and trends.

This study describes the daily life, and analyzes the processes that define the actions of Black teen mothers. Moreover, their gender activities occur within personal and private arenas that are constructed, in part, by themselves and their peers to meet their needs and choices. I am using a cultural analysis to study these acts and choices while recognizing that they "occur within structurally defined limits among structurally provided alternatives"(Hays, 1994:65). That is, ultimately, structural forces, such as the market economy, state power, and the race-gender system, shape their arenas as well as the consequences of their choices.

According to Hays, structural forces are composed of two "analytically distinct, but empirically connected systems."

The systems of social relations include "patterns, roles, relationships, and forms of domination" based on racial, gender, and class categories, and is matched by culture or "systems of meaning" in "its power, its patterning, its durability, and its collective and transcendent nature (Hays, 1994:66-67). The social structure also consists of resilient patterns that order social life and "in some manner conditions or determines" the thoughts and actions of individuals" (Hays, 1994:61). In order to understand how these patterns shape the lives of social actors "both the cultural and the relational milieu must be taken into account" (Hays, 1994,:66).

Moreover, the race-gender system defines a significant part of the culture embodied in the social structure. Within this system, race is used to regulate and reproduce gender behaviors, attitudes, and representations. Its historic roots are found in legal and customary gender patterns derived from slavery and segregation. The race-gender system attempts to order everyday gender activities by promoting racial criteria for dating, marriage, standards of beauty, sexuality, and gender roles. These criteria were initially reinforced by laws and violence, but are increasingly structured by media and ideology. In fact, by restricting legitimate gender relationships to those within one's racial and ethnic group, racial categories are reproduced. The race-gender system then

privileges white middle-class gender patterns and acts over those of African-Americans and other groups.

However, the Black social world houses cultures that resist these patterns of racial and gender domination. These cultures act as a "bulwark in preserving the identity of people who are subjected to political domination and economic exploitation" (Cabral, 1973:61). They preserve their identity and autonomy by acting as mediating forces that limit, interrupt, and re-interpret the social structure's attempt to reach into their intimate lives. Black social actors are encouraged by their distinctive and oppositional cultures to seek alternative ways to meet their desire for traditional gender roles and for families and kinship systems of their own. The recognition that Black social actors do not merely respond mechanically to the dictates of the social structure has focused this study on understanding how these young mothers conduct their daily activities within the constraints of the economy, public policies, and racial discrimination.

To avoid the pitfalls of disconnecting Black teen mothers from the Black social world, African-American cultural history, as well as from national social trends, I have quilted together an ethnography that connects the individual with the historical and public discourse with personal experiences. I have situated my study beyond the forest approach of empirical analysis and the tree-by-tree method of case studies. From this vantage point I can

study the cultural life of Black adolescents as they mediate, disregard, and often capitulate to the dictates of the social structure that exists both within and beyond our racialized neighborhoods. While "most of the time, in most places, most people simply habitually reproduce the prevailing pattern of social life" (Hays, 1994:63), Black teen mothers and other African-Americans are constructing and reconstructing and interpreting those patterns in complex and diverse ways.

Young Black Women as Social Actors

Adolescence concentrates and intensifies the social processes involved in creating a new adult self. There is an acute self-conscious awareness of constructing a self that is distinct from a childish personality and is intended to define a mature or womanly identity.

As a result of possessing a self, human beings do not merely respond, they internally construct their own actions, constantly interpreting and interacting with their environment. Blumer explains that having a self has meant that "the human being has to forge or piece together a line of action" that involves identifying desires and goals, then "mapping out a prospective line of behavior". They pay attention to other social actors, and then compare, critique, and examine their own situation and "frequently spur himself(sic) on in the face of dragging dispositions or discouraging settings" (Blumer, 1969:16).

The thoughts, emotions, and choices of the young Black woman are concerned with the immediate temporal and tangible issues of personal autonomy, beautification rites, and relationships with friends. Her aim is to create a self "which she feels, and which others see as stemming from that highly valued though vaguely conceived notion of personal identity (Apter, 1990:74).

The teen mothers I see, whether living with families, friends, or lovers or heading their own households, are a feisty, irreverent, and stubbornly independent group. Their food stamp dependency is matched by their ingenuity in managing to dress their children in the latest styles. Their awesome parenting responsibility and even the depth of their regret, are somehow covered up by bravado, daring, and sometimes foolish optimism. While desperately in need of adult guidance and protection, they are fiercely protective about their ability to mother and passionate about their sexual autonomy. Many of them somewhat recklessly hurl themselves into intense romances, sexual activity, and childbearing without realizing the personal costs to themselves and their children. Their lines of action are not simply psychological, economic, or biological, but part of the construction of gendered selves taking place within their own systems of meaning. This process of interacting within oneself and one's social environment does not mean that the person always constructs her own actions very well or even

that she interprets her world or situation accurately, it only means that these acts are constructed out of what they take into account (Blumer, 1969:64).

As Blumer advises, "one has to get inside of the defining process of the actor in order to understand his (sic) action (Blumer, 1969: 16). I am assuming that Black teen mothers reflect and act based on their own "defining process" that is never totally predictable because social actors produce their own internal lines of action and interpretation from imaginations, nightmares, and desires culled from symbolic and actual situations in their social worlds. Although they have similar backgrounds, each Black teen mother has a distinct and unique response to her life experiences. This individuation does not preclude the need for sociological analysis, but rather insists that they be recognized and respected as social actors.

Ironically, racial segregation has facilitated the development of African American cultural forms that enable Black social actors such as teen mothers to construct selves. The Black social world is criss-crossed with diverse, contradictory, and conflicting cultures. Adolescent culture, for example, contradicts, while it also feeds into, the need for a distinct culture of motherhood. Many aspects of these cultures are ennobling, and other parts are destructive-- in either case they reproduce routinized patterns and behaviors. Under specific historical situations, such as during the

civil rights movement, these cultures have led to transformations and significant changes or adjustments in the social structure. But their role in sustaining gender and family relations among African- Americans should not be minimized. Moreover, because the boundaries of the social world are porous, these cultures have never been totally isolated from other social worlds, especially cultural forms emanating from the race-gender system.

Through popular culture, social science, and public policies, the race-gender system has reinforced negative representations of Black women and gender activities within the Black community. Black teen mothers are only the latest group of Black women to be considered promiscuous and sexually loose, an attitude that has always been connected to racial scapegoating as a means of explaining away racial inequity. Focusing on their so-called deviant maternity patterns has reinforced an understanding of Black teen motherhood as a social problem. This approach has obscured the realization that they are part of a national cultural phenomenon.

The high rates of single teen mothers among all groups are part of the transformations in gender, especially the declining significance of marriage as the sole site for childbearing. There is also confusion about the notion of liberating women from traditional roles of marriage and motherhood. Young women are admonished to postpone sexual

relations, marriage, and childbearing until they are educated and have jobs and careers which will make them economically self-sufficient. At the same time, they are bombarded by cultural messages that emphasize romantic relationships, sexual intercourse, and maternity as indicators of "real" womanhood. In the midst of these confused gender messages, it is not surprising that many young women make sexuality and motherhood central to their lives precisely because they offer a secure female identity and sphere outside the unstable and alienating marketplace.

In light of society's contradictions around womanhood, teen and single motherhood should be expected to be a difficult rite of passage from adolescence to womanhood, occurring against the backdrop of the lack of a societal consensus around the role of sex, marriage, and family and the necessity of women's wage labor.

Summary

This section has described the quilted and multiple levels of the cultural theories of my research design. Black feminist historian Elsa Barkley Brown suggests that a quilt is a useful pattern for understanding Black female experiences where the individual stands "alone like the contrasting strips of the quilt, and at the same time remains part of the group"(1988, 17). The quilt motif visualizes Black women's identities, roles, oppressions, which cause her

to move in 'multiple directions at once" and do "different, seemingly contradictory things, simultaneously" (pg.17).

While the focus of this study is to examine the daily life of Black teen mothers and their relationship to adolescent culture and expressions of womanhood and motherhood within the Black social world, I am mindful that their lives are part of a larger social framework. The character of modern American society is itself like a quilt composed of distinct individuals and groups arranged in thematic resilient patterns and habitual activities, held together by a historically evolved structural framework combining the political economy, national cultural trends, and ideologies. When individuals and their group interact, they do so within a pyramid of priority, privilege, and power. However, there is a constant moving back and forth and up and down between the pecking order and the quilt makers. Those who dominate the social structures can limit, box in, direct, or dictate, but they can't predict exactly how individual and groups will react. Individuals and their groups are not mere patches in someone else's quilt, but are busily creating their own quilt.

Notes from the field: Becoming a Participant Observer

The original method proposed for this ethnography consisted of open-ended taped interviews with current and former residents of the Shelter. My research model was derived from the studies of feminist sociologists examining

women's lives, especially Black women by Black feminist sociologists whose oral narratives revealed "the multilayered texture of black women's lives" (Etter-Lewis, 1991:43). My proposed life histories of Black teen mothers were designed to be used in the manner suggested by theorist Dorothy Smith: as a "a point of entry" for "placing an experiencing subject into a larger social and economic process" (Smith, 1987:157) and to analyze how gender, race, and class operate.

Since, for more than twenty years, I counseled, taught, and organized Black women, I was confident that the teen mothers in the Shelter would open up and tell me interesting and intimate stories of their lives. In fact, I had chosen the Shelter because I was familiar with its work for more than 15 years and I was a volunteer consultant to The Shelter's parent organization.

Just to make sure the in-depth interviews would go smoothly, I honed my skills working as a researcher on a project studying college students who were the same age as the teen mothers in the Shelter. I assumed the most difficult aspect my research would be compiling and analyzing the result of the interviews.

With great confidence, I phoned the director of the Shelter to set up a time to meet the girls. She encouraged me to come to one of their mandatory meetings. As a way of introducing them to me and the research project, she

suggested I tell them about my personal experiences as a single mother and show off my publications.

However, sometime between describing my books and after introducing my research project I realized that I faced 17 bored, tired, young girls and their hungry infants and restless toddlers with no interest in my presentation or project. I later learned that most of the young mothers had been in school all day and had just picked up their children from nearby or on-site child care. A few young mothers had worked all day. Others had the stunned and traumatized look of sleep-deprived new mothers.

In spite of some misgivings, I plowed on anyway, talking about "my" research project to the distracted teen mothers. Toddlers wandered around grabbing at the papers I had distributed and eating my nicely typed agenda. Mothers tried to balance papers, babies, and bottles on their laps. But I knew I was in real trouble when the girls started excusing themselves and asking if it was alright to leave.

The young mothers were anxious for the meeting to end so they could get upstairs to their apartments, make dinner, and relax. Only a few girls stayed behind, more interested in discussing the latest proposed reforms in welfare policy than in being interviewed by me. One young mother said she was interested in participating in the study but I was so flustered I never got her name or made arrangements to do the interview.

I foolishly continue to hope that the director, an old friend, would encourage or even coerce the girls into participating in my study. I was angry and disappointed because I had thought that nearly all 17 girls would sign up to tell their stories to me. When I phoned a few days later, she said a few girls had shown interest and to call her back later in the week. I kept calling on and off for a month with no results -- that is, no names of residents who wanted to be interviewed.

In one call, probably sensing my exasperation the director said that the "girls" were reluctant to open up and just tell someone about their "stuff" -- personal issues. Perhaps, she suggested, if they were paid, they would take the time to speak about their lives to a stranger like me. While I did consider this option, my immediate response to paying for the interviews was a "how dare you suggest my paying the girls when you know I have no research money"?

Repelled by her suggestion, I was ready to write a theoretical and political analysis of Black teen mothers without using any actual subjects. But I believed that interacting with actual Black teen mothers was necessary for legitimizing and strengthening my analysis and research. I also thought of going to another shelter where the staff would be willing to "pressure" their clients into being interviewed. But I questioned the validity of a study in which the subjects were overtly or even subtly coerced into

participating. Besides, doing research at another shelter would involve months to implement.

Desperate, I considered using money from my household budget to pay the residents. But how much was enough? I began to question the soundness of data collected from poor and immature woman whose only interest in participating in the research project was their need for money. Although some scholars legitimately pay subjects, I felt that because they were young and vulnerable, paying these teen mothers would have been coercive.

After much prayer, I reached what now seems an obvious conclusion: neither the director nor the young mothers needed my study. The director, though a friend, was an advocate for the residents in her program and not responsible for getting respondents for my research project. My experiences as a Black single mother and previous work with Black women were not enough to assume entree to these residents. I had been too heady from the discussions of feminism and woman's voice prevalent in academic and intellectual circles. I overemphasized my past as a feminist theoretician and organizer and relied too much on the model of other feminist studies involving oral narratives and life studies. I compared my research setting to those in these models. Joyce Ladner's landmark study with young Black women took place within their family households and with parental involvement or at least consent (Ladner, 1972). The study of Black teen

mothers by Constance Williams also took place in the respondent's homes (Williams, 1991). Carol Gilligan (Gilligan, 1991) and Sharon Thompson (Thompson, 1995) met the young women of their studies, some of whom were African-American and others teen mothers, at mutually agreed upon community sites. Beth Ritchie's interviews with Black female inmates at Rikers Island involved adult women who volunteered for her study (Ritchie, 1996). Joelle Sander's study of four generations of Black teen mothers in one family was initiated by her long-term relationship with a 16-year participant in a YWCA program for teen mothers. Most of her interviews occurred at the homes of the women. The young Black female subjects of all these studies were studied within their own family and social settings. None of these research settings were comparable to the situation I faced of interviewing young women who were new mothers living in a shelter for the homeless.

Although most of the Shelter residents were emancipated minors with their own income from welfare, most were immature and inexperienced. In spite of their wide range of personal abilities and backgrounds, they shared the vulnerability and problems associated with being shuttled about without stable family relationships or residences. Before coming to the Shelter most of the residents had lived in group homes, with boyfriends, family members, and foster parents. Their

homeless status made them more isolated than other teen mothers who lived with their families, friends, or lovers.

I discussed the issue of interviewing with a young Black woman informant just a few years older than the residents. The informant had worked with homeless women and children. She said that "many young women especially teen mothers haven't even processed what is happening to them" and "would have difficulty adequately identifying and addressing the reasons for their actions". Youthful populations such as the Shelter residents were inexperienced with reflecting about themselves and their choices.

In addition, when I learned that some of the residents had just given birth, memory of my own groggy, sleepless first months as a new mother further convinced me that these young women were in no condition for in-depth interviews for a sociological study. I had to resign myself to the fact that it was simply not feasible or realistic to impose in-depth interview methods in this setting.

After this realization that I had to change my approach I was stymied about what method would be useful for learning about these Black teen mothers. In the meantime, I humbled myself and begged the director to let me volunteer at the Shelter in any capacity to at least have access to the residents.

The director seemed to enjoy spending time telling me about the present and former residents of the Shelter. She

described how each of "her girls" had their own story and unique issues based upon their particular experiences, backgrounds, and personalities. The director, a strong gatekeeper and protector over her "girls", was determined to offer privacy, normalcy, and security during their stay at the Shelter. She focused on alleviating the stress of becoming new mothers under difficult circumstances. She helped her young charges overcome the stigma and failures of their past by overcoming daily obstacles and by setting future goals for themselves and their children.

Although interesting and often informative, these conversations with the director seemed to be her attempt to circumvent my directly approaching the girls with personal and troublesome questions. She distrusted researchers like myself who often wanted to simply interview teen mothers and get them "to spill out their guts". Her concerns raised ethical issues for me about studying such a vulnerable population. The director once asked rhetorically: who would help the young girl "pick up the pieces" after the interviewer left her devastated and depressed from talking about her past experiences. I personalized her remarks and wondered, who would be responsible if the questions I asked provoked pain and stress in the young mothers? As a volunteer and researcher I had no obligation nor role in helping the young women address issues and that might

inadvertently cause serious damage to the resident and to the program's ability to help her.

After volunteering for a few weeks, watching the residents and listening to the director's concerns, I became a participant observer in the collective living space of the Shelter residents. My fieldwork began with me changing diapers at the on-site child care facility during lunch coverage for the regular worker. I learned a great deal from that initial experience about how young mothers claimed and exercised their maternal rights over their children while housed within an institutional setting with imposed regulations and restrictions. From the vantage point of the child care unit, I was also able to learn about how young mothers strive to maintain relationships with their family members. Some mothers traveled long distances to leave their children in the care of relatives rather than leave them in the on-site facility. Others were distrustful of anyone and insisted on keeping their children with them all the time. They lugged them to welfare centers and educational programs in spite of the Shelter's provision for child care.

Working in child care also gained me respect from the director and her staff. A few weeks into my fieldwork, I was asked by the director to counsel residents about schooling and education. My tasks included tutoring residents for high school exams, advising those enrolled in college, and encouraging others to go to college. I had unlimited access

to the records of each resident. Staff members and residents freely shared information about residents with me. I also participated in workshops and programs at the Shelter. Eventually, I was considered a part of the Shelter's community.

I tried to learn as much as I could about the young mothers without altering their schedules, interfering with their families, or most importantly, without intruding on their privacy. For example, I never visited their apartments or socialized with them outside the Shelter. I always made appointments to meet them in the public meeting rooms of the Shelter with the permission of staff members.

Although a few of the residents talked with me about relationships with their family or baby's father, respecting their privacy and naiveté, I was cautious not to use these openings to probe and dig for additional information. I was also mindful that the young women were selective about what they shared because I was considered part of the Shelter's staff. Nevertheless, I was able to have private and serious conversations with a few of the young girls, one of which developed into an interview session where I was able to ask formal questions about her past.

My field experience at the Shelter allowed me to study Black teen mothers within social settings that involved their mothering, their schooling, and their social interactions with each other and the staff. I developed a diary based on

my observations of their public activities and expressions. The Shelter files provided me with information about their family backgrounds.

Because of their circumstances I have used a few precautions to protect the residents which impact the way my findings are presented. I have generalized my conclusions and made composite profiles and statements based on several residents in order to obscure their identities and preclude any possibility that the identity of an individual resident could be gleaned from my references to their remarks. Demographic profiles in the study use codes and aliases. I have also stopped using the actual name of the Shelter or its director because the identity of shelter and its residents are widely known to several private and public social agencies.

Summary

My research is based on three principal themes: (1) the integrity of Black teen mothers as social actors; (2) their location in the Black social world and connections with African-American forms of doing gender, especially the cultures of adolescence and mothering; (3) and the recognition that Black teen motherhood is a social phenomenon reflective of national trends in gender construction. While recognizing that the social structure, especially the political economy fosters race, gender, and class inequities

and oppressions, this study focuses on culture, an equally powerful social phenomenon that enables social actors to buffer, mediate, and creatively respond to constraining race, class and gender relationships.

The next chapter documents the relationship between young Black women and the adolescent culture's impact on teen mothering through media's communication of ideals of romance and sexuality. These ideals are further influenced by contemporary beautification rites of young Black women that emphasize historic concerns about skin color, body size, and hair texture in new cultural contexts. While their romantic, sexual gauntlets and sexual acts reflect Black cultural expressions, such behaviors also resonate with those of adolescents in the rest of society. These concerns reinforce the underlying theme that in spite of being racially segregated, African-Americans, like every social group does gender, that is constructs male and female identities and roles as well as reproducing themselves through ritualized, habitual, but creative forms of sexuality and parenting.

Introduction

Although their T-shirts say it's a Black thing that others wouldn't understand, only the content of Black youth culture is Black -- its form extends into other sites of post-industrial and late modern societies. Contemporary adolescents in the United States, regardless of race or ethnicity, whether in school or not, on drugs or sober minded, rich or poor, suburban or urban, are caught up in cultures whose stance is rebellious, violent, verbal, and sexual. An examination of those aspects of youth culture specific to Black adolescence should be a central concern of social science, not the unique pathology of Black youth's sexual and social behaviors.

This chapter focuses on hip hop cultural forms, especially rap, as critical for understanding contemporary Black adolescence. The goal is to describe the sexualized imaginations and acts constructed and embedded within Black adolescent culture. The assumption of this study is that rap lyrics and videos, Black teen magazines, and Black characters on television and in movies inform adolescent imaginations and model their social interactions.

This chapter also analyzes the integral role of the beauty culture in shaping female adolescent social actors and their culture. Beautification rites most directly inform the Black female adolescent's sense of feminine identity and performance of daily activities.

While most Black working class and poor youth are undereducated and unemployed, "with a neighborhood unemployment rate so high the methods of measuring it are no longer valid..." (Donaldson, Greg as cited in Lee, 1993,25), they are fully integrated into the national adolescent consumer culture. Although considered a socially and economically marginalized group, Black teens have created a culture which is "...a driving force behind pop culture throughout the world, and one of the only charismatic protest cultures left in the United States..." (Donaldson, Greg as cited in Lee, 1993, 25).

YOUTH AND THE BLACK SOCIAL WORLD

We watch them swagger, their pants slung low and their hair high, wildly and dangerously plaited and woven. Sometimes they are very clean-cut and dressed with the expensive casualness of a Black Tommy Hilfiger ad. During the mid-1990's, girls are wearing elaborate long braids in various colors or short marcelled waves slick and tinted. Nails are extra long. In the winter, most wear jeans, down jackets, boots or sneakers. Short skirts with tights, long skirts with slits top high-heeled chunky boots that make the girls totter and stomp. In the summer, the dress is more varied and divided between tiny skirts and tops or jeans and T-shirts. Except for the hair and skin color they could be any group of American teenagers.

They look menacing in groups, easily taking over buses and fast food shops. When they yell and 'act the fool', mothers and children cower, and old people scurry away. Their youthful tempos are fast and their mouths vulgar. They have taken over almost all public spaces they encounter: schools, stores, buses, and trains.

Not so long ago, residential areas like Black Brooklyn were calm and tranquil -- dominated by the families of church-goers and workers. Blacks who drank, stood around, or committed crimes were hidden from the community, seen only in red light districts or around bars and clubs. But gradually over the last 30 years, Black youth have become the center of Black public space -- scatologically challenging adults for preeminence.

Traditionally, the family and the adult community established both the social forms and the cultural interchange of adolescence. However, "...many are convinced that a clear radicalization and intensification of modernity occurred during the post-war period and even more after the 1960's" (Fornas, 1995: 5). In post-industrial societies experiencing this intensification, adolescence has become a distinct stage having its own culture and social organization, increasingly separated from and opposed to adult influence or control.

During the decade of the 1950's, "American adolescents came into their own as 'teenagers,' a distinct group with

their own tastes and problems, and with money to spend" (Holden, 1995:4). The trends which expanded and empowered the development of an "adolescent society" or a "youth culture" in the United States began in the post World War II economic boom. The improved wages of adult workers and the entry of adult women in the workforce enabled most families to no longer need to rely on the wages of adolescent workers for family survival. In fact, in many families teen workers are allowed to use their earnings for personal items and leisure activities. The increased significance of college education and expanded educational and professional opportunities for women extended adolescence into the early twenties, delaying the age for marriage and pregnancy. During the 1960's, college students, through anti-racist and anti-war protests, made their entree into politics by challenging adult leaders in government and the university. Moreover, American teenagers also had their own music - rock and roll - and made significant inroads in shaping the entertainment and clothing industries. By the 1990's teenagers numbered 34.9 million...and their market wielded \$99.1 billion dollars in 1994" (Ahmad-Taylor, 1995:4).

In the last thirty years, these patterns of adolescence became more consolidated and now play a leading role in socializing youngsters for manhood and womanhood, modeling sexual behaviors and interactions, and orchestrating relationships with adults. Television, movies, and music are

the tools and mechanism for transmitting and constructing adolescents culture across spatial, racial, and class boundaries.

Black youngsters born since 1960 are the first generation of African Americans not born within the confines of slavery or legal segregation. They have grown up in an increasingly sexualized, secular, diffuse, and diverse Black community that was once dominated by a rather unified Christian working class culture. However, that community is now intruded into by media and consumerism, fragmented by class division, pumped up by cultural nationalism, and subverted by political and economic neglect.

HIP HOP

Hip hop (used here to include the full range of Black youth cultural forms that include rap) developed during the 1970's as a series of unique artistic inventions created by young Black and Latin males in New York City. Its innovative use of chanted and staccato voices over a scratching rhythmic beat borrowed generously from jazz, skat, and Black poetry, complemented graffiti art's spray-can messages on public walls and subway cars. Moves inspired by capeoria or Brazilian martial arts, Black tap, and creative Black teen dance steps combined to become break dancing (Rose, 1994:3). While dancing and visual arts decreased in significance, rap evolved into a dominant musical and cultural form expressing the rage, defiance, and sexuality of Black youth. Rap has

been able to both bracket and display black youth experiences, while reinforcing and informing international youth cultural patterns. "The crowning achievement of rap culture," notes Lott, "is that within the American system of apartheid the victims have restructured their reality with quite deliberate opposition to mass media's representation" (Lott, 1992:81).

Hip hop emerged during the late 1970's as African Americans faced a political and social impasse. The civil rights movement and the War on Poverty, which promised economic equity, social justice, and political power were not able to deliver concrete economic and social gains to many working class African Americans. Black upward mobility has depended upon individualized and idiosyncratic efforts and federal policies such as Affirmative Action.

At the same time, many Black community based politicians and leaders have turned to fossilized and frozen forms of cultural nationalism which offer a politics of rhetoric, style, and symbol that leave Black youth fired up, but without direction, education, or jobs. Lacking the jobs and schooling that could integrate them into traditional working-class and middle-class life, Black youth increasingly feed on a pseudo-nationalism derived from rap and hip hop culture. Among many of its performers and consumers, rap is considered a radical even revolutionary force, that challenges the white power structure. Yet for all its defiant words and Black

nationalist cultural icons, the raps of Black youth are part of a multi-million dollar industry. Its anti-establishment messages belies the American economy's capacity to finance, promote, and organize oppositional cultural forms that reinforce anger and rage, while leaving poverty and oppression inadequately challenged. Black youth consumerism and materialism are fostered, but job creation is not.

Nevertheless, "the dialogic capacity of popular music, particularly that of rap music seems especially suited for engaging many of the social contradictions and ambiguities that pertain specifically to contemporary urban working-class black life" (Rose, 1994:154). Rap music has provided a way for Black youth to tell their stories, create their images, and more generally construct a particular cultural form during an era of alienation, youth unemployment, and conservative politics. The use of videos has added the power of visual representation to the music and words, often juxtaposing youthful fantasy against the backdrop of urban reality. Its videos "have animated hip hop culture style and aesthetics and facilitated a cross neighborhood, cross-country (transnational) dialogue in a social environment that is highly segregated by class and race" (Rose, 1994:9).

Rap is viewed by its detractors as imbued with a destructive force capable of increasing violence among poor Black youth. A civic leader opposed to rap has suggested that, "it was the government's responsibility to silence

gangsta rap because it was unredeemably negative, obscene and caused crime" (The Source, 1994:23). However, weapons brandished by the menacing young men of "gangsta rap," suggesting revolutionary offensives, are actually a choreographed act performed for the camera. "The gangsta rappers pick up the cadence of the automatic gunfire and chant of death by the bullet," but for the actual young people in their audiences, "the lyrics and posturing only relieve some of the despair of urban reality" (Donaldson, 1994:A1). Congresswoman Maxine Waters suggests that we "...not lose sight of what the real problem is. It is not the words being used. It is the reality being rapped about" (The Source, 1994:23).

If what was being rapped about was only youthful Black male expressions of anger and frustration with poverty, white racism, and police violence, it could certainly be considered potentially radical and oppositional. However, its "...incessant references to women -- particularly African American women -- in profane, derogatory, and foul language" (The Source, 1994, 23) enacts and displays the reactionary posture and politics of male chauvinism and sexual stereotyping. Tate asserts that "since it serves up the sexual fantasies and sexual mores of the hip hop generation in explicit and uncensored language, rap music is a hotbed of inside dope on black teen sexuality" (Tate, Nov. 1986:25). This "dope" unfortunately relegates Black women to roles,

expressions, and displays that are sexualized, sexist, and subordinate to men. In spite of Black female rappers' messages about Black female sexual power and personal dignity, "...they cannot be situated in total opposition to male rappers; they support and critique male rappers' sexual discourse in a number of contradictory ways" (Rose, 1994: 150). The contradiction between female personal power and female subordination to males reflects a fundamental aspect of Black female gender identity. Black female support for Black men who might be violent and sexist while also displaying sexual aggression is a *traditional* response by Black women negotiating sexual relationships with Black men.

Though many female rappers express a non-sexist position for Black women in their lyrics and images, they do not identify themselves or their positions as feminist.

Pioneering Black female rapper MC Lyte explains, "I'm a hip hopper, I'm just talking about the things I believe"

(The Source, 1991). Rapper Queen Latifah adds,

I know that at the end of the day, I'm a
Black woman in this world and I gotta get
mine. I want to see the rise of the Black
male in personal strength and power.
(The Source, 1994).

Queen Latifah and her message offer a significant antidote to the courtship rituals and sexist politics so prevalent in both male and female rappers. "Ladies First", Queen Latifah's second release from her debut album, *All Hail the Queen*, is a

statement for black female unity, independence, and power,...and recognition of the importance of black female political activists which offers hope for the development of a pro-female pro-black diasporic political consciousness (Rose, 1994:163-164).

However, "by and large, black women rappers are carving out a female-dominated space in which black women's sexuality is openly expressed" (Rose, 1994:170) in ways that invert "the aesthetic hierarchy that renders black women's bodies inadequate and sexually unattractive" Nevertheless, young Black females continue to be the object of men's desire and "creatures of male sexual possession" (Rose, 1994:168).

Rap's stance has been a scatological and sacrilegious assault on all adult heterosexual contradictions and inconsistencies. Although groups have their own principals, preferences, and standards, collectively nothing is off limits or too far out; no language or topic is taboo. Black women's scantily clad and gyrating bodies are the backdrop for lyrics that often explicitly describe sexual intercourse in street terms, designate Black women as manipulative and mercenary, while naming them as "bitches" and "hos". Unfortunately, because its language and behavior are re-enacted daily among teenagers, rap could be instructing as much as reflecting the "dope" on black teen sexuality. Rap has helped to construct the roughness and brutality of sexual encounters that demean Black women verbally and visually.

Public displays of sexy Black women resonate with blues singers such as Bessie Smith and Black female sexual icons such as Josephine Baker, Eartha Kitt, and Tina Turner. But the sexual icons in rap videos are young women whose audience is adolescents, not adult nightclub customers. The highly sexualized representation of rap is acted out in the school yards, the streets, and living rooms of Black teenagers. Rap and its emphasis on sexual imagery and language has encouraged Black female teens to become preoccupied with the public display of their bodies as a means of attracting male attention. As Rose indicates, rap and adolescent Black female beauty culture reinforce each other:

Black women rappers sport distinctively black hairstyles and hip hop clothing and jewelry that ground them in contemporary working-class black youth aesthetic. They affirm black female working-class cultural signs and experiences that are rarely depicted in American popular culture. Public performance also provides a means by which young black women can occupy public space in ways that affirm the centrality of their voices (Rose, 1994:182).

BEYOND THE BLUEST EYE: YOUNG BLACK WOMEN AND THE BEAUTY CULTURE

No longer hidden and omitted from media representation, young Black women actively participate in the making of their own beautification rites. These rites are familiar to all women, and specifically relate to the concerns of all African American women. Feminist scholars have identified the beauty culture as a universal phenomena which socializes and

often coerces women into beautifying their bodies for male approval and pleasure. Throughout the world, the female body is adorned, shaped, and designed to meet culturally specific designated notions of beauty. In western societies such as the United States,

Beauty standards apply to face paint
color body size and weight, breast shape,
upper arm measurement, head and body hair
texture, color and visibility, facial
expression, garment and accessory
selection and co-ordination (Mac Cannell,
D. and Mac Cannell, J.n.a.:208).

Because their hair texture, body size, skin color, and features fail to meet American (Western) standards of beauty, Black females were never considered part of the beauty system. Among the largest and darkest groups of women in a society which prizes blond, blue-eyed, white-skinned, and thin women as the ideal of beauty, Black women are considered their ugly antithesis (Grier and Cobbs, 1968:40-41).

Historically, being a beautiful Black female was considered an insane impossibility, as epitomized in Toni Morrison's novel, *The Bluest Eye*. Pecola, a Black teen mother incest victim goes insane while imagining herself having the perquisites of beauty: "If she had blue eyes, she'd be thought beautiful, like the dolls with the pretty dresses and bows. Her hair would be long and silky if she had blue eyes" (Gillespie, 1993:73).

Since it was not thought possible for Black women to become beautiful, no major cosmetic companies thought it

necessary to cultivate products designed for Black female customers. The few available beauty products designed to enhance skin-tones and straighten hair were locally and often crudely produced.

However, during the 1970's, Black Power and Soul movement era, a specific African American female beauty culture emerged with its own magazines, fashions, cosmetics, and hair products. Mainstream cosmetic companies greedily compete to produce make-up and hair products designed for women with darker hues. In fact, both white and Black companies and entrepreneurs have institutionalized and cultivated a consumer market specifically addressed to beautifying Black women. A recent newspaper account suggests that,

with sales of beauty products generally sluggish in recent years, and with the 1990 census indicating that one of four Americans is now of non-European descent, analysis say the industry can no longer afford to ignore a fast-growing market segment that spends more than \$500 million a year (Kerr, Peter, August, 1991: D15).

Black women have become a significant market for major cosmetic companies because they "spend as much as three times more than white women on cosmetics and skin-care products". Young Black women are especially important because "the median age for Black and Hispanic cosmetics customers is 27 years old," six years younger than white customers and as a

marketing director notes, "younger customers are more likely to try new products" (Kerr, *ibid.*).

While African American models, actresses, and commercial spokeswomen still tend to be thin and light skinned, there are enough typical Black women in the media to reassure all Black women that beauty is attainable and appreciated. Black teen girls have their own symbols of beauty in rappers such as Queen Latifah and singers such as Brandy, both of whom star in their own television sit-coms. No longer yearning for blue eyes, young Black women are consumers and participants in their own unique forms of the beauty culture.

Shopping, Fashion, and Style

The work of beautification dominates the everyday activities of most young Black women, including teen mothers. They feel they must embody beauty and sexuality in order to attract and keep male attention and win the admiration of female peers. This "aestheticizing the body" provides an outlet for the creativity of young women (Ganetz, 1995:73) and bind women to each other. Young women compare, compete, consult and actually help each other dress, style hair and polish nails. The goal of these efforts is to "look good", meaning to be well put together in matching latest styled clothing with nicely coifed hair and nails.

To effectively perform beautification rites, women and youth from all ethnic and class and age backgrounds must shop to purchase products and gather information reflecting

particular styles and fashion. Women "can spend hours putting on and taking off clothes in order to find the right combination for just that particular occasion and those particular people"(Ganetz, 1995: 78). Black girls who have summer jobs often use their earnings to perfect their "look"; others "boost" or steal clothes and beg, borrow, or hustle money from parents, relatives, or friends in order to get their hair or nails done and buy an outfit.

Shopping is an essential social activity often involving large groups of friends and babies and toddlers. Shopping with one's boyfriend is a popular date. The shopping areas in the communities in Black Brooklyn have many small stores with cheap versions of current styles. Black residents also shop at major department stores in the local malls and downtown areas using the opportunity to also look at things and observe people. For most women, the department store

or mall provides a safe, public space to relieve boredom, to hang out, to imagine and to experiment with perfecting their look, to see what's "in style" what people are wearing, to plan and to wish...(Ganetz,1995:86).

Putting together the right "look" is not peripheral, but a major focus of the activities of young Black females. Girls who can't achieve the right look are ridiculed and isolated. and most importantly, "dissed" and ignored by males. Those who can't put themselves totally together must be content to emphasize any piece of it they can: well-polished extended

nails, nice hair styles, and imitations of the current styles.

Black youth strive to use fashion as a means of expressing a collective yet Black cultural style, distinctive from, and out of the reach of other ethnic groups. They don't mind being imitated by those groups, but try never to follow their styles. Black youth do, however, appropriate elements from a wide variety of styles to create their own look, such as mixing African hair styles and jewelry with sporty fashions designed for elite outdoors men. Fashion experts and manufacturers agree that the trend-setting styles of African American youth in the inner city are "mimicked from 7th Avenue all the way to Japan" (The Source, 1993:63). Without receiving any financial compensation, Black youth consumers have bolstered the sales of Timberland, Tommy Hilfiger, and DKNY among themselves and other youth. Both Black male and female youth spend money and time perfecting their look with the same degree and concern of artists painting a picture or musicians playing a score. They diligently study videos, magazines, and each other in order to keep up with the latest styles.

The emphasis on visual display of style through clothes and hair is not merely a contemporary adolescent phenomena. Since they first arrived in the Americas, "the commitment to a new culture" by enslaved and dislocated African-Americans

"included an expectation of continued dynamism, change, elaboration, and creativity."

Enslaved Africans learned to put a premium on innovations and individual creativity; there was always a place for fads and fashions, 'something new' (within aesthetic limits of course) became something to be celebrated, copied and elaborated...(Mintz and Price, 1991:51).

Within sub-groups of contemporary Black youth, individual creativity is displayed within the parameter of the styles that are in fashion, which enables them to both identify and look like each other while distinguishing their own individuality. Innovation takes place within formal patterns established by whatever is the current Black youth aesthetic. Moreover, these patterns are constantly being up dated and changed.

While fashion and style are the sources of cultural and personal power, they amplify the lack of authority or ability of Black youth to influence the political and economic structures shaping their lives. Powerless adolescent social actors turn to the arena of control most accessible to them -- their own bodies. Black youth use fashion and style to "...seek, experiment, and shape his or her own identity and subjectivity" (Ganetz, 1995:87). In addition, Black female identity is inextricably linked to the pursuit of beauty. Through beautification rites, Black teen girls attempt to resolve contradictions in their identity between the lingering effects of a demeaned physiology with the attempts

to be attractive women. The distinctive hair textures, skin colors and body sizes of Black women demonstrate the racial aspects of gender reproduction. These issues around hair, color, and size are central to the attempts of young Black women to define and control their own culture of beauty and manage its rites.

Hair. The social value and beauty of female slaves and freed Black women mirrored complex differentiation and evaluation about the grades of good and bad hair resulting from their children's racially mixed parentage. More white-looking female slaves were given genteel work and even considered more sexually desirable than more African-looking female slaves, who were considered ugly and animalistic. These differences were internalized within Black families and communities, especially by mothers and female relatives who considered daughters with straight hair more attractive than those with kinky hair. Within and outside the Black community, straight hair was considered more manageable and feminine than African-textured hair.

Although Black women continued African-style hair braiding throughout slavery, eventually it was limited to children's hair styles or used only within the family. For most of the twentieth century, straightened hair became the preferred standard of adult women. As a result, processing and straightening with hot combs or chemicals became one of the most important beautification rites of Black females.

During the 1970's the popularity of Afro or natural hair styles released women from longing for the straight hair of white women or deprecating their own hair texture.

Ironically, increased appreciation for Afros occurred at the time more efficient and effective forms of straightening Black hair were also being achieved by chemical relaxers. Moreover, the availability of affordable wigs made long, even blond hair possible to any Black woman who could afford it. "In the early '80s, women inspired by female rappers like Salt 'N' Pepa began either bleaching their hair blonde or putting in blond streaks, embellishing their look with huge gold earrings"(Summers, 1994:19). Singer Tina Turner and others began to popularized long, blond hair for Black women.

However, the popularity of Afros or naturals initiated another trend in hair styles for Black women. "African immigrant women entrepreneurs brought extensions and braided looks from the motherland including casamas braids, Senegalese twists, and cornrows"(Summers, 1994:20). The availability of affordable human and synthetic hair has helped to popularize these styles. However, one Black woman writer raises the question about whether Black female attempts to "Afrocentrize" her hair by "wearing dreadlocks, twists, cornrows" is a "desire to have shake-your-head hair that moves and flips and flies" (Gillespie, 1993: 74).

Nearly a half-dozen magazines devoted exclusively to Black female hair styles and businesses devoted to braiding,

dyeing, and fixing black hair have formed a central place in the cottage industries of the Black community. Hair salons are one of the most successful small business among African American entrepreneurs. Many Black teen girls earn extra money "doing hair" for friends and family members and often hope to become beauticians.

According to the beauty culture, hair is the crown of a woman's beauty, however, the many options offered to Black women have replaced the desire for hair like white women. Black women have a wide array of hair styles and "looks" from which to choose, ranging from permanents for straightening hair to braids and dread locks in an assortment of colors and elaborate designs. Young Black women now choosing, experimenting, and designing their own hair is one of the most prevalent beautification rites.

Body. While Black women have overcome the limitations and stigma associated by the natural kink in their hair, their physical shape and size continue to be a cause for sexual ridicule and personal abuse.

Genetically endowed with large hips, buttocks, legs, and breasts, many Black women have inherited a possible African adaptation to famine (Gregory, August, 1994:111). Their large bodies were well-suited for the heavy physical work of domestic and farm labor of slavery and rural life. Since it was believed that large-sized Black women were strong and accepted within the Black community, obesity among Black

women has been a hidden and unexamined eating disorder. For while Black women might have a genetic tendency toward being large, overeating and extreme weight gain are indications of eating disorders akin to bulimia.

Thompson's study of eating disorders among African American, Latina, and white women suggests that "eating problems begin as ways women cope with various traumas, including sexual abuse, racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and poverty" (Thompson, 1992:547). One national study indicates that "48% of Black women are overweight". Moreover, such large size women are 20 percent less likely to marry than their thinner counterparts, have lower household incomes, and are ten percent more likely to be living in poverty (Gregory, 1994: 58).

Rather than acceptance, many large-sized Black women suffer personal rejection and humiliation by family and friends. Black men are tolerant of a variety of skin color, hair textures, and body sizes in "their women". However, large-sized and obese Black women have become the butt of their jokes and songs.

A Black woman's large size also has negative economic consequences. A "disproportionately high number of overweight women" are poor and are "more likely to eat fat-laden food and junk foods and get less exercise than richer women" (Kolata, 1993:A18). The poor eating habits of Black women can lead to obesity that in turn, blocks them from the

employment opportunities. Many employers simply refuse to hire or promote large-sized Black women.

There is also a connection between sexual abuse and eating problems. In Thompson's study, "sixty-one percent of the women were survivors of sexual abuse (11 of the 18 women) (Thompson, 1992: 551). Food became an accessible way for victims to anesthetize the pain and comfort themselves. Excessive dieting, bingeing and bulimia became "a girl's logical attempt to protect herself by being a size and shape that does not seem as vulnerable to sexual assault" (Thompson, 1992: 553).

In spite of the stigma and rejection experienced by large Black women, eating is a common teen activity in Black Brooklyn neighborhoods. Every area has many outlets of nationally known fast-food restaurants as well as many Chinese restaurants and pizza parlors. The availability of cheap, fatty food contributes to weight gain among young Black adults. The lack of access to recreation and sports facilities causes Black girls (and boys) to spend a great deal of their time eating. Young mothers in the shelter and the "hood" are major customers at the local fast-food stores and among the largest Black female teens.

Their eating patterns accompany the stressful stages of adolescence and often continue throughout adulthood. They are accelerated by the depression and difficulties of sexually activity, pregnancy, and childbirth. While some large-sized

young women hide their bodies in loose fitting clothes and confine their beauty rites to getting their hair and nails done, others struggle to fit into the latest style short skirts, tight tops, and high heels. They sadly strive to participate in the beauty culture, even if only in its margins and shadows.

Color. While weight, hair texture, and style can be adjusted and controlled by Black females themselves to meet beauty standards, skin color and features cannot. Black communities and many families have used skin color as a marker for status and a sign of beauty. An awareness of the significance of skin color begins in infancy: "Black children quickly absorb the guilt, anger, jealousy, and depression generated in their families by an unresolved color complex" (Russell, Wilson, and Hall, 1992:95). Parents, especially mothers, often give preferential treatment or punishment to their children based on their skin color. Rist demonstrated how teachers, even Black ones, continue this skin color demarcation in the classroom, often favoring and selecting lighter skinned girls for special attention and recognition (Rist, 1970).

During adolescence, skin-color prejudice becomes more acute for Black girls competing over the acquisition of beauty, because "in no other development phase is skin color so closely linked to attractiveness, popularity, and self worth". Color preferences persist among high school students who report that "the most popular girls in the school are

nearly always light-skinned" (Russell, Wilson and Hall, 1992: 102). "The program director of a clinic that provides social services to pregnant girls fourteen and younger say most of the pregnant Black girls she has counseled fantasize about having babies with light skin, light eyes, and 'good' hair...Such babies are doted on while dark skinned babies and mothers are ignored (Russell, Wilson and Hall, *ibid.*:95).

"Lighter skinned women" are preferred as the romantic interest in music videos and movies. The actual wives and girl friends chosen by the male "rap stars" Black teenage girls adore conform to trends of color-coding in marriage. While many Black men profess a general appreciation for the Africanized features and dark skin of Black women, "studies show that successful Black men are particularly likely to marry light-skinned women (Bates, 1994:132)

Light-skinned girls also suffer from color prejudice, because they are often viewed as desirable simply because of their skin color. Their personality and character are often overlooked because they are considered "pretty" and feminine because they are light-skinned. The social advantages enjoyed by the light-skinned teenage girl can be the source of hostility and alienation - "dissing" by darker- skinned girls. Being viewed as a sexual and social prize can seem desirable to the overlooked dark-skinned woman, but the idolizing of light skin is a form of prejudice that glorifies

a white standard of beauty in which women are objectified and demeaned irrespective of their color .

In summary, young Black females actively attempt to make themselves beautiful and attractive by using as guides the models, actresses, dancers, and singers seen in videos, magazines, movies, and television. The increased availability of inexpensive clothing and cosmetic and hair products specifically geared to Black women facilitate their beautification rites. Yet, the issues of hair, body, and skin color continue to inform Black female attempts to be beautiful. However, racialization does not prevent or minimize the efforts and desires of young Black women to package and display their femininity in forms designed to attract romantic and sexual attention.

"WAITING TO EXHALE": ROMANCE, LOVE AND SEX

Everyone falls in love sometime
Sometime it's wrong, and sometimes it's right
For every win, someone must fail
But there comes a point when
When we exhale.
(from "Waiting to Exhale" sung by Whitney Houston)

The possibility of young girls receiving attention, companionship, and love from boys or men organizes and fosters beautification rites and makes music not merely a form of entertainment, but road map and diary for lovers. The vehicles which construct adolescent romance inform the actual contacts and relationships between young women and men. In fact, romance, love and sex are the steps linking adolescence

with pregnancy, making early intimate heterosexual contact potent, overwhelming, and often disastrous for young women. The pursuit of love and sex prevails and diminishes all other parts of their emerging selves. Once romance becomes central to young girls, they make choices and take risks in order to realize their dreams of idealized love.

The emotional turmoil, strategizing, and work of romance in the lives of young Black women are usually hidden by stereotypic assumptions that sex is natural and uninhibited among Black women and men. Considered sexually sophisticated and promiscuous, young Black females are not usually viewed as being in love and concerned with romance. Yet, it is their dreams of romantic love conflated with idealized notions of being lovable and attractive to men that fosters their initial experiences with sex.

Young black women hold their breath waiting for the right man, passionately anticipating falling in love. Unfortunately, for those who have actual experienced love and sex, their point of exhaling is usually when they are either emotionally shattered, pregnant, or both.

ROMANCE

"I Pray that you'll invest in my happiness"
(from "Waiting to Exhale" sung by Brandy)

In summer more than in any other season, it is time for romance, an intense set of activities cultivating and organizing expressions of love. The work and effort young girls devote to beautifying themselves is supposed to pay off

in the summer, when school work and weather no longer interfere with their strutting, preening, and preparing for getting or deepening their commitment to a boyfriend.

If clothes create the needed look, then special songs express the emotion and mood of love. Each summer for the past 40 years, the music industry has produced a song which either captures or anticipates the character of romantic relationships, "exercising a deep, calling-out power over anyone who falls in love between June and September". The song, usually a ballad and national hit, is like "a blank Valentine card" used to help teenagers memorialize their "summer love" (Talty, 1995:34-35).

The potency of romantic songs are captured in the music score to the film, *Waiting to Exhale*, based on the novel about Black female romance and sex. Although written by a Black man, these songs are sung by popular Black women artists who voice the feelings of Black women in love and appeal to young women desiring to fall in love. The romantic dream of "many inner-city girls evolve from their early teenage years. The popular love songs they listen to ... are imbued with a wistful air, promising love and ecstasy..." Their dream is also "nurtured by daily watching of television soap operas" (Anderson, 1990:115).

Television soap operas and popular songs are contemporary romantic vehicles that are part of universal forms of gender socialization. Throughout the world,

beautification activities and love music are used by most societies in the rites of passages that prepare young women for marriage, usually arranged by parents and sanctioned by the community. In order to prepare for prospective mates, young girls are socialized and pressured to construct their femaleness around beautifying themselves. Romance, an essential part of these rites, is a socially acceptable, but clever ruse which cloaks an insatiable lust under the pursuit of unachievable and idealized lovemaking (Boyd, nd:2).

Since there are no established rites of passage for contemporary young women, they construct their own from the music, clothing, and other artifacts of adolescent culture. They are also intent on living out their own idealized romantic scenario. Their ideal lover is a handsome, prosperous, sexy, and single "man" (who is actually often a teenager like themselves) who is both strong and tender. She, in turn, imagines herself beautiful, feminine, and loyal. She intends to be the only one who truly understands and befriends him, and he will become the only one who truly loves her and meets her needs. If their love is true, she reasons, it should be strong enough to overcome drugs, street violence, poverty, and other women. Their overwhelming and passionate love will indicate longevity and commitment. She willingly gives her body to her man as a gift, because sexual intercourse is an expression of love. Besides, sexual intercourse, in her eyes, is expected to culminate and

confirm the durability of their love and eventually lead to marriage or at least children and life-long love. She believes this kind of true love is all consuming and leads to endless happiness.

But she also realizes that real love is frequently difficult, so music and soap operas are used to help her through the perils and problems of being in love. Many adolescent girls watch soap operas, although the characters are almost all white and middle and upper class. Young Black women, however, believe that the characters enact love scenarios that resemble their desired or actual love life. In fact, romance's angst and tension is derived from the belief that true love has the ability to conquer the expected competition and conflict.

Before she ever meets her "lover", a young woman has frequently imagined, mentally rehearsed, and readied herself to make her romantic dreams come true. Although fearful of being seduced, abandoned, and getting pregnant, they often provoke, plan, and plot their way into becoming sexually and emotionally involved with a chosen man. In this way, romance can be used to justify and cloak her own "lust" and sexual desire (Thompson, 1995:17-46).

Adolescent females are increasingly influenced by a cultural milieu which promotes sexual intercourse as acceptable and normal. Many young women are picked at, fawned over, pawed, and pressured to have sexual intercourse because

young men are also encouraged to be sexually aggressive and active. Romantic notions may help to socialize young women into expecting to fall in love and have sex, but it leaves them without adequate direction or support in maneuvering actual sexual terrains.

Sexualized Terrains

The sexualized culture of adolescence dominates the actual experiences of young women whether or not they are romantic or sexually active. Schools are the primary and initial site for most adolescent sexual display and romantic and sexual encounters.

For young women, school is the place where the latest styles and beautification rites are tested for their ability to effectively compete with other young women in winning the attention of men. Cliques of "girlfriends" come together to discuss romantic strategies and experiences. They help each other gather information about prospective boyfriends, especially after monitoring his experiences with other girls. It is girlfriends, not parents or teachers, who provide information about contraception and abortion. Although some groups of girls are sexually aggressive, girlfriends protect each other from sexual harassment and abuse within school.

Across the nation, many school hallways are a "daunting sexually charged terrain where most girls and many boys can routinely expect to be grabbed, poked, pinched or put down in explicitly sexual ways." The majority of the girls in one

study indicated they had received sexual comments or looks and were touched, grabbed, brushed up against or pinched in a sexual way (Barrington, 1993: B7). In addition, attacks from, and sexual relationships with, male teachers and staff add to the sexualized atmosphere in high schools for adolescent females. Sexual harassment in school has caused girls to be reluctant to go to school or talk in class. They have found it hard to pay attention and study and often make lower grades in class and on tests (O'Brian, 1985:7). Sometimes girls wear baggy pants and big sweatshirts to prevent being groped or ogled by male school mates. Some girls act tough and loud in an attempt to offset their fear of sexual attack.

This sexualized atmosphere exists in the Black Brooklyn neighborhood's high schools in this ethnography. Among the city's worst schools academically, they are known for their high rates of violence, adolescent pregnancy, and sexually charged hallways and classrooms. Since most students attend schools in their neighborhoods, sexualized conversations and harassment at school extends to and from the block.

A public language full of cursing and derogatory speech reflects and adds to the almost complete sexualizing of public spaces by adolescents. In the past, the use of scatological language, especially when referring to genitalia, was limited to privatized and specific male or adult spaces. At that time, young people might curse among their friends, but it was never socially acceptable in public

spaces. However, it is not unusual for today's children and adolescents to "cuss like sailors" on buses, schools, and streets.

Few young girls can walk the streets without being called a derogatory name, and few can resist the need to have their own repertoire of powerful retorts. Wherever they go, adolescent girls must daily walk a gauntlet of preening, rapping, and posturing young men whose "verbal debris", a young Black woman says, "invades our private space and assaults our very being" (Smith, 1993:152).

An immigrant describes her initial dismay at being called a "bitch", but "after three years of hearing the word 'bitch' used as frequently as the word 'the', the word tends to roll off my back..." (Lazar-Lea, 1995: 189). Many young women instead of being insulted, also use street language in conversation and as evidence of their own toughness, sexual sophistication, and worldliness. As one female rap group (HWA) explained, when women use the terms "bitch and ho" they deflate its power in the hands of men. (The Source,)

The sexuality of the streets and schools are heightened in the scores of social clubs and house parties in Black Brooklyn. "Hooky" parties and group television watching also provide spaces for teens to gather. Hanging out and attending these events gives neighborhood teens a place to be seen, to meet "someone" or to take dates. These places are where

adolescents dance, drink, or do drugs in an atmosphere ranging from orgiastic to simply having a good time.

Without private bedrooms and apartments of their own, teenage lovers take advantage of lapses in parental supervision. Since many teenagers are left alone or in charge of younger siblings while their parents are working, sex often takes place in their own homes. A national survey reported that "most of the high school students who said they engaged in sexual intercourse reported doing so in family homes" (Lewin, 1994:A20). Young women whose lovers are adults have to devise ways to deceive or placate their parents so they can join them in their own apartments.

After navigating actual sexualized terrains and participating in a culture that stirs up their sexual imaginations and emotions, it is inevitable that teens will become sexually active. At the highest rate in American history, in 1992 more than 53 percent of teens aged 15 to 19 are sexually active (Plain Talk, 1992:8) and by age 20, 86 percent of men and 77 percent of women have had sexual intercourse (College News, 4). In addition to public health concerns which include teenage pregnancy, there are emotional and social risks posed by such high levels of teen sexual activity.

The sexualized gauntlet young women have to walk through is more than verbal assault and consensus sex. The Ms Foundation for Women reports "486,000 of the girls now

attending high school will have been raped before they graduate." Moreover, the same report states that "nearly twenty percent of all American women were sexually abused as children." The extensive range and diverse forms of sexual encounters and episodes makes it nearly impossible for many young women to escape to the totalizing impact of sex.

I wanna please you. Don't wanna tease you.
(from "Waiting to Exhale" sung by TLC)

Sexual Acts

The process involved in young women becoming sexually active is neither spontaneous nor simple. In spite of all the sexuality in their lives, many young women continue to be ambivalent and fearful of actually having sex because it invites the possibility of being hurt, abandoned, or becoming pregnant (Thompson, 1995:19). Over several dates and other encounters, her boyfriend or male acquaintance might have to ask and plead with her to have sex. She is simultaneously pressured by both her pursuing lover and an internal debate within herself about whether she should have sex with this particular male or have it all.

Anderson describes the pursuing young Black male's "game" of seduction as an attempt to "get over" the young women's defenses. Using methods similar to female beautification rites, he must develop an entire repertoire,

which includes "his dress, grooming, looks, dancing ability and conversation or rap in order to gain the girls' confidence" (Anderson, 1996:114). Furthermore, successful men learn to "...show her the side of himself that he knows she wants to see, that represents what she wants in a man" (Anderson, 1996:116).

The pursuing male is often persistent, intense, charming, and emotionally coercive. Sometimes he will intensify the game by using jealousy or feigning indifference to "mess with the girl's head" or confuse her emotions. The goal is to make her submissive and dependent on him and willing, at any cost, to meet his needs and demands. Many of these strategies are consciously discussed and examined within male groups in order for young men to become more effective in seducing young women (Anderson, 1996; Lees, 1993). According to Anderson,

...to the young man the woman becomes, in the most profound sense, a sexual object. Her body and mind are the object of a sexual game, to be won for his personal aggrandizement. Status goes to the winner, and sex is prized not as a testament of love but is testimony to control of another human being. (Anderson, 1996:114)

For those young women who describe sex as something that just happened to them, it is quite possible that they might not be able to recognize the male persuasion and pressure (Anderson, 1996; Ladner, 1972; Thompson, 1995). Being picked at, fawned over, and pawed initially turns young women off,

but his persistence and forcefulness often eventually breaks down her resistance to sexual intercourse. When adult, rather than teen male lovers are involved, young girls can be even more deceived and seduced by the male game. "Instead of scrumptious exchanges," one young woman's high school friends offered "battlefront war stories of sex that often ended with the guy's conquest and their feeble surrender" (Roberts, 1994:117).

Young Black women often go along with male sexual games because they believe the strength of their love will rescue Black men from devastation and despair. Once initial fears and doubts are overcome, sex can give young women a sense of power and womanliness that comes from feeling needed and physically gratified. One young Black mother claimed that "sex is a wonderful experience...making love can be extremely beautiful, especially if you have deep feelings for your sex partners" (Kornblum and Williams, 1985:83). Others

do not consider themselves particularly sexual. For them, sex is part of a recreational pattern that also includes desultory TV watching, frequent marijuana smoking, and the consumption of vast quantities of pizza and pop (Kornblum and Williams, 1985:83).

Increasingly, for those girls who have steady boyfriends, having sex on a regular basis is a routine part of their relationship. Sex is considered necessary for maintaining and sustaining their relationship. Sex often operates as a medium of exchange: she gives him sex, support,

and understanding, and he gives her attention, status, and possibly gifts. (Anderson, 1996; Ladner, 1972; Kornblum and Williams, 1985; Lees, 1993)

However routine and consensual, sexual intercourse intensifies and confounds adolescent relationships. In many instances, these were not relationships but rather a series of sex acts, which young women fantasized as the first steps toward a mutually emotional committed partnership. Her dream life and desires have primed her to "melt in his arms." From the beginning, "when she is approached by a boy, the girl's faith in the dream clouds her view of the situation" (Anderson, 1996:115).

She is often unable to see that many men may view the "relationship" only as an opportunity for having sex without commitment and responsibility. His desire for sex and control is more central to their idealized notions of romance than her notions of love and commitment. Furthermore, many males classify women into two groups: those who can provide ideal sex and those who can provide ideal love. In spite of changes in the roles and position of women, this traditional male dichotomized attitude and view of women dominate the sexual relations and fantasies of adolescent males (Anderson, 1996:114-119).

Young men often intend to reserve their feelings of love for the good "woman" who will be obedient, loyal, and sexually and emotionally there for him and him alone. She is

the one he wants to have his child. He usually expects her to understand that their love will not preclude him exercising his male privilege and prerogative to have other "women" as sexual playmates. Though many such men might have good intentions, their continual use of sex as a source of recreation and multiple partners as evidence of manliness or search for his ideal love, precludes their being the loyal and sensitive boyfriends and lovers hoped for by young women.

After using charm, and attentiveness to initially conform to her romantic ideal, many young men then become sexually aggressive, emotionally demanding, and abusive. At this point, young women often feel it is too difficult and dangerous to refuse to have sex or end these sexual relationships. Violence among teen lovers is not unusual when a young woman attempts to dissolve a sexual relationship. Male lovers have beaten and even murdered females who attempt to walk away from their relationships (Amber, 1997). Having his baby is often an attempt by both to fulfill their very different versions of love and relationship: her need for commitment and his need for control.

When young women are abandoned, they often become anxious, angry, and depressed. After their boyfriend loses interest in them, their sense of "betrayal is usually much greater if sex has been part of the relationship" (Lickona, 1994:38). Many attempt to find solace by having casual sex

with others. These sex games or "temporary sexual relationships can lower the self-respect of both the used and the user"(Lickona, 1994:37). In spite of their tenacity and ingenuity, many young women end up having been seduced by romantic love and abandoned by lovers who have been protected and supported by male privilege.

The negative consequences of adolescent sexual intercourse are usually considered solely in terms of pregnancy and disease, while the emotional damage and moral consequences are ignored. Sex makes the emotional intensity and fluctuation of adolescent flirtation, infatuation, and friendships more dangerous. Once it begins, the emotional weight and physical demands of sex tend to overwhelm adolescent lovers. Most adolescents are not mature enough to unravel and address the complex interlacing of choice and coercion as well as danger and desire involved in their sexual relationships. Sexual experimentation also carries with it guilt and the sense of having done something wrong (Lickona, 34-39). In fact, 62 percent of the sexually active girls in one study said they "should have waited until they were older before having sex...", but 71 percent reported they were in love with their last sexual partner" (Lewin, 1994:A20).

However, young women should not be seen as merely youthful victims of broken love affairs, but rather as adolescents attempting to meet the expectation of a culture

that has defined sex as central to the development of a viable self. While sex is a natural vital function of everyday life and as normal and human as eating and sleeping (Ladner, 1972:198), it is not simply biological or psychological. In most societies, in the past, adolescent romance, love, and sexualized cultural spaces were preludes to marriages, because unprotected sex had emotional and physical consequences damaging to the individual and the social order. Marriage was the social institution created to contain intimacy and sexual intercourse. However, the fact that more and more unmarried teen girls are "going all the way" sexually has had radical implications. Young girls are trying to sustain sexual relationships and motherhood without marriage or freedom

at the very time in their lives when they should be reaching out forming new friendships, joining clubs, and teams, developing their interests and skills, taking on bigger social responsibilities (Likona, 1994:39).

This chapter has traced the root of current forms of female adolescent development and teen mothering to the growth of a national and international adolescent culture that emphasizes personal autonomy and sexual freedom within distinct ethnic, racial, and class boundaries. Rap and the hip hop culture of Black adolescents developed in a complex and contradictory social world of poverty and upward mobility, racial boundaries, and individual expression. Young Black women as consumers and participants in Black adolescent

culture engage in their own entertainment styles, beautification rites, romantic practices.

As with other female adolescents, young Black women have to negotiate highly sexualized social environments at school, on the street, and even in their homes. They have daily encounters with sexually aggressive boys and men who assume they will perform sexual acts with little regard to their emotional and physical consequences. Sadly, young women's preoccupation with beautification and romance and idealization of sexual intercourse actually prepares them to become willing participants in sexual "relationships" that for many, eventually lead to pregnancy. The pervasiveness of adolescent sexualized terrains help to explain the high rates of sexual intercourse among American teenagers.

Their high rates of pregnancy are a result of the combination of pro-natalism, conflicted views about contraceptive use and abortion. In spite of deep religious and philosophical divisions in the society, once pregnant, many teen-age girls choose abortion. However, within the Black community, more often, cultural and institutions of motherhood, fundamentalist Christian beliefs and even African values emphasize motherhood for the young woman. This pro-natalism, often without marriage and economic security, has a distinctive history and pattern that explains why many pregnant Black teenagers choose to keep their babies.

This study theorizes that Black teen motherhood has developed from gender construction and social reproduction among young African American women situated at the juncture where the cultures of motherhood and adolescence meet. The adolescent culture experienced and (in part) created by Black youth occupies a dominant role in the lives of contemporary Black female teens especially before they become mothers. After giving birth, though the romance and sexuality of adolescence continues to have a major impact on their lives, it is the institutions and practices of the culture of Black motherhood that become critical to the young woman and her child's successful survival. This cultural form separates the African American teen mother experience from other groups.

Introduction

While adolescent culture's emphasis on sexuality and autonomy can be said to explain how young women become pregnant, their decision to become mothers is informed by the constructions of mothering and womanhood among adults. "...Motherhood is not an issue of the individual; it is an ideology that is interwoven into every aspect of society's basic structures" (Christian, 1994:15). Women internalize the importance of motherhood without realizing its life altering impact. Understood by most societies as the primary and ultimate function expected of women, motherhood is also frequently de-valued. The ideals of mothering that are transmitted to daughters directly from their parents and indirectly from the social culture do not reveal all the responsibilities and sacrifices required of mothers. Mothers, whether married or single, often are primarily responsible for rearing children and maintaining households. The idealization of motherhood helps to explain why many adolescents in the United States regard childbirth as their rite of passage into becoming women.

The culture of Black motherhood shares the same pro-natalist beliefs that exist throughout the society. These beliefs are that "all women need to be mothers, that all mothers need their children and that all children need their mothers" (Oakley 1974:186). The Black teen age girls in one study viewed pregnancy and childbirth as a "line of

demarcation...that separates the girls from the women"
(Ladner, 1971:212).

The values and beliefs about mothering among African Americans have been significantly influenced by traditional African societies. Africans believe that motherhood, because of its spiritual and kinship value, is a necessary condition for womanhood. "By giving birth to children, African women ensure their people's continuity, both in the here, and in the hereafter. But if the African woman was 'barren' she was an outcast in her society" (Christian. 1994:96). For Africans believe that the continuity of the tribe rests on progeny who remember and conduct rituals in memory of their ancestors.

African mothering is not simply a "privatized nurturing occupation of biological mothers" (Collins. 1987:4), but a collective enterprise involving elaborate networks of all social actors, both men and women, and their lineage. In many west African societies "the economic support of children was not the exclusive responsibility of men"..., for mothers provided for "key dimensions of their own and their children's economic support..." (Collins, 1987:4). All women were expected to become mothers in order to be valid and legitimate members of their families, lineage groups, kin networks, and the overall society.

"Both African and African-American cultures prescribe motherhood as women's central and primary mission, and their only means of gaining status (but not power)" (Glenn,

1971,10). Enslaved Africans in the United States valued mothering both for its assurance of their biological continuity, and for its role in preserving their cultural integrity as a people. Mothering among the enslaved was also in the economic interests of owners whose profits depended upon the natural increase of the slave population.

This chapter describes the culture of motherhood that developed among African American women from this unique combination of African tradition and the slave system within the United States. This historical background provides a context and explanation for understanding the patterns of marriage and single motherhood among Black women. The culture of motherhood also helps to explain why so many pregnant Black teens decide to keep their babies and the familial networks of support offered to them and their children.

Slave Mothering

From the very beginning of America's history, the rights of enslaved African women and men to manage their own gender activities within the private arena of home and family was contested by slave owners and other racial patriarchs. While sex, mating, and parenting was considered a private matter among free populations, gender among the enslaved was rigidly monitored and controlled (Higginbotham, 1978).

Without any patriarchal protection or social rights, Black women were vulnerable to sexual assaults as well as

economic exploitation. Enslaved African women were stripped of their right to familial relationships as wife, sister, daughter, or mother. In fact, regardless of circumstance, the slave economy viewed Black females more as laborers than as women (Davis, 1981; Lerner, 1973:5-25; Jones, 1985:11-43).

Enslaved Africans were overpowered by an economic, political, and military power determined to literally work them to death and to deny them all rights to family life (Bennett, 1975:145-166). They survived, in part, because that power structure needed slave women to biologically reproduce slaves, who, in turn, required a modicum of family life in order to work and reproduce. The slave woman was so significant that the United States became the only new world slave society able to reproduce its population by natural increase (Patterson, 1982). Slave mothering and Black family life became possible because the economic interest of the slave owners to increase their slave population dovetailed with the desire of the slaves to have children and families of their own (Gutman, 1976).

In spite of the value of biological reproduction to the slave system, enslaved men and women had to struggle with the slave owner for familial control. Slave women fought for the right to mother the children they birthed, regardless of the race or status of their fathers. In ministering to the daily needs of slaves and slave masters,

they were able to nurture an insurgent Black community and unique forms of family life (Davis, 1981).

When they could, enslaved women used their importance as reproducers of the slave population to enhance their claims of motherhood. They rebelled against slave masters who attempted to treat their children as chattel and commodities. They attempted to use face-to-face interactions to read their oppressor's mood and attitude in order to manipulate it to their benefit. Although racist and sexist stereotypes assumed them to be inferior and animal-like, nevertheless, these women made several shrewd choices that insured the survival of Black families and communities.

First of all, contrary to traditional African customs and Christian values, enslaved women chose to live in spite of the stigma and dishonor of rape and sexual abuse. Their decision to survive contrasted with middle-passage patterns in which large numbers of women committed suicide and infanticide after being raped and impregnated (Omolade, 1979).

Second, enslaved women maintained strong kinship ties with Black male "husbands", fathers, sons, and brothers. Black men, in turn, (also contrary to custom) chose these frequently sexually abused women as partners and mates. Since marriage between slaves was illegal and slave children were considered the property of slave owners, only enslaved women recognized the parental and marital rights

of their slave mates even if they were sold away from them (Gutman, 1976; Billingsley, 1992: 83-143).

Third, enslaved women developed elaborate female networks among themselves in order to manage childbirth, mothering, and other domestic chores within the slave quarters (White, 1985: 119-141). Although these women and their children were assumed by slave owners to be mere "survival units", they saw themselves as families. In this sense, Black women created single parent families under the harsh domination of the racial patriarchy and its slave system (Omolade, 1994: 21-38; Kulikoff, 1978).

Marriage

Marriage is universally recognize an economic, social, and cultural institution providing stability, predictability, and emotional sustenance to husbands, wives and their children. While there were many informal and surreptitious unions among enslaved Africans the institution of legal marriage was undermined and nearly eradicated because it was forbidden and outlawed. The outlawing of the legal rights of slaves to create permanent and valid families based on marriage was one of the most troubling results of the American slave system. Black men were prevented from exercising any patriarchal authority, leadership, or responsibility over their families and communities. Black men had no legal or customary rights to be fathers or husbands and were denied any role in possessing, controlling, directing, or benefiting from the

productive and reproductive capacity of their women.

According to the slave system, Black men had no right to have wives or children (Higginbotham, 1978; Frazier, 1966; Commager, 1973).

The manhood and patriarchal rights denied to Black men were in dialectical relationship to the protection needed by Black women and children. During both the slave and segregation eras, white males could demand sex from Black women they owned or hired. These women could not, like others assume that their marital status or family affiliation would give them privilege and respect. Even after the end of slavery, Black women were not honored by white men for being wives and mothers. Therefore, being married and having one's own household and family were privileges for Black women and men that was often opposed by white supremacy (Omolade, 1994: 3-19; Jones, 1985; Frazier, 1966).

Although the Black male patriarchy had been forcibly dismantled during the slave era, and demeaned and persecuted during the segregation era, it sought to steadily increase its authority in the two-parent family, and in Black churches, organizations, and schools. Black men, ostracized and discriminated against in the labor force and political system, struggled to expand their authority and control their own households, wives, and children (Frazier, 1966; Jones, 1985). Every expression of Black patriarchal authority indicated increased autonomy

and control over gender roles and choices by Black people in general.

Although many preferred families that enabled women to remain at home, economic circumstances forced Black men and women to modify and alter this model. Wives had to work outside the home in order for their families to survive. For their incomes, not those of their husbands, were often the most reliable source of family support. While cautioned and prepared for such economic roles, Black women were socialized to place marriage and men at the center of their lives. Therefore, it was not unusual for Black wives to be aggressive at work, assertive in their communities, and submissive at home.

Marriage was one of the few socially sanctioned ways for Black women to achieve status within and outside the African American community (Scott, 1991:191). As long as marriage was considered a means of defending manhood, uplifting the race, and protecting children, most Black women tolerated the autocracy of many Black patriarchal husbands.

Black Single Mothers

Although most African-American families consisted of married couples during the segregation era, about a fourth of all Black families were headed by women. "Between 1880-1915, 25 to 30 percent of all urban Black families were headed by women," most of whom were low-income urban workers, widowed or abandoned by their husbands (Jones,

1985:113). Many women feigned marriage and widowhood when they were actually unmarried mothers (Du Bois, 1908:94). Frequently Black mothers throughout the rural south chose not to marry preferring to remain among their natal family (Frazier, 1966:89-101; Jones, 1985). However at the end of World War II, Black single mother families were transformed by changes in the racial climate, the economy and in the culture.

There have been a dramatic increase in employment opportunities for Black women for all classes. Working-class Black women previously employed as domestics and farmers were able to enter and move up into public sector jobs with government bureaucracies and agencies. Expanded opportunities in college education has increased the number of Black female professionals (Sokoloff, 1992).

These changes have had a dramatic impact on marriage and family composition among Black women. First, increased job opportunities and incomes have strengthened the earning power of marriages and two-parent families. These combined incomes have enabled many Black families to escape poverty. Secondly, gainful employment has removed the incentive for Black working wives to prolong bad marriages. For example, "in 1959 a woman who separated from a chronically jobless man and entered the labor force would see her risk of poverty increase, twenty years later her risk would hardly have changed" (Stern, 251). Thirdly, women's employment has increased their economic independence from marriage

altogether. Employment possibilities have given many Black women "reason to avoid entangling alliances or not marry" (Stern, 1993: 252).

During these same decades, marriage and gender patterns among all societal groups have been radically transformed by the simultaneous impact of movements asserting sexual liberation, women's economic and social independence and autonomy, and civil rights for racial groups. Feminist consciousness and sexual liberation combine to release both men and women from lockstep attitudes and roles in the traditional family. At the same time, efforts by the women's movement to liberalize laws and public attitudes about divorce and abortion have empowered women to critically evaluate their role as wife and the value of marriage itself (Luker, 1996; 81-108).

Although desirous of the rights and privileges of womanhood it affords, increasingly, Black women's growing distaste for marriage is often rooted in their wariness of its demands for submission and selfless devotion to the needs of patriarchal husbands. While recognizing the political importance of strong Black male leaders, more Black women prefer more equitable and liberal relationships with Black men. "Whereas three-quarters of all Black marriages were intact in the 1960's, barely half are so today. The proportion divorced is highest among Black females" (Staples, 1993:163).

The Black community's single mothering traditions have been accelerated by these social changes. Billingsley reports that

the female headed single parent family has escalated enormously over the past generation. Consisting of a minority of 20 percent of families with children in 1960, this family form had increased to 33 percent by 1970, to 49 percent by 1980, and to a whopping 57 percent by 1990... Beginning in 1980 for the first time in history, female-headed families with children outnumbered married-couple families with children (Billingsley, 1992:36-37).

While Black men and women continue to have intense intimate relationships and desire to parent children, they no longer have the desire or ability to sustain and institutionalize these relationships by marriage. Nevertheless, Black women still expect men to father the children they sire and live with. But as Black fatherhood weakens, Black motherhood has been sustained by cultural patterns that exist independently of, and outside marriage. Mothering, more than marriage, has become the central means for many Black women to express their female identity.

The Culture of Motherhood

The culture of Black motherhood initially emerged in order to protect gender construction and counteract the social dislocation caused by racial and economic displacement and exploitation. It established networks of Black mothers who provided mutual material and emotional support and transmitted mothering patterns among single and married women. Most women performed mothering roles

within their own families, however, when children and youth were not properly cared for, they were reared by "othermothers."

Outside the family, the culture of motherhood was reinforced and supported by the Black church and other institutions and connected to individual and community uplift and self-help. The perpetuation of an institution-alized culture of mothering has been an outcome of the struggle of Black people to "retain power over motherhood so that it serves the legitimate needs of their communities" (Collins, 1994:52).

Although successful mothering can be a powerful source of personal affirmation and means of countering the inhuman effects of racism, in many instances it has become merely "a habit of survival". Scott uses

the phrase *habits of survival* to refer to the external adjustments and internal adaptations that people make to economic exploitation and to racial and gender-related oppression. Such habits, first and foremost, are responses to pain and suffering that help lessen anger, give a sense of self-control, and offer hope. (Scott. 1991:10)

As noted earlier, single mothering was originally intended as a way for Black mothers to create legitimate and viable families when faced with forcible separation and death of their mates and spouses as a result of racist practices. It was also supported by the Black community as a valid response of Black women to the violence and adultery of their husbands and mates. However, as a habit,

single mothering can become a means for avoiding marriage altogether.

Contemporary Black women often use motherhood to resolve emotional ambivalence, to gain status within their families and with sexual partners, and to be considered womanly. Women who devote themselves so exclusively to motherhood often forego any attempt at constructing other viable forms of female identity. Consequently, the culture of Black motherhood has the dual dimensions of empowerment and restriction, often reifying the mother while weakening the woman.

The culture of motherhood is buttressed by Black women's role as wage earner. Black women are admired for their ability to be economically self-sufficient. In order to meet the needs of their families, most Black women must toil relentlessly in the paid work force while also doing house work and domestic chores. Although they seem effective and able, Black women have frequently been left too exhausted to address their own emotional needs and to offer personal attention and affection to their children and mates (Staples, 1993:57-60).

Another element of the Black motherhood culture is that all women are supposed to mother children, their own or other women's. Regardless of marital status or class, Black women are expected to be "other mothers" to children, as if they were members of their own families. Single women without children are expected to take in orphans and needy

children. Childless daughters are expected to care for their siblings and nieces and nephews. Black mothers with children of their own are supposed to make room for the children of their relatives and neighbors. More effective institutional, political, and structural solutions to care for orphaned and abandoned children are often unexplored because of the assumption that Black women have an unlimited ability to mother all the children.

Black women usually organize networks of female family members in order to accomplish their varied maternal tasks and roles. Such networks have enabled women to carry out the kin work of caring for children and relatives and daily and special domestic chores. While these networks offer mothers help and support, they also require her to reciprocate in services and resources (Stack. 1994:33-44).

Although noble and generous, other mothering overburdens many women and excludes Black men from assuming their roles as "other fathers". The increase in Black-single mother families has alienated and distanced Black men from the family. When marriages and relationships end, fathers no longer have well-defined parenting roles. A vicious cycle develops in which the more non-residential fathers are alienated and distant from domestic life, the more they avoid fathering their children and the more they are unprepared for fathering and living within families and households (Omolade, 1994: 93-95).

In addition, Hill Collins notes that "Black women's experiences as other mothers have provided a foundation for Black women's social activism" (Collins, 1987:4). Black mothers have provided the rationales and resources for community campaigns and social protests. Saving Black children from harm and disadvantage is the constant theme of their efforts to oppose drugs, police violence, hospital closings, and poor schools. Black mothers have also been inspired to develop schools, churches, and recreational programs in order to improve the lives of Black children. Because of their activism, poor Black communities and groups have made modest gains in services and resources. The activism of Black mothers is integral to the safety net that enables most, but not all, Black families to function in spite of poverty and lack of resources or political clout.

As they age, Black mothers are often regarded as "symbols of power" within their communities. This status is derived "not only from their roles as mothers in their own families but from their contributions as community other mothers to Black community development as well" (Collins, 1987:6). However, recognition is usually conferred only when these "community mothers" express resistance to white authorities or strive to uplift the race. Strategies directly challenging Black male sexism or pressing for a political agenda not focused exclusively on race receive little community-wide support from men or women.

Black women's ability to provide for their families, maintain households, and develop female networks has helped to create the mythology of the strong, self-sufficient, and powerful Black mother. This myth is central to the continuity of the culture of motherhood because it seems to recognize and reward Black women for their hard work and toil. The daily acts of mothering have been powerful incentives for Black women to legitimate an important element of their female self. They reveal the intervention of Black female social actors in creating their own definitions of womanhood and motherhood and their attempts to construct gender and family.

Mothering by vulnerable women, such as teenagers can intensify and problematize their relationships to individual men, the patriarchy, and the state, exposing them to racism's and sexism's most virulent forms. Motherhood especially among teen-agers can entrap young women into the lower working class and make them susceptible to the consequences of welfare, child care, and employment policies that punish rather than support her mothering.

Black Teen Mothers

When we consider that "one of every four black children is born to a teenage mother" (Wattleton, 1994:109); and that "by age eighteen, 26 percent of black females have given birth and 40 percent have a child before age twenty" (Gibbs, 1992:72), the dominant influence of the

culture of motherhood in socializing young Black women becomes evident.

Black teen girls have learned to view mothering as the successful completion of a developmental process sanctioned and idealized by both Black and white adult women. Although they do not want their adolescent daughters to follow their difficult life and become pregnant without marital and financial security, Black mothers have often inadvertently socialized them for domesticity and mothering. By the time they are teenagers, many daughters are almost entirely responsible for younger siblings, preparing family meals and clothes, and maintaining households while their mothers are working. Unfortunately, this recruitment of young Black women into domesticity facilitates and prepares them for early motherhood (Reid. 1982:141; Joseph, G. and Lewis, J. 1981:95).

In Joyce Ladner's classic study, Black girls through household chores and child care responsibilities, began being "consciously socialized into the role of womanhood" when they were about seven or eight years old (Ladner 1972:60). Although girls with strict upbringing abstained from sexual intercourse and were concerned with etiquette and school, girls of all ages accepted having a baby as a symbol of womanhood (Ladner *ibid.*, :128).

Black mothers also socialize their daughters to become mothers as well as independent women who are able to face adversity, hard work, and struggle (Ladner 1972;

Joseph and Lewis 1981). Although offering the possibility of personal power to young women mothers, mothering also increasingly "shatters her emerging self" (Emecheta 1979:41) and places her and their children in emotional and economic jeopardy.

There is a tension between mothering as a source of agency and status and mothering as a habit of survival and entrapment. Paul Willis's study of white working class male youth in central England provides a model for examining this tension. In their rebellion against school, petty thievery, and admiration of manual labor, the "lads" have created a counter school culture to the intellectual, ideological, and oppressive aspects of education and schooling. Rather than viewing the boys as the authorities do, Willis understands that the rough masculinized antics and delinquent behavior of the "lads" rebellion enables and facilitates their easy transition into manual and factory work (Willis, 1977).

Motherhood for most teen girls is like the shop floor of the "lads" in the Willis study. Just as the lads become trapped into working class jobs after their rebellion against school authorities, after using sexuality and motherhood to express their womanliness, many Black teen girls who become mothers also become further entrapped into the lower working class and single mother families. In fact, these girls often follow the same patterns of employment and mating as their own mothers.

Willis is concerned with the reproduction of the working class and its capacity for expanding, resisting, and grappling with the seemingly impenetrable systems of exploitation by the creation of culture. Through their own activity and ideological development, "the lads" reproduce themselves as a working class (Willis 1977). Black motherhood is a culture, which like the counter culture of the lads in Willis' study, has been an attempt by Black women "to expand, resist and grapple" and to negotiate the simultaneous impacts of racism, inequity, and sexism.

Black teen mothering has always been a significant phenomenon within the African American community, however, a defiant Black teen counter culture has emerged intent on constructing its own forms of sexuality and parenting and refusing to adhere to adult authority. While most Black teen mothers do return to live in their mother's home during pregnancy, childbirth, and the child's early years, many seek autonomy and independence from both their parents and from marriage. In aggressively pursuing romantic and sexual relationships while attempting to raise their children, contemporary teen mothers reject the self-sacrifice and Puritan values of the culture of Black motherhood that guided the behavior of unmarried mothers in the past.

Abortion and Contraception

Although there is a long tradition of African-American women using contraception and abortions to control their

reproduction, there is an equally entrenched tradition of aversion to any form of birth control derived from fundamentalist Christian beliefs. Contemporary Black teen mothers embody and express the contradiction between these two traditions. "When asked about the acceptability of abortion...Hispanic and black adolescents tended to report that most of the people important to them were against their having an abortion..." (Adler and Tschann, 1993:149). In spite of this finding, Black women in 1991 "obtained 24 per cent of the abortions in the United States, more than 500,000"..(Ross, 1993:141).

Until the woman's movement and the rise of Black feminism, many African-American Christians opposed abortion and advocated a strong pro-life position, long before the more recent anti-abortion movement. They believed that abortion is murder and a sin against God. Moreover, Black Christian anti-abortion sentiment was also based on the belief that children had a right to be born irrespective of their economic or social circumstances. Having survived slavery and segregation by countering white attempts to contain Black population growth, having children was seen as a weapon against genocide and racism. Besides, the extended family and other mothering assured that Black children would be cared for by someone, usually a woman. Informal adoption of Black babies and children even if they are unwanted and abandoned, was a means of keeping such

children from becoming victims of white racist's orphanages and other institutions.

Since the 1970's Black feminist organizations such as the Black Women's Health Project have supported abortion, and contend that the abortion is genocide argument denies Black women freedom. Loretta Ross, a researcher of "the African-American women's struggle for abortion rights and reproductive freedom" explains that these activists define "pro-life and pro-choice as the right to have, or not to have children and the right to raise them free from racism, sexism, and poverty" (Ross, 1993:141).

Nevertheless, Black women continue to use Biblical and "spiritual" reasons for not having abortion. Anecdotal accounts suggest that although Black women have abortions, they also express regret for doing so. Because they believe that pregnancy and childbirth are inevitable, natural and God's blessing, many will eventually also have children.

For young women this tension between anti-abortion beliefs and abortion practice is complicated by both parents and welfare policy. Until recently, young Black women on public assistance in states like New York, who received Medicaid were able to get medically safe abortions without parental permission. Yet the same Medicaid provisions enabled young Black women to receive medical care for childbirth and funds for food, clothing and shelter. Therefore, pregnant adolescents were able to make

their own decisions about reproductive choices without adhering to parental authority.

In her study, Elaine Bell Kaplan reported that "all but one of the teen mothers in her study reported that their mothers demanded they have an abortion"(Bell Kaplan, 1997:54). However, the teens refused, claiming "fervent conviction" based on the notion that, "My mother didn't get rid of me, why should I abort my child". On the other hand, many parents oppose their daughter getting an abortion citing moral and religious reasons.

Overall, Black adolescent and adult women's conflicting views and practices of about abortion and contraception have promoted motherhood in spite of the circumstances of the child's birth. Not wanting to deny any individual their civil rights, Black women support reproductive rights in general, while considering abortion to be generally immoral and anti-life. However, childbearing outside of marriage has little moral stigma, especially for adolescent mothers. Therefore, the decision by young women to go ahead with the pregnancy and give birth even if the child was not wanted or planned for is a good example of the habit of surviving so central to the culture of Black motherhood.

Summary

In every society, mothers prepare their daughters for womanhood as defined by the male order. Whether they acknowledge it or not mothers realize that gender rites of

passage such as teen motherhood, female circumcision, or debutante balls improve the womanly status of their daughters.

Many Black girls learn from their mothers that motherhood is the only reliable indication of their womanhood. Many believe marriage is impossible and precarious; beauty is elusive; brains privileged. But any girl who has sex can become pregnant and a mother, hence, a woman. This outcome of the culture of motherhood is perhaps unintended, however, mothers often contradictorily socialize their daughters to replicate the gender system while encouraging them to transcend its limitations.

However, not all mothers continue to parent their adolescent daughters and take-in their grand-children. After years of sacrificial mothering, many are unable or unwilling to interrupt missed creative, professional or romantic opportunities. Unfortunately, this is the very time that teen daughters need to be mothered. When biological mothers fail to support their teen mother daughters "other mothers" usually female family members, often step in. Increasingly, other mothers are organizations of Black women, such as the Shelter, who have established support programs for these young women.

Although not advocating adolescent sexuality or teen parenting, the cultural values and practices of mothering have been able to sustain Black teen mothers. Both two-parent and single mother-headed households encourage teen

mothers and their children to live at home as needy and dependent members within an extended family network. In the next chapter, a former teen mother describes this typical pattern. The themes of her autobiography introduces the chapters of the ethnographic study of a group of Black teen mothers residing in a homeless shelter who lack familial and maternal support.

The culture of motherhood is seen in both these experiences of teen mothering. The chapters on the Shelter describe the application of its othermothering principles while the experiences of the mothers in the Shelter, both reproduce and challenge Black motherhood's essential child bearing and childrearing roles.

Introduction

This chapter is the autobiography of a typical Black teen mother, who is now in her mid-thirties. She describes her struggle to come to terms with her baby's father, to negotiate education, employment and welfare systems, and to care for her child. Like most teen mothers she was initiated into sexual intercourse by her boyfriend whom she cared for and loved. Such initial sex acts are usually spontaneous, with contraception an afterthought, and with the resulting pregnancy, unwanted and unexpected. After informing and confessing to her parents, the pregnant teen is eventually cared for by them in spite of their disapproval and disappointment with her pregnancy.

"The overwhelming majority (85%) of black unwed teenage mothers do not set up independent households, but continue to live in the home of their parents or with other adult relatives after the birth of their babies" (Hill, 1993: 31). In her study of early parenthood among low-income adolescent girls, Mayfield indicated that "black teen mothers were less likely than whites to marry and move away from home and are more likely to be living with their parents and receiving assistance with child care" (Mayfield, 1986:226).

After giving birth, the young mother's family usually helps with child care while they urge and encourage her to go back to school or to get a job. Frequently, the young mother and her child remain in her parent's household until she marries or becomes financially independent.

Romantic Feelings

The typical teen mothering experience begins before becoming a mother when romance and sexual desire greatly influence the activities of teenage girls.

At the tender young age of fifteen, I began to look at boys in a different way, a way in which they no longer were viewed as buddies, but more girl and boy relationships developed. With one guy in question that I was seeing (dating) the friendship began to develop into a relationship that was more than talking about the same interests. This guy lived across the street from me, each day he would appear around my home always giving messages through his friends to pass on to me. I decided one day to respond to some of his questions. This process began with the development of us talking daily. As time went on little did I know that I was developing (romantic) feelings for this young man, although I was unsure what these feelings were. Through a lot of talk and exploring I was able to see that the feelings I was experiencing was love. Each day we would spend a lot of quality time together just talking.

One day he informed me that his mother was sending him down south for the summer, that had to be the saddest day for both of us. We shared words together, and began to discuss the many letters we would write to each other daily. The thought of being apart for such a long period for time was a little too much for us to bear.

First Sexual Experience: "Proving My Love"

The young girl's first experiences with sexual intercourse, whether persuaded by her lover or not, usually involves attempts to prove her love for him.

During one of our discussions the topic developed regarding becoming (sexually) intimate. Being a virgin, and not having a lot of knowledge of being intimate with the opposite sex, I was reluctant to engage in such an activity. That topic came up on more than one occasion. Having these feelings for him and the sadness around him leaving for the summer caused me to decide to engage in my first sexual relationships. I guess you can say that I wanted to prove my love to him as well as have (improve) my chances, very slim, that he would continue the relationship once (after) he returned from down south. Being young, and in love I guess you can say that I was committed to doing what ever it took to keep this guy in my life. It's funny being young and in love, the things you will engage in to prove your love, and keep that person in your life. I can truly say that when the intimate act did occur I was at a total loss about what I was doing. I know one thing it sure did hurt".

Am I Pregnant?

The next stage involves the young woman anxiously waiting to find out if she is pregnant.

Since my menstruation cycle began, I was use to seeing my cycle each month. I noticed the days were going by and my menstruation didn't come. I began to get a little worried but

didn't think too much of the situation. I informed the guy in question of my concern, but was told not to worry something would happen in the next couple of days. Here I was thinking, 'Oh God, what have I done?' My mother had never discussed with me the function of the female reproductive system and how I could become pregnant the first time even if I didn't use any protection. I took the liberty of purchasing a home pregnancy test to see if my fears had become reality. Sitting in my room I checked the results and found the test results to be positive.

Telling My Mother

Once she knows, the teen girl usually fearfully tells her mother she is pregnant. Mothers usually express anger and disappointment. Sometimes the girls are temporarily thrown out of the house and attempts are made to talk with the boy and his parents. Eventually, most Black mothers feel obliged to help their daughters. Ironically, it is the teen girl's disregard of her mother's interdiction against sex that lead to her greater dependence on her mother.

Here I was fifteen with a positive pregnancy test reading, and unclear of what to do. I contacted the young man and informed him of my situation. it's so easy for a guy to discuss this type of issue with his parents, the harder part is for the young lady to inform her parents".

Here I was unsure of what to say to my mother to inform her of my pregnancy. I finally built up enough courage to tell her of my condition. I can truly say that my mother had

a hard time dealing with my news. I think she was more disappointed in me than anything else. The youngest of three children, I was the first one to get pregnant. Well, she yelled and screamed and all those things that a parent does when they find out that their child has been sexually active, and has become pregnant.

Education: Offsetting the Negative

In Mayfield's study, low-income Black adolescent girls, regardless of parenting status have greater school attachment and higher educational goals than white youth.

"A larger percentage of Black mothers are attending school and completing more grades. Minority youth realize that they are more dependent on educational institutions to achieve upward mobility"(Mayfield, 1986:238).

"After the news of my pregnancy became a reality, my mother sat with me, and discussed my options. I made a commitment to my mother that day that I would continue to go to school and graduate so she wouldn't worry about me being a teenage mother with no future. I focused myself towards continuing my education, but felt very uncomfortable about returning to my regular school setting because I was pregnant.

I discussed my discomfort with my mother and with her help she enrolled me in a school for young mothers which met all my educational needs as well as my pre-natal needs. My experience attending a school for young mother was positive. All the teenage mothers that attended the school were

pregnant and received the support they needed. Students were taught how to care for themselves before and after the baby was born. They also provided educational classes to help us keep up with school studies.

Giving Birth

Whether married or not, new mothers are usually overwhelmed by the intense and difficult tasks involved in mothering. Their own mother's support becomes the most dependable resource for confronting their arduous struggles. For unmarried Black teen mothers, their mothers are often their only resource.

After I gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. What a joy I felt bringing such a beautiful human being into the world. As a new mother I had to learn how to take care of such a small person. I received a lot of support from my mother who helped me in every way to take care of my child. I didn't think of the full responsibility I would have to endure taking care of a small infant. After the baby was born my enrollment in the young mother's school was completed.

I returned to regular school catching up with my studies in order to graduate on time with my graduating class of 1983. It wasn't easy trying to go to school each day, and not have a regular baby sitter to watch my baby. I struggled each day to attend school, keeping up with studies, exams, and caring for the baby. Through trials and tribulations, for one reason or another, my child care provider would be unable to

watch the baby, I would have to then find a new sitter while I attended school.

The Baby's Father

Although they both have sex, often at the man's insistence, most young men do not expect to become fathers. While Black girls are socialized by the culture of motherhood to assume responsibility for mothering, few young Black boys remain committed to the baby or the baby's mother when they learn of the pregnancy. Many just run away.

Throughout the difficulty of caring for the baby and attending school I received no support from my daughter's father either emotionally or financially. He never took the time to assist me in watching the baby while I went to school or to purchase items needed for the baby. I was able to speak with him, and discuss the unfairness of him not playing a bigger role in his daughter life, I received no response. I had to move on with my life, and take care of my daughter the best way I could. I guess he became afraid of the responsibility of being a young father. I wanted to make the relationship work, but the struggle I was going through with raising the baby and school made me decide to end the relationship.

Going on Welfare

It is the contention of this study that most African American women view welfare as a short-term social insurance needed until they become gainfully employed. Since many live in households headed by single mothers who have limited

incomes, Black teen mothers are often encouraged to at least get food-stamps and Medicaid in order to supplement the household resources. Like the young mothers in William's study, the writer does not "fit the terms 'welfare dependent' or "underclass" for she "relies heavily, but not solely, on welfare" (Williams, 1991;130).

Being under age I needed a way to be able to take care of her financially. My mother took me down to the public assistance office to apply for financial aid. Since I was under age, I needed my mother's assistance in completing and signing the forms. Once my benefits were put into place I was financially able to take care of my daughter as best as I could. I knew within myself that public assistance wouldn't be something that I would remain on for the rest of my life. I saw it as a stepping stone to help me get on my feet. After completing all my required classes, I was able to participate in the graduating class of 1983.

Becoming a Working Mother

While supportive of their teen-mother daughters until they complete their high school or college education, many Black mothers also require that their daughters go to work. If unemployed, grandmothers usually watch their grandchildren while their daughters go to work. Otherwise young mothers must get a job, arrange for child care, and are expected to make financial contributions to the household. The mother's strong work ethic influences their daughter's notion that with a good job, they can take care of their child. But as

this woman's story indicates, young Black women enter the workforce at the lowest level of the service sector and are forced into a long and difficult path toward employment and financial security.

After graduation things began to look a little unstable for me. Here I was out of school and unemployed and needing a change in my life. My mother began to grow tired of me staying home, and not trying to make a difference in my life. She began to tell me that opportunity would not knock on my door, I would have to go out and seek my opportunity if that's what I was seeking. I can remember looking for that feeling of independence of working a regular nine to five job and not have to depend on public assistance.

Having no work experience or any special skills I applied for a cashier position at Mc Donald's. I entered the facility, and asked to fill out an application. I was granted an interview the same day by the manager and was asked a host of questions regarding cashier duties. After the interview, I was offered the job, I felt like I was on top of the world. I couldn't wait to get home to share my news with my family. I worked out baby-sitting care for my daughter while I reported to work each day.

Being my first job and all, I felt scared and excited all at the same time. I was eager to learn my job and give my all, each day. I reported to work and was given my uniform, policy and all other information. I was trained by another cashier for about two weeks then I was placed on line

independently to work the register. I remained at this particular job for a little while until I received unfair treatment and saw the need to leave.

Here I was again unemployed, and in need of a job, I was able to get a job at a senior citizen's home in the kitchen department. I enjoyed the work I did with the elderly tenants, serving them meals. But I needed to feel more productive in a more professional setting. I decided to look at other options in my life, still unsure of what to do. I didn't want to do anything that was too complicated.

I decided to see about joining the United States Army. I went down to the local recruiting station to see about the steps I would need to take to join the Army. I received full details about the Army policy, benefits, and other areas. Things began to look good regarding enrollment, then I brought up the question regarding my child. Would I be able to send for her once I was stationed? I was informed that I would have to give legal guardianship to my mother. After hearing this bit of news I was reluctant to join the Army.

I thought about enrolling in school for Nursing Assistance. I enrolled and received training in an eighteen month course which promised that upon graduation I would receive a paper with names and numbers of organizations that I could contact about a job. Little did I know after completing my course that I would not receive the certificate that I worked so hard to achieve. This downfall gave me a feeling of being cheated out of something I worked so hard to

complete. I was able to obtain a job as a Home Attendant, but found the job to be unsatisfying.

Seeking a College Education

"Perhaps only tenacity can explain why mature African American workers are so often in urban college programs" (Omolade, 1994:151). Black women make up nearly twenty percent of the total student body in the City University of New York and the typical Black woman student is a single mother, many of whom were teen mothers. "Schooling offers Black women the most tangible and reliable opportunity for economic and social advancement..." (150)

After, exploring my situation, I decided to enroll in college to work towards a degree that would lead me toward a more rewarding job. I enrolled in community college in 1988, five years after graduating from high school. My field of choice was nursing, hoping to regain my interest in the field after having a bad experience in a training school. After completing a semester I began to feel discouraged in my course of study.

A good friend that I met knew I was interested in working with people and guided me back in school to show me the field in which I could transfer into; I chose the field of Human Service. I worked hard in my studies and received passing grades and I became pleased with the progress I was making....

At the end of my semester, preparing for graduation, I received a flyer to attend a job fair. Here I was

inexperienced with no skills, and not a lot of history to fill up my resume, but I decided to attend the job fair, and try my luck. Dressed professionally, I carried with me a few resumes to hand out to a few organizations at the event. I walked around proudly exploring the many organizations looking for the one I would be able to qualify for, remembering that I was graduating with an Associate Degree in Human Services.

I presented my resume to a few booths, and was told that I would be contacted if I met the qualifications. I left my first job fair with great pride knowing that I gave my all to seeking employment. Two weeks passed and I was preparing for graduation when I received two responses from the resumes I had submitted at the job fair. I was at a loss for words to receive any responses. I responded to both organizations weighing which one I would accept.

I went to both interviews and gave my all to the first interview I went to, which involved working with young mothers, and ensuring pre-natal care for mothers and children. Throughout the interview I felt very confident in my method which I thought were (was) impressive. I was offered the position, but declined it. I decided to accept the job of working with the mentally ill population. I finally experienced the feeling of real independence working so hard towards a goal and achieving that goal.

Regrets: My Daughter Has No Father

For most single mother families there is a non-residential father/ As a result, large numbers of children will never live with or know their biological fathers. Most of these fathers do not emotionally or financially care for their children. "The concept father loss is a more useful and powerful concept than mere father absence, because it conveys the depth of the emotional feelings of the daughters" (Kaplan, 1997:124).

My daughter was really growing at this point, I went through the stage of sitting in the emergency room with her high fevers, enrolling her in daycare as well as the trauma of the different developmental stages she went through. I can truly say it was really an experience raising this little girl on my own. My daughter's father was still not playing an active role in her life, but through it all I never denied him the opportunity to see his daughter as well as spend quality time with her, which he never did. One thing that my mother always instilled in her children was never talk about your children's father negatively in their presence and that's one thing I lived by.

I was only sad that my daughter's father was unable to be a part of the good grace I had found with my daughter and my new career. My daughter went through a great portion of her young life not having her father in her life. As far back as I can remember she never went through the process of

asking for her father or wondering what happened to him or why he wasn't around. I guess you can say I went through the single teen parent stage of having to raise my daughter alone. I had to be her mother and father all wrapped up in one. I went through the feeling of being angry with him for not being a part of his daughter's life and not being concerned to at least spend time with her even if he was unable to take care of her financially.

Overcoming Obstacles

New motherhood demonstrates that "there is no longer a sharp line separating her from her mother" (Ladner, 1971:213). The young woman now has power and authority over her own life: "This is power not in the sense of domination, but in the sense of competence. It is control, not in the sense of will, but in the sense of mastery, which we need in order to see ourselves as agents in our own lives" (Apter, 1990:54).

Here I was a teenage black mother looked down my society. I can remember one of my teachers saying I was too young to have a baby, and wouldn't be able to accomplish anything in life, since I had a baby so young. I really wish I could see that same teacher today and show her how much I have made of my life as well as the great job I've done in raising my daughter. In society, people will look at you and assume the worst about you due to having a child at such a young age. Yes, I was too young to have a baby but the fact

still remains that I did have a baby and through a lot of hardship I was able to raise her to the best of my ability.

A Proud Mother: The Tradition Continues

Black single mothers who have successfully reared children into adolescence and adulthood claim personal satisfaction and achievement, in spite of bittersweet feelings about the failure and weakness of romantic relationships or marriage, subordinate roles in the economy, and a sense of lost opportunity. Their examples reify and reinforce the notion that mothering does produce strong and mature women. However, while such single mothers often encourage self-sufficiency, independence and a rigorous work ethic in their daughters, they are apprehensive about their ability to prevent them from succumbing to negative forms of sex, romance and love.

I've looked at my life in retrospect and saw many things I know now I would change a lot of things in my life. My daughter is well on her way in her school studies receiving excellent grades as well as being on the honor roll for four years in a row. I was very proud of the way I have been able to raise my daughter alone. She now attends high school for nursing. My daughter has grown along with me in a lot of ways. I have instilled in my daughter the importance of not becoming sexually active at such a young age and risk becoming pregnant and have to endure some of my struggles as a young mother. I also gave encouragement to her to continue

her education for a higher level of success. In life there is no stronger love than a mother's love.

Summary

This woman's story reveals the ways most African-American families address the issue of teen mothering. When nestled within the protective authority of adults, the young mother is able to avoid the negative impact of isolation, interrupted education and the demands of employment on herself and her child. These experiences contrast with those young mothers are attempting to raise their children alone or with male partners. The ethnography in the next chapters describes a group of young Black mothers who reside in a shelter for homeless mother and children because of their families' inability to provide them with support. However, their attempt to balance mothering, education, and employment is not unlike the experiences of the writer of this autobiography.

Introduction

The Shelter is situated at the corner of two well-traveled streets in Black Brooklyn. Its front is virtually indistinguishable from the other three-story walk-up apartment buildings on a long block of private homes. Diagonally across the street from its doors is a cloistered convent that takes up an entire square block. In either direction are commercial avenues filled with small supermarkets, groceries, fast food stores, and beauty parlors. In this neighborhood, workers, homeowners and entrepreneurs live along side the addicted, the unemployed, and the poor. Nearly all the residents in the neighborhood surrounding the Shelter are African Americans or recent Black immigrants from the Caribbean. Despite the diversity among the neighborhood's residents, scholars and politicians have linked such hyper-segregation with extreme economic disadvantage and marginalization.

One of the elected official serving the district in which the Shelter is housed describes the dire social conditions of his community's young people. He reports that "only one in five of those African-Americans aged sixteen through nineteen is employed," and that "there are increased rates of school based and street violence and death; and high rates of substance abuse and its concomitant crime." Furthermore, he attributes these conditions to "lack of employment, poor education, and healthcare facilities, which

should be addressed by targeted state and federal public works programs" (Green, n.a.).

Though created and maintained by racism and white institutions, these "Blacktowns," "ghettoes" and "hoods" offer their residents something more than dysfunction and failure. In their study of Chicago, Cayton and Drake describe this something more as

...the familiar milieu in which Negroes live and move from birth to death. it is accepted as 'natural' and is psychologically satisfying. Negroes do not think of their institutional life as something 'inferior'. In fact, they express considerable pride in it, viewing it as evidence that they as well as whites, can create a collective life (Cayton and Drake, 1945:122).

While not all Black people view their life with pride or their communities as "psychologically satisfying," there are enough families, community self-help groups, and organizers who are creating a viable collective life within the most devastated Black communities. The same elected official who described the problems faced by his community's youth has recognized the role of community activists and their organizations in addressing them. This politician was instrumental in securing funding and support for the Shelter.

This chapter describes the work and philosophy of the Shelter for homeless teen mothers. The Shelter grew out of a Black single mother's self-help organization, which was established by a Black woman community organizer. The programs and services in the Shelter reflect the

institutionalization of female traditions of othermothering as one form of intercessory work vitally needed to serve community residents.

Community Intercessors

Black community organizers or intercessors realize that many Black youth experience difficulty in school, discrimination in the labor market, despair in their families, and violence and drugs in the streets. In order to help these youngsters they go beyond the traditional notion of the social worker. As intercessors, they "stand in the gap" between the destructive and nihilistic behaviors of Black youth and the often hostile responses to them by the police, schools, and the courts. Unlike many representatives from these institutions, community intercessors view Black youth as undeveloped and uninformed, rather than pathological and beyond redemption. They counter negative stereotypes not only by directly challenging those who hold those views, but by helping young people resist internalizing their assumptions.

Community intercessors are committed to informing young Black social actors about the demands and operations of the "larger society." They also work to mitigate the negative consequences of violence, drugs, and unprotected sex. Intercessors, in short, strive to snatch young people from the fires of racism and failure by teaching them needed skills and strategies for changing their behavior and their lives. They go beyond their organizations' offerings of

education, employment, recreation and cultural services, and often function as surrogate parents to these youth.

The Shelter is an example of the kind of community intercessory work that has grown out of the culture of motherhood tradition of "other mothering." Contemporary institutionalized forms of "other mothering" involve an individual or group of Black women who obtain resources to help endangered children and youth. To the agencies and organizations and foundations which usually finance this work, the programs are adjuncts of the social welfare and social work systems. For those who establish and work in them, these programs are sites where forms of extended family and community are located.

The Shelter is an outgrowth of the Sisterhood, an explicitly Black feminist organization which, for nearly 20 years, helped single mothers and their families in Black Brooklyn. By reinforcing self-worth through education, employment, and mutual support, the Sisterhood helped their members challenge the blaming stereotypes of family dysfunction and resist the pressure for traditional marriages. The Shelter and its predecessor, the Sisterhood, are examples of pro-active efforts by Black women against the combined impact of racism and sexism.

The Sisterhood

In 1973, the Shelter's director was a 20-year-old Black single mother not unlike the current residents. However, she was raised by a skillful and caring single mother and a

close-knit family and felt good about her choice to parent her son without a husband. Yet nearly all of the public discussions and images she saw or heard equated Black single mothers with social pathology and dysfunction.

Determined to counter these negative images, she announced the beginning of a support group for Black single mothers on a local radio program. Interested women contacted her and began to meet. Those meetings developed into The Sisterhood, an organization offering help to Black single mothers and their families.

The Sisterhood grew into a network with a central office that coordinated the programs and activities of members and non-members seeking help with housing, child care, schooling, and employment. The sisterly atmosphere enabled women to discuss their family problems without judgment and criticism. Sometimes needy women were housed with Sisterhood members, while others were hired to work in its offices, giving them on-the-job training for future employment.

Although its membership was never more than a few hundred, the Sisterhood had a large vision and a great deal of influence. As a result of its pioneering and innovative efforts in helping women and families, the group became known by city, state, and national policy groups working on social issues concerned with single and teen mothers and poor families. The Sisterhood emerged as one of the few community-based organizations unequivocally founded and consistently focused on the needs of Black women and their families.

The founder, who often viewed the Sisterhood as "her baby," controlled its day-to-day operations and fiscal policies. In fact, she occupied several simultaneous roles: program director, chief administrator, fund-raiser, fiscal manager, public speaker, and public relations officer. Like similar community organizations, there was an implicit agreement among the supporters and members that the risk-taking founder-director had earned the right to make decisions and set policy for the organization. The director held the organization together with stamina and determination and the support of her staff and a small circle of volunteers.

The Sisterhood's work was funded by a patchwork of small grants from government agencies, foundations, and religious groups. Consequently, a great deal of the director's time was spent raising funds for and promoting the organization. Hence, over a period of time, the founder-director's viewpoints and approaches became synonymous with the organization's philosophy and guiding principles.

The most prominent of these principles was the challenge to the commonly held assumptions about Black single-mother families. In most speaking engagements, for example, the director would respond to those who said that such families signified a broken home in the following way: "I don't know whose house they mean when they say 'broken home' - My home ain't broken and doesn't need to be fixed." She insisted on using the term "Black single mother" instead of "unwed

mother." In her speeches she asked, "Why do we define single mother families as father-less -- by who's not there -- we don't define being 'single' as wed-less."

Demanding a change in the terminology had a two fold purpose. It empowered those who were Black single mothers, and it challenged the prejudices and stereotypes of those who were not. In the same way that the use of terms like "Black," "African," and "feminist" reflect more than vocabulary changes, "Black single motherhood" demonstrated the ability of Black women to claim the power to define their own experiences, legitimate their families, and remove stigma from their children.

This form of family and self was connected to the attitude of the Sisterhood toward Black teen and adult single mothers. Those who came to the organization for support were regarded as sisters, not "clients" or "cases". In the director's own words:

The sisterhood came out of that philosophy that we can help ourselves a lot more than we've been led to believe What I saw as possible was a simple thing, for sisters to be able to form a support and caring system for each other; one with love, hope and well wishes for each other, as well as being able to provide concrete and practical insights into some of the problems members were facing as single mothers (Cousins, n.a., 2).

Rather than demeaning them, the Sisterhood provided single mothers with education, housing, and employment information for improving their position as the primary

parent and head of a household. Since funding was minimal, volunteer single mothers offered these services. The organization encouraged women to have fun with their children by sponsoring trips, picnics, and holiday celebrations. It also planned social activities, such as dances, parties, and conferences for single mothers who needed time away from their children.

Finally, a flyer from the Sisterhood explains that its goals were "to develop a viable support system through which all Black single mothers gain a positive self image, leading to the determination, awareness, and strength to positively raise her children." Challenging negative language and images, treating Black single mothers as sisters, and offering them concrete help became central objectives in the Sisterhood's work with teen mothers.

The Shelter That Sisters Built

When you have a baby in your arms and
you're a teen, and you have no place to
go. A lot of them find bad places out of
mere survival (City Limits, 1985:22).

In 1979, the Sisterhood received a grant from the Ford Foundation for a Big Sister-Little Sister project that offered stipends and programmatic support to teen mothers. Fifteen adult single mothers were paired with adolescent mothers. These "little sisters" received child care and transportation money for participating in education, training, or employment programs. The "big sisters" volunteered their time by providing practical help and

support to the younger women. As role models and not disciplinarians, Big Sisters helped teen mothers address childrearing and parenting issues. They also assisted them in relationships with their families and children's fathers. This project became a national model for programs supporting teen mothers.

Although funding for the program ended, the problems of homeless teen mothers seeking help from the Sisterhood continued to grow. In one instance, the director recounts

the story of a teenage mother-to-be who was referred to the Sisterhood by the Bureau of Child Welfare to be taught "parenting skills"...the welfare office had placed the young woman in a seedy rooming house with drug addicts and with squalid bathroom and kitchen facilities shared by all tenants. Members of the Sisterhood opened their homes to the teen mother, found her an apartment and convinced a hospital social worker to let her keep her baby (Cousins, n.a., 123).

While most Black teen mothers continued to live with stable family members, increasing numbers of young women shuttled among parents, kin, and boyfriends, most of whom could not provide a healthy environment because of their own problems.

The Sisterhood made many unsuccessful attempts to find adequate shelter for young mothers between the ages of 17 and 21 years old -- too old for Child Protective Services but not quite old enough to live in adult shelters. When many of these young mothers were allotted welfare payments for housing, they were often cheated or sexually harassed by

landlords and janitors. They were often too inexperienced to properly secure apartments or negotiate leases and repairs. The director realized that teen mothers needed more than shelter. They had to have support services and preparation to live successfully on their own.

In 1980, the director applied to a city program designed to help community groups renovate abandoned buildings for their programs. She had to go through a series of arduous and complex bureaucratic procedures: completing long and intricate forms, meeting with representatives from various city agencies, and complying with procedures and policies. During this time the Sisterhood joined forces with another community-based organization experienced in the technical aspects of building maintenance, management, and security. For three years both groups negotiated with the Human Resources Administration (HRA) to fund the program, and the Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) to renovate the building. Actual renovation and programmatic planning for the Shelter began in 1983. Five years later, on October 26, 1988, the Shelter opened for residents.

From the onset, the director knew that to truly help teen mothers and children the Shelter had to be architecturally different from standard homeless shelters and group homes. She struggled for apartment-like units with amenities such as washing machines and spacious private bedrooms large enough for the child's crib and the mother's bed. The director said, "I had to fight for policies such as

girls can't be admitted at any time of the day or night, and could be dismissed if they fight. These were bottom line issues." In addition, she also had to secure outside funding for developing an effective program to meet the needs of the residents.

In a brochure describing the ground breaking ceremony, the director described her goals for the Shelter:

Too many times when you hear the words 'shelter' or 'transitional housing you get the feeling of warehousing or putting people someplace. This will not be just an institution in terms of a place to live. This will be a family living experience and not just a place to house mothers and babies.

Physical Arrangement

Privacy, space, and security are an integral part of the Shelter's layout. The girls live in two-bedroom and three-bedroom suites, which include a shared living room and kitchen space. Each resident has a large private room for herself and her baby. Cribs are provided, along with beds for the mother. Washing machines and modern appliances are provided for each unit. There is a child-care room, a meeting room, and several offices on the premises.

Programs and Services

The Shelter offers an array of programs and services designed to enable young mothers to effectively head their households and rear their children. The program features three categories of support: home management, self-improvement, and parenting.

(1) Home Management Program

Since the Shelter is divided into apartment-like units, each resident is expected to take care of her own living quarters. The Shelter does not provide meals, laundry, or cleaning services. Young mothers must budget for household expenses and prepare meals for themselves and their children. Washing facilities are on the premises, but they must care for their own clothing. Since the young mothers share cooking facilities and a living room, they are expected to help each other. Workshops offering information about nutrition and home management are often offered.

The residents' home management skills are supervised and inspected by staff members who also give individual assistance. Week-end passes and other privileges can be withheld if the apartments are not clean and orderly. These activities are designed to prepare the young mother for managing her household and maintaining her apartment after leaving the Shelter.

(2) Education and Self-Improvement

Secondly, these young women are expected and supported to attend school, work, or be in a training program if they are not incapacitated with childbearing. The girls have a wide range of education backgrounds, from those in special education, those who lack a GED or have only a 10th grade education, to those who are high school graduates, and others who are in college. A counselor from the Board of Education

is assigned to the Shelter to place residents in appropriate education and tutoring programs.

(3) Parenting

Assistance with parenting is the most significant service offered the residents. Whether in formal workshops or informal conversations, staff and volunteers are continually helping the young mothers take care of their children. Often they model ways to feed, discipline, and play with the children and offer sympathy and advice to the young mothers.

The Staff as Family

At least 15 salaried staff persons provide social services, security, child care, administration, counseling, home management, and parenting training to the residents. The staff includes a receptionist/office manager, evening counselor, housemothers (one is on call all night), security monitor, and child care staff. The facility is maintained and guarded by the Shelter's co-sponsoring organization.

The small number and limited space are only some of the factors which explain staff cohesion. The director intentionally created a staff composed of diverse Black women who represented various familial roles. The housemother, child care, outreach workers, and weekend staff are older women, one of whom admits that "they portray the grandmother and mother to the young girls." These grandmothers advise and monitor the residents. Their tone and approach are more

familial than professional. They might use a parental phrase such as "I know you are not expecting to go out with your room looking like that." They give directives to the mothers like, "Put some shoes on your baby's feet!" And of course, they dote on the babies like a grandmother by cooing and holding them and remarking about their growth and health: "He is getting so big. What are you feeding him?" "She feels a little warm to me, does she have a fever?"

These institutional grandmothers are mothers and grandmothers who are often dealing with teen-mother issues in their own families. The outreach worker, for example, is raising two grandchildren abandoned by her grand-daughter, who was a teenage mother. Older "other mothers" provide assurance and wisdom to the motherless young women based upon insights gleaned from their own experiences.

In contrast to these workers, the office manager and secretary is a young single mother closer in age to the Shelter residents. She was referred from a community program that pays stipends to young people they temporarily place in jobs in community agencies. These agencies can then decide whether they wanted to hire the worker permanently. The Director hired the young woman who, she confides, is now competent enough to run the Shelter by herself. The director explains, "She was always very good with the girls, because like a big sister they can confide in her. At the same time she is also respected and is an example of what the girls can achieve."

The education counselor, an outreach worker from the Board of Education, provides another kind of Black female support. She is a "nudger" who tries to make sure that all the girls are enrolled in some educational program. She gets personally frustrated by the girls' reluctance to follow up on appointments with schools and teachers. Though they try to avoid her, often feigning illness and forgetfulness, she is persistent and relentless. As with other staff members, her "real life" role as wife and mother of five children blends into her job in the Shelter.

Another staff member is the day counselor who runs groups, keeps records, and admits the young women into the Shelter. Seemingly more reserved than other staff members, in the Shelter's context she is the kind of "other mother" who models efficiency and professionalism.

As with men in many families, the male workers are necessary but peripheral to the Shelter's major tasks and functions. The male security guards and maintenance workers know the girls by name and play with their babies. Like supportive big brothers and cousins, they tease and joke but keep a respectful distance in this clearly female-dominated space.

The familial character of the shelter staff did not occur by accident, but was deliberately organized by the director. As with any powerful mother who has single-handedly raised her children, she closely watches over both "her staff" and "her girls." She wants the teen mothers in the

Shelter to emulate and learn from a full range of positive maternal role models. Since most of the teen mothers live in the Shelter for nearly a year, the pictures of smiling young women and their children are more like a family album than Shelter document.

Mothering in the Shelter

Ambiance and Routines

During the day the Shelter is quiet. Most of the mothers have left for school or work, or for appointments at clinics housing or welfare. Only new mothers or those with sick children are upstairs. There are, of course, one or two mothers who simply refuse to leave their rooms.

The Shelter really comes alive in the evening when mothers come in with babies picked up from child care and with groceries for dinner. When the weather is nice, they might go back out to get takeout food from the nearby restaurants. The housemother exclaims, "Lots of Chinese food comes through here!"

If there are no required house meetings, the young mothers are relaxed, and the Shelter becomes like a college dorm with children. They visit and hang out in each other's rooms. Music and television along with chatter and laughter can be heard throughout the building. The hall phone rings constantly with calls from boyfriends and family members. Residents nearing the end of their stay are making arrangements with realtors and landlords.

A few residents might have individual sessions with the counselor. Others drop by the office to talk with the housemother and other staff. Babies are bounced and cooed over. Sometimes former residents come by to visit and chat.

During the evening, the house mother checks apartments to make sure they are clean and neat. Her approval is a prerequisite for weekend passes. During these inspections, she takes time to admonish and advise the girls.

Shelter mothers who receive passes from her can spend the weekend visiting with their baby's father, family members, or friends. Sometimes fathers come to the Shelter to visit their children. On some weekends, workshops and special events such as baby showers, birthday parties, and holiday dinners are held at the Shelter.

Othermothers Talk about Childbirth

The Shelter's ambiance is upbeat and friendly and its public space, the office and front door area, permeated with banter and chatter. This is no formal facility with strict protocols and sharp boundaries. Conversations among staff members, especially in the evening, are casual and informal.

One evening, the housemother told the counselor about a phone call she received from the hospital. A new resident who had a baby that morning is due to come out tomorrow. In recalling birthing practices of the past, we are shocked that she can leave the hospital so soon.

In the Caribbean about thirty years ago, the housemother explains, women would be dismissed from the hospital and then

the local midwives would take over. They would massage the woman's stomach frequently with homemade salves and then bound her body with cloth to flatten the stomach and eliminate stretch marks. Their healing would be fostered by herbs for laxatives and soups. Women would be confined for three months. Babies would be bound with cloth to prevent their navel from protruding. They would be fed only water for nine days to flush out their system and then they would be nursed.

Another counselor shared comparable child birthing experiences in New York City thirty years ago. At that time, new mothers were hospitalized for at least 3 - 5 days and sometimes a week. In her family they were not allowed to cook while bleeding because new mothers were considered "open" during the period after childbirth. They were confined for at least six weeks until being examined by a doctor and deemed healthy enough to resume sexual and physical activities. There was, of course, no sex during this time.

Contemporary teen mothers have very different after-birth experiences. The housemother explains, "They listen to their boyfriends and have sex right away to please their man, but are unaware of the health risks. They don't care about themselves and their bodies. They get lots of vaginal infections and have stretch marks."

The difference between the caring after-birth experiences of older Black women and the hasty and unhealthy ones of the Shelter mothers is an indication of the

generational ruptures within the culture of Black motherhood. The after-birth experiences of the Shelter mothers continues to underscore the maternal care and parenting needed by young mothers.

The Shelter as Mother

As an institutional "other mother" the Shelter attempts to replicate the approach to teen pregnancy and motherhood fostered by the culture of Black motherhood. Mothers of teen mothers usually administer a combination of material support, emotional encouragement, and tough love. A former teen mother gives an example of this combination. She recalls her mother saying, "I am obligated to take care of you, but not your child." She went to work a few months after giving birth while her mother supported her and her child. One former teen mother says,

As a new mother I had to learn to take care of such a small person. I received a lot of support from my mother who helped me in every way to take care of my child.

All mothers are expected to love their children, but Black mothers are also socialized to work in order to meet their children's material needs. Education is encouraged because it can improve the mother's employment opportunities. In order to fulfill these dual roles, single mothers are expected to become full-time caretakers and caregivers. These roles extract a great deal of time and energy from women, leaving little time for intimate relationships or personal activities. Many young mothers reject these demands and

strive to make their roles as lovers and mates more central to their lives.

Nevertheless, the Shelter's model of mothering focuses on maternal traditions of dual roles. The residents are expected to simultaneously learn to provide for their families and to nurture and care for their children. The requirement that Shelter mothers go to work or school is not merely to wean them from the increasingly precarious welfare system, but to prepare them to be economically self-sufficient single mothers.

The shelter has four requirements for its residents:

- go to school or to work;
- perform housekeeping chores: clean rooms, prepare meals, wash clothes;
- take care of your children;
- prepare to establish their your household: find and furnish an apartment, make moving arrangements.

Consequently, one of the first tasks of young mothers in realizing these goals is to organize care for their child while they work or go to school. Those who leave infants and toddlers in the Shelter's child care system must prepare clothes, diapers, food, and written instructions for the child care worker. This rather formal procedure prepares the young mother to learn how to make child care arrangements. Mothers are urged, as soon as possible, to place their

children in publicly funded child care facilities even while they live in the Shelter.

Summary

Looking back one evening as I left the Shelter, I could see the guard's silhouette against the brightly lit first floor window. Staff workers were sitting and chatting with some of the girls. The girls were either on the phone or watching television in their rooms. Being there, one could almost forget that this was a shelter. It had all the comfort and casualness of a college dormitory or large family.

For many young mothers, this was the first time they had a room of their own and that their possessions weren't in danger of being stolen or borrowed. They could now sleep without the fear and interruption of violence or drugs. This was the first time for many that order, affection, and care was given and not yearned for.

One could almost forget the stormy life that had driven them into the Shelter and the difficulties awaiting them once they leave. The national debates about teen motherhood were distant and far removed from the young women about to go to sleep in a shelter built for them. Nestled in a social world known more for its pathology and dysfunction, the Shelter was just one of the ways that Black women themselves have defined and attempted to solve the social problems they face.

Introduction

Usually birthing initiates women into the culture of motherhood, a cluster of behaviors, norms, and expectations designed to instruct, support, and determine how she mothers. This culture is usually structured and transmitted through relationships between the new mother and her own mother and female kin.

Unfortunately, The Shelter mothers, having suffered traumatic separations from their mothers and other family members, are forced to give birth alone in an institution. This chapter describes the impact of their "motherlessness" and explores how the Shelters as an institutionalized "other mother" meets the young mother's need for support and direction. The focus of the chapter is on how young women learn to mother while negotiating schooling and work.

Profile of the Shelter Moms

The major part of this ethnographic research was conducted from March to October in 1995. When I began my fieldwork, there were 12 African American, (some of Caribbean heritage) and 5 Latina mothers and children. Since it is part of the city's homeless shelter system, the Shelter residents have always included young mothers who are not African-American. However, its philosophy reflects the culture of Black motherhood's tradition of other mothering regardless of the ethnic background of the young mothers.

As the volunteer education and career counselor, I spoke to nearly all of these residents; however, my study focuses

on nine African American mothers and their children. These young women were selected because their combined experiences seemed typical of homeless teen mothers and the crisis aspects of this phenomenon.

The ages of these nine mothers ranged from 19 to 24: three were 19 years old, three were 20 years old, one was 21 years old, two were 24 years old. The presence of a 20-to-24 year old in a shelter designed for teen mothers is not an anomaly or error. While not technically adolescents, these homeless young mothers were referred by workers from shelters or group homes because they were unable to function as adults.

Each came into the Shelter at different stages in their mothering: two were pregnant; two entered with infants; two with one-year-old; and three with two-year olds. Nearly all had therefore been teenagers when they gave birth.

Although the family composition of these young mothers differed widely, all came from family backgrounds plagued with some form of parental substance abuse and violence. Rape and possible incest are recorded in the cases of two of these young mothers, but there was no indication of these problems in the family lives of the others. Four of the young women reported mothers addicted to drugs or alcohol, and three of them were raised by their grandmothers. All of the residents grew up with siblings. Two young mothers had lived with their adult brother or sister before coming to the shelter.

Three of the young mothers grew up in two parent households. One such resident was brought to the United States by her mother while her father remained in the Caribbean. Her records indicate that he "smoked reefer constantly and physically abused her and her mother." Another resident also grew up with an abusive and addicted father. The third resident from a two parent household became pregnant one year after they immigrated to the United States from the Caribbean. Her father proceeded to kick her out of the household and has refused to communicate with her.

Only two of the nine young mothers had no relationship with their fathers: one father died when his daughter was four years old, and another left the family when the resident was young. Four young mothers lived with their fathers at some point during their lives. While in their teens, two young women had lived with their fathers who were remarried and had additional children.

Eight of the nine mothers continued to have contact with their children's fathers. One does not see, nor allow her child to visit the father, but knows where he lives. Of those whose ages are known, five fathers are within a two or three-year range of the mother's ages and have the same background. One mother described her baby's father as a supportive 24-year-old businessman. Two residents had lived with their child's father before entering the homeless shelter system. Another had lived with the family of her baby's father. One mother said her baby's father asked her to marry him and

allows the child to visit with him and his parents each weekend. One resident says she continues to have intimate relations with her baby's father. These examples indicate that most fathers continue to remain closely involved during this stage of their child's life.

The educational background of the young mothers varied widely. Two were college students and two others had graduated from high school. One graduated from high school during the field research. Four of the teen mothers had not completed high school: one was in the 11 grade, one in the 10th grade, and one had completed only the 9th grade. One young mother was in special education. Nearly half of the young mothers been employed. One became pregnant while in the Job Corps. During the period of the study, many were employed by the NYC Summer Youth Jobs Program for disadvantaged youth.

As this description suggests, Shelter mothers were a disparate group. Most have spent years living in turbulent households, shifting between relatives and friends, and fending for themselves. Some had come from the same maternity shelter, which housed pregnant teens over 16 years old, but not both mothers and children.

Although the Shelter "family" was close-knit, few residents seemed to form long-lasting relationships among themselves. They were used to, as the director suggested, keeping their "stuff close to themselves because that's all they have." I came to realize that this "stuff" they were holding onto was not family secrets, for the stories of

abuse, drugs, and dysfunction were known by the staff and available to all who read their files. Their "stuff" is their feelings, dreams, visions, and thoughts, which they protect by silence or dissemblance and only sparingly ration out to staff or to other residents.

One worker's description of her encounter with a Shelter resident indicates the difficulty these young women have in "opening up" about their complex and hurtful "stuff."

I had a case of a young lady we had here who was withdrawn most of the time. This young lady was abused and spent a lot of her time in the group homes....She used to always be left here on the holidays. And I used to do a lot of holiday work, overtime for the holidays and I would see this young lady always sitting by herself. I knew she was withdrawn and that something was bothering her. She usually was aggressive when you pushed her to a point. But there was something in her that I saw that was deep and kind...a real gentleness about her. One day we were sitting there, it must have been Christmas or something; it was a holiday. And she said to me, can I talk to you? And she was telling me that she was sexually abused by the mother's girlfriend and this has made it difficult for her to bond with her child.

Although there is a counseling program, many personal issues are, as this example demonstrates, not handled in group or individual counseling sessions but in encounters with specific staff members. The counseling program is required but not invasive, for the director is sensitive to the young resident's need for privacy and individualized support.

The Shelter program's goal is not to resolve the personal issues of the young mothers, but primarily to prepare them for effective independent living. Many mothers never open up to anyone, and after they leave the Shelter, they continue to silently shoulder the issues that originally caused them to become homeless and pregnant.

Motherless Child: "Sometimes I feel like a motherless child, a long way from home"

We are seeing more girls who come from foster care, whose mothers are addicted to crack cocaine or have AIDS. There is an increase of young mothers whose own mothers are addicted. It's unlike anything else before. The young mothers may have been in a shelter, which might have been a more healthy move than living with an addicted mother. (Directors' Remarks)

H.'s story is representative of this phenomena. H. was 13 years old when her mother began using crack cocaine and blamed H. and her sister for her drug use. A year later H. also started drinking heavily and using marijuana. Locked out after an argument over a blouse, H. went to her friends, and when she returned her mother had moved. After being abandoned, H. moved in with her grandmother, her uncle and his baby's mother, with whom she didn't get along. So at 15 1/2 years old, she moved in with her boyfriend. Then after many arguments, H. went to live with a sister and her three children in a one-bedroom apartment. After becoming pregnant by her boyfriend she moved from this overcrowded apartment to a maternity shelter before coming to the Shelter.

The experiences of H. and other such daughters indicate that many addicted mothers became more incapacitated as their daughters reached adolescence. Usually grandmothers and aunts take in the children of such mothers. However, the absence and fragility of these family "other mothers" increase the disrupting impact of the drug-addicted mothers on their daughters. Eventually the daughter, especially if she becomes pregnant, is completely severed from family networks that are unable to care for both her and her child. However, these young women make many valiant efforts at living with various family members before being forced to recognize their homeless status and enter the shelter system.

E. for example, grew up with her grandmother and was only occasionally visited by her heroin-addicted mother. When she was 17 years old, her grandmother died, and she went to live with her HIV-positive father, stepmother, and their two children, for about a year. She attended school, worked, and also cared for her siblings, then because her father's marriage was failing, she was again displaced. She went to live with another grandmother, but her grandfather objected. E. eventually moved several times and lived with her boyfriend, her boyfriend's grandmother, and her girlfriends before becoming pregnant. E. had lived in at least four different family settings before coming to the Shelter.

As E.'s experience indicates, some girls attempted to live with their fathers when their mothers or grandmothers could no longer care for them. Most of these now-remarried

fathers had additional children and were unable to care for their daughters. Many had their own problems with drug addiction and AIDS. After dropping out of college, one resident went to live with her father, but soon discovered that he stole her money in order to buy drugs.

Addicted mothers, inadequate fathers, and fragile family networks were not the only ways Shelter mothers became "motherless." Those from two parent families also experienced separation from their mothers and disruption in their families. They were severed from maternal support by domestic violence and patriarchal attitudes. G.'s records reveal that her father was both violent and addicted. His abuse kept G. and her mother and sisters "in and out of shelters". Though G. graduated from high school, she became pregnant while in the Job Corps. But she was unable to return to her violence-ridden home or receive help from her mother.

D.'s estrangement from her family was not due to either violence or addiction. Her father kicked D. out of the house after learning she had become pregnant. D. is of mixed African and Indian Caribbean heritage, and her baby's father, more Black than Indian, was considered a social inferior. D.'s father also forbade her mother from seeing or supporting their daughter.

Long before becoming pregnant, most of the "motherless" mothers have been on their own both physically and emotionally. Most grew up with dysfunctional mothers whose addiction and erratic and self-destructive behaviors

prevented them from bonding or supporting their daughters. Domestic violence and extreme patriarchal control also prevented mothers from adequately caring for their daughters. All of the Shelter mothers showed some sign of this maternal neglect.

S., a very overweight mother of a one-year-old, was the most neglected in the group. She had moved around a lot because her mother was alcoholic, and her grandmothers were abusive and neglectful. Her records indicate that S. was raped twice and was suicidal in her early teens. The director and staff had to spend extra time teaching her hygiene and personal care.

A glimpse of S.'s family experiences is suggested in this exchange between her and the housemother of the Shelter. S. has run out of money for milk and asks to borrow a couple of dollars. She says she also wants to rent an X-rated film. The housemother says you can't watch it in here. S. replies, "You mean we can't watch it in the privacy of our own rooms?" The housemother says "I better not see it if I come in there." S. asks, "What's wrong with X-rated films anyway? My mother let me watch them to learn what not to do. I've been watching them since I was 7." The housemother asks, "Would you expose your child to them?" S. answered: "It's a way to learn about sex, isn't it?"

"It's a shame," the housemother later notes, "Instead of her mother teaching her how to clean and cook, she was teaching her about X-rated movies." S. seemed undisturbed or

unbothered by the inappropriateness of using pornography to teach children about sexuality and the possible impact of this negative practice in her own life.

Where there is a breakdown in the culture of motherhood, there is no household or family life. Mothers routinize home life and provide the emotional care necessary for facilitating the transitions from childhood to adolescence. Without functioning mothers, young women have no conversation or interaction with women who love them and can help them make sense of what it means to be a woman. It doesn't matter whether the contact is structured or verbalized, the mother teaches her daughter about womanhood. It is, for the adolescent female, the most significant emotional alternative to sexual and peer relationships. Having a mother does not prevent pregnancy nor preclude rebellious behavior by the young woman, but her care and support provides a safety net for the teen girl attempting to negotiate sexualized terrain. The motherless mothers in the Shelter have had no such female care and have been left alone to navigate the biological and emotional trauma of sexuality, pregnancy, and birth.

Homeless young women without mothers must rely on their own constructions of womanhood. These constructions are greatly informed by male lovers and partners, who themselves might be dislocated from stable family life. Then, adolescent culture, with its emphasis on sexuality and romantic idealism, gives young men ultimate authority in the lives of

young girls. Since most Shelter mothers have no mothers or female kin to love them, these males have offered them their only source of intimate emotional support, no matter how erratic. The babies provide some degree of emotional satisfaction, but most young mothers quickly realize that they would also like support from their "man".

The dilemma facing the "motherless" mother is this: she needs support from the culture of motherhood in order to cope and become an effective caretaker and care giver to her child; however, her mother, step-mother, and grandmothers have abandoned her. She has to then learn to depend upon lovers who are often exploitative and demanding. The adolescent culture's emphasis on immediate sexual gratification and romantic idealism intensifies her abandonment and dependency and the challenges of new motherhood.

Since there is no institutional form of support nor agreed upon set of values from her baby's father, the new mother must constantly struggle to hold on to his love and attention. She usually doesn't receive the needed emotional and practical help from him. Moreover, her efforts to please and keep him compete with her ability to meet her own and her baby's needs. It was these attitudes toward love, romance, and sexuality that originally led her into relationships and choices, which, in turn led to pregnancy and motherhood. The Shelter attempts to intervene in this cycle by assuming the temporary role of a surrogate mother, offering her support

and information to address her need for housing, employment, and education. The Shelter philosophy asserts that once these material needs are met, young mothers will be better able to take care of their child and make decisions about their sexual relationships.

Though some have been able to use the Shelter in this manner, for many it is not enough to offset maternal neglect and broken family networks. As supportive as the Shelter is, it's still an institution which eventually requires mothers and children to leave and hence does not have the enduring and private specialness of a functioning mother and family.

The experiences of many young mothers after they leave the Shelter suggests that they are trying to establish a family with father, mother, and child. Having a baby is not so much wanting to have someone of one's own to love, but a means for many young mothers to create a family of their own. However, it's only when the motherless young woman depends more on the culture of motherhood learned at the Shelter than on the promises of an ideal family that she becomes able to successfully mother her child and care for herself.

In the Shelter, many young women have a bed and room of their own for the first time in their lives. Along with this physical security is the emotional safety derived from the routines and nudging of nurturing mothers. In coming into the Shelter, teen mothers have an opportunity to reclaim or connect with adult women who care for them.

The director says,

We try to respect their privacy and are protective over them. The Shelter tries to undo behavior which has already set in. We help them reconcile issues with their family. They still might love their mother although she is addicted to drugs. We help them deal with that. As girls get healthy they can re-establish or establish relationships with their family because they are outside of some very negative systems and behaviors. We help them develop decision making.

The director likes to emphasize the success of former residents who entered the Shelter as needy teen mothers and are now accomplished single mothers and successful college graduates and professionals. Mothering without maternal and family support has been a rigorous rite of passage for some who have become high achievers. They have taken advantage of the Shelter's resources to improve their education and employment status. In addition, they work seriously and effectively at taking care of their children. Having a baby seems to have helped them mature and has given them direction. Some of these young mothers are then able to go back into fragile family systems and re-establish relationships with their mothers.

During the challenging first year of their child's life, Shelter mothers, must learn how to parent and bond with their children, while working or going to school. They must also find an apartment, furnish it, and move in and also look for child care. In addition, the young mothers are also encouraged to relate to their families and child's father. To

critique the accelerated decision making required of new mothers is to also expose weaknesses in the Shelter program, that the director is unwilling to examine.

Positive Outcomes

In each group of Shelter residents, there are one or two mothers who exhibit the maturity and motivation to effectively assume both caretaker and caregiver roles. They are either resolved to be single mothers or have stable and supportive male partners.

Although her family background is similar to those of the other "motherless" residents, A. is a high achiever. A. is a 20-year-old mother of a two-year-old whose mother was addicted to drugs and whose father left the family when she was 13 years old. After becoming pregnant at 18, she dropped out of school and lived in a homeless shelter before coming to the Shelter.

Like A., many residents were high school drop-outs because of pregnancy and birth. However, she consistently attended high school while in the Shelter. She also studied diligently and accepted help from volunteers and counselors in order to pass her exams. She was then able to graduate from high school while living in the Shelter.

She was also a responsible and caring mother who was watchful and alert to her son's needs during meetings, always providing him with a snack or some soothing words. A. was able to balance discipline and love and seemed to enjoy caring for and playing with her son. A's attitude

differentiated her from other Shelter mothers because she was committed to the Shelter program of education and employment and determined to build a better life for herself and her son. While she had one or two close friends at the Shelter, she seemed more serious and reflective about her experiences than the other mothers. Incidentally, A. was the only one among the nine mothers who agreed to be formally interviewed for the study.

While the program stabilized and strengthened her, A. was highly motivated and mature when she entered the Shelter. She says the birth of her son caused her to settle down because she stopped partying, drinking, and smoking marijuana. Her son became the best part of her life and now brightens her day. She is aware of the financial limitations of being a single mother. This has motivated her determination to go to college in order to better provide for her son.

Another factor which influenced A.'s success at the Shelter was her on-going relationship with her mother. In spite of her addiction, A.'s mother has continued to be involved with her daughter. She was with her daughter when she gave birth and attended her high school graduation. Although A.'s life was disrupted by her mother's divorce and addiction, she did not suffer the same degree of continual maternal deprivation as the other residents. A. reports that her mother is now in recovery and goes to school as part of a welfare program.

Secondly, A. has a stable relationship with a boyfriend whom she desires to marry. However, A.'s relationship with her baby's father terminated before she gave birth. Even if her plans to marry do not materialize, A. seeks and expects a permanent supportive marital relationship for herself and her son. Thirdly, A. has strong moral and religious beliefs. She prays regularly and is part of a religious community.

The Shelter provided support and resources to A., an already focused and disciplined young mother. She, in turn, availed herself of the Shelter's services and was able to successfully complete her high school education, get a summer job and apartment, and eventually move out on her own with a sense of accomplishment and direction. Although she might not meet her goals of marriage and college education, she is now a mature mother.

Ambiguous Outcomes

Although the Director enjoys boasting about the successful young mothers such as A. who demonstrate responsible parenting, commitment to education, and dedication to employment, most Shelter mothers have more uneven and ambiguous outcomes. The stories of the next three mothers indicate the tensions involved in balancing the roles of responsible mother, achieving student, and provider demanded by the Shelter program. H., the first mother described in this study, is a good mother with limited education and work experiences, while T. and D. are serious

college students and good providers, but careless and neglectful mothers.

The relationship between H. and her daughter is an example of successful bonding between mother and child. The housemother says that H. and her daughter are "in love with each other." They are rarely seen apart. H. is the only resident I saw nursing her child, plying her with kisses and personal conversation.

Her five-month old daughter has chubby cheeks and a winning smile. She is most frequently seen held lovingly by her mother, who dresses her in the latest style clothing. On one occasion she is dressed in a denim skirt, Fila brand sneakers, gold chains on each arm and earrings. She has her own sets of gold chains. Her hair is barretted in an elaborate hair style.

H. is overheard talking about how to dress her daughter in the latest styles. The close attention to dress and attire is reminiscent of the adolescent's focus on clothes and style. In fact, many Black teen mothers use their welfare checks and meager earnings to dress their children in expensive clothes. By doing so, the well dressed baby is able to reflect their mother's care and demonstrate her knowledge of the latest styles. Although expensive, poor mothers can better afford these clothes for their children than for themselves.

In contrast to her well dressed daughter, H. was dressed in a plain pair of shorts and a tee shirt and complained

about having no money. She is a high school drop-out without employment plans, but her love for her daughter, if sustained, might eventually encourage her to finish her education in order to get a good job. However, with the dissolution of the certainty of public assistance, mothers like H. will not be able to delay work while pampering their children.

Long before the recent welfare reforms, the stigma and dead-end of public assistance made helping mothers complete their high school and college education and get a job a central goal of the Shelter program. Yet public assistance seemed expedient since it was also recognized that poor women needed immediate financial help, training, and support until they could find adequate housing, child care, and employment.

As T.'s story indicates, the issue of mothers, especially of infants, taking time to successfully bond and nurture their children often conflicted with the demands by the Shelter program that they take steps to become economically self-sufficient. T. arrived at the shelter only eleven days before giving birth. At a life-skills meeting held shortly after her arrival, she was soft-spoken and modestly attired in an African-style caftan. T. had been a history major at a college in the south, but expressed doubts that the "powers that be" would let her pursue her goal of teaching the "true history." I later learned that T. was referring to her beliefs in elaborate mystical conspiracy theories about aliens and racial politics.

Though T.'s mother lives near the shelter, she has refused to help her daughter because she dropped out of college. After leaving college, T. went to Long Island to live with her father and stepmother, but she said he used drugs and stole from her. She then lived on and off with her boyfriend who became the father of her baby.

A few days after giving birth, she was standing near a train station with her baby and seemed quiet and in control. Although her labor was 12 hours, she said she felt good. On the surface, T.'s problems didn't seem as severe as those of the other residents. She was older and better educated, and had already worked and lived on her own.

Three months after having her baby, T. is already working full-time, often coming into the Shelter laden down with groceries and packages after picking her daughter up from day care. T. also was the only resident who had serious arguments and problems with her roommate, whom she accused of threatening and cursing her. Although they share the living room and kitchen areas, they are not speaking or working together.

Moreover, T. seemed agitated and overwhelmed with the array of decisions she has to make: Should she get an apartment and continue to live in New York ? Should she go back to college in the south? Should she resume her relationship with her baby's father? She has contacted her old college about returning to school. When T. returned from a visit to her former school, she learned that she can be re-

admitted in the following semester. She will be able to return to her old job at the school and gradually re-pay her loan. However, as she explored this option, she realized her need for public assistance to help pay for an apartment and child care.

In New York, T. already has a job and a support system which includes help from her family, her baby's father, and the Shelter. She will be able to set up an apartment and reasons that maybe she can attend a local college. She adds that "if I stay in New York, maybe I will let my baby's father live with me to see if it works out."

The baby's father has recently been released from prison on probation. He loves children but T. has at least three reasons why they shouldn't live together. First of all, "He's dyslexic and feels he's stupid and that I'm smarter than he is." Secondly, T. explains that in the past, he had trouble remaining employed because he couldn't deal with the sanitation department where he worked. He supports himself with money from his father's military benefits. But the most compelling reason for T. not reuniting with her baby's father is her own unsettled state.

She says she can't see what her future will be like. "It's a blank." Its hard for her to figure out what she's going to be doing. The future seems so hopeless. "I stay up for hours looking at the news -- to feel sorry for others, increasingly getting depressed." T. wonders what future her

daughter will have in all "this mess" and has even talked with the director about giving her up for adoption.

Post-partum depression and confusion like T.'s is not unusual. New mothers are often overwhelmed by the responsibility of mothering. They become pre-occupied and anxious about their bodies and dramatically change their looks and styles. However, these anxieties are usually resolved by the assurances and comfort of female kin or husbands. While the Shelter is supposed to be able to alleviate these issues through counseling and reassurance, the staff and director seemed more concerned with T.'s weird ideas about UFOs and arguments with her roommate than her underlying problems of fear and anxiety.

Because these problems are so embedded in the demands of the Shelter program, they are more difficult to face by its staff. Although T. has met the shelter's education and work requirement for becoming a provider, she is frazzled and overwhelmed by everything else associated with mothering.

The experiences of D. a student mother reveals another dimension of the conflicting and demanding choices Shelter mothers face. D. is the young mother who was kicked out of her parent's house when they learned she was pregnant. In a 1994 court hearing, her "family refused to acknowledge her."

Before coming to the Shelter, she and her daughter had been in various foster care and residential facilities.

D.'s daughter had been in foster care for nearly two years, but under a new law requiring both mother and child to be sent to the same foster care placement, they were reunited. Unknown to the director when she was admitted, custody was returned to D. only two months before she came to live at the Shelter.

In spite of her troubled past and family estrangement, D. is determined to succeed at school. She is an intense and motivated freshman in her second semester at a local community college. At the beginning of the semester, the director phoned D.'s mother to get money for her college tuition. She explained that although D. was working hard there were financial aid difficulties that threaten to force her to stop school. Although her father forbade any contact, D.'s mother gave her the money but did not resume on-going contact with her.

D. is career-oriented and wants a good job that pays well. Since D. attends school and also works, she has been unable to meet with a counselor or attend meetings. The director feels D. is working too hard and should give up the job in order to spend more time with her daughter. D. has had several formal warnings about her continuous violation of curfew, indifferent care of her daughter, and failure to adequately care for her apartment. Her daughter has been left outside the day care center (not located in the Shelter) because she wasn't picked up on time. A few times, D. has sent male friends to pick up her daughter after day care.

Three times within a two-month period, a Shelter staff member has had to pick up the child.

The director is also upset because the referring agency did not tell her that D. and her daughter had lived together for a very short time. This lack of experience could explain D.'s neglect in caring for her child. The director, who initially raved about D.'s college success, grew more disturbed about her weakness as a mother. Because D. was a hard working student and her daughter seemed smart and attractive, her difficulty with mothering was not readily apparent.

Negative Outcomes

The shelter staff paid the most attention to the those mothers whose combined lack of parenting skills, schooling, or employment indicated negative outcomes in that they would not be able to successfully live on their own. Some residents benefit very little from the Shelter's programs and counseling because they refuse to or are unable to comply with its rules and requirements.

J. for example, was viewed by the staff as a malingerer because she refused to use the Shelter's child care facility to meet her appointments with school officials. J. claimed to have completed two years of college in the Caribbean, but only finished the 9th and 10th grades at a local high school with failing grades. The education coordinator wants J. to take the exams that are required in order to receive a high school diploma. However, she keeps missing her appointments

for setting up this arrangement and uses excuses the staff find contrived. J. doesn't want to leave her newborn in the Shelter child care center and takes her to stay with family members. However, since they live quite a distance from both the Shelter and the education office, by the time she reaches her family and gets to the office, she is too late for her appointments.

J.'s explanations are not greeted with sympathy by the staff, especially the Board of Education counselor. They view her as lazy and recalcitrant and disregard the possibility that J. is more interested in maintaining her connection to her family networks than in completing her high school education.

Since interruption of the mother's high school education is one of the most disturbing outcomes of teen parenting, the Shelter encourages residents to obtain a diploma and provides the resources for them to do so. However compelling her reasons for avoiding school, the staff knows that J.'s educational and child care choices are troublesome. Without a high school diploma, she has virtually no possibility of becoming gainfully employed. J. continued to promise to meet her appointments, but managed to never get there and moved out before resolving her educational issue.

While J. clearly refused to follow the rules regarding going to school, the staff and director were unsure whether S. was capable of learning to care for herself and her

daughter. The staff spent a great deal of time teaching her personal hygiene, domestic chores, and child care.

S. didn't seem to know how to properly perform basic household chores. When her apartment (she lived in the only single apartment in the building) was inspected, cereal and chicken bones were on the floor causing a health hazard for her two-year-old daughter. The floor was dirty and the counters filthy.

S.'s obesity also concerned the director, who was trying to find a weight reduction programs for the over-six-foot-tall and more three-hundred-pound 19-year-old mother. In the meantime, she also sought supportive ways to help S. with hygiene and clothes without causing embarrassment about her weight.

S.'s lack of parenting skills also concerned the Shelter staff. Her two-year-old daughter has been diagnosed as developmentally delayed and attends a special program. She has had two skull fractures when she was two and three months old. Its unclear whether they were the result of deliberate abuse or simply accidents.

S.'s careless parenting continued while in the Shelter. In addition to her reckless cooking habits, S. did not dress her child properly. On a cold day, S. took her daughter out without socks or hat. This neglect contrasts with most other mothers who are fastidious about their children's attire. Also, the night staff reported that S.'s sometimes left her daughter alone at night. She has been found wandering the

hall looking for her mother who was visiting with other residents.

The housemother attributed her slovenly ways to laziness. She commented, "Welfare is good for some people, but with her -- all she does is lay around all day and at night she's up and busy. She knows she's getting her check and so she doesn't do anything."

Although S. moved out just before this study ended, it was not certain that she could manage even the basic chores of motherhood without lots of support. While in the Shelter S. and her daughter were involved in many support programs and therapies for the developmentally delayed. S. attended church regularly and continued to see her baby's father and his family and sent her daughter to visit them each weekend. Perhaps they will give her the support she needs.

Conflicting Demands

The mothering experiences of Shelter residents are not at all unusual, but reflect the postpartum readjustments, the rage, and conflicting role demands faced by many new mothers. However, the culture of Black motherhood expressed in the Shelter's policies places additional demands on the young women by requiring them to assume the dual responsibility of primary caregiver and sole provider for their children.

These two roles are fraught with tensions and contradictions. Because of the requirement to work or go to school as soon as they are able, the new mothers at the Shelter have little uninterrupted time to bond with their

newborn. Those who enter the Shelter with young children need bonding time because many have developed bad parenting habits under difficult circumstances.

For some residents who need to sort out their relationships with families, the requirement to attend school and work seems intrusive. The mother who attempts to be a good student and worker is often unable to meet the demands of their caregiver role. Despite these tensions, Shelter mothers are pressured to balance burdensome schedules in order to fulfill both roles.

In addition, these young mothers must make crucial decisions about their future within a very short period of time -- during the hectic first years of their child's life. Shelter mothers must plan and establish households of their own. Most also strive to work out viable relationships with their baby's father and with their own family members. They are also coping with the impact of traumatic and violent experiences within their families and in institutional settings.

Though it meets general needs, the Shelter's restrictions on the resident's length of stay and its push toward independent living places strains on its ability to adequately mother the young women in their care. No matter how well intentioned, the Shelter as "other mother" is not sensitive or flexible enough to meet the needs of the young mothers. The Shelter can not match the contribution of a

functioning adult mother to the life of her daughter who is a teen mother.

Although teen mothers who remain at home with their mothers are also required to assume dual roles of caretaker and caregiver, they usually have time to bond with their infant and recover from the trauma of birth. No matter how stern, mothers often insist their daughters stay at home for at least a few months until they are ready to go to school or work. Grandmothers also actively help in the rearing of the baby by giving the new mother financial, residential, and other support. Decisions about moving into an apartment of their own or about continuing relations with their baby's father are deliberated, discussed, and even argued about by the women in the young mother's family. Some grandmothers assume total care of their grandchildren, while their daughters work out reconciliations or new sexual relationships. Some mothers and grandmothers eventually establish permanent households together.

While the young mothers are residents, The Shelter tries to replicate this intricate and elaborate cooperation between adult mothers and their teen mother daughters. However, its approach can only facilitate the establishment of "independent living arrangements" or households of single mothers and their children without support from either mothers or husbands. Most Shelter mothers accomplish the basic goals of these arrangements by getting their own apartments and gaining minimal mothering skills and

information about schooling and jobs. However, they leave the Shelter without resolving the basic conflicts and traumas they entered with.

Summary

This chapter has described the issues facing the young mothers who reside in the Shelter. Their homeless status indicates estrangement and dislocation from their families, especially their mothers. Most enter the Shelter having bounced around among various family members, foster homes, and other shelters. These "motherless" mothers must face the traumas of childbirth within an institutional setting with a very demanding set of requirements.

The few completely successful mothers are those who can balance school attendance, work and parenting, while looking for an apartment. Among those who succeed, personal characteristics seem to be just as important as the Shelter's program. For those whose outcomes were mostly negative, the Shelter provided a minimal stop-gap measure to meet the need of young mothers and their children for safe housing. Their inability or unwillingness to comply with the Shelter's program is probably a good prognosis of continual dependency on public assistance or other forms of charity. Most of the Shelter mothers were partially successful in one of the roles required of them: mother, student, or worker, but not in all three.

Meeting these role requirements was crucial for these troubled mothers and their children. The Shelter program was

designed to help them become "certified" by HRA for housing subsidies for their own apartments as well as to enable them to become self-sufficient and capable heads of households. The residents and HRA staff realized that the Shelter was only transitional housing; however, the director hopes that its programs and support would also transform the lives of the young women and their children.

The mothering provided by the Shelter works best when the mothers come in already highly motivated toward personal achievement and bonded with their child, and mature enough to work toward personal and maternal goals. The Shelter program contributes but does not develop these attributes in young mothers. Although the director beams about the successes of the extraordinary overcomers who have gone on to become single mothers with good jobs and college degrees, most Shelter mothers usually achieve only partial success and continue to struggle to survive in overwhelming circumstances.

Former Shelter mothers are invited to join the follow-up group and are visited at least once or twice by an outreach worker. Those who are successful or in dire need come back to visit the Shelter. But for most, the mothering role of the Shelter is over and they are on their own.

Introduction

This ethnography has highlighted the motherlessness, role conflict and loneliness shared by most of the young Black mothers living in a homeless shelter specifically developed to meet their needs. The Shelter's program seeks to address the immediate issues of poverty, homelessness, and family estrangement facing its residents.

Young mothers come to the Shelter because they are "motherless". Before pregnancy or childbirth, their own mothers were unable to provide them with emotional and material support. Some inability could be attributed to their own patterns of mating and mothering. Mothers who separate, divorce, and remarry while rearing their children often pay greater attention to the needs of their mates and younger children than to their teenage children. In addition, when mothers become addicted to drugs or alcohol, as many of the Shelter girls experienced, they also cannot offer needed care and guidance. It's usual in these situations for a grandmother or aunt to parent the children. However, even these traditional family networks that are part of the culture of motherhood can also fail.

When this disruption occurs, young women can end up "in the system" of foster care agencies, group homes, and homeless shelters. Many young women also shift between the system and family and friends becoming particularly vulnerable to the promises and pressures of young men who desire sexual liaisons.

This study has argued that these sexual relationships are informed by various adolescent cultural forms. Furthermore, these cultural forms equate womanhood with sexual availability and female subordination to male needs. Pregnancy, childbirth, and mothering are often viewed by Black youth as an inescapable part of a young woman's life, but committed parenting by young men is considered more optional. Young women influenced by adolescent culture desire idealized love and romance, while in somewhat contradictory fashion, also enjoy its sexual permissiveness without marital obligation. Motherless girls experience this confusion about gender roles, sexuality, and romantic love without a maternal buffer or interpreter. They don't have mothers to rebel and measure themselves against. They are on their own in their attempts to construct viable selves. Their search leads to unprotected sex, which invariably leads to pregnancy. For those without maternal support, pregnancy leads to homelessness and destitution.

The Shelter program was established as an intercessor standing in the gap for these "motherless children." In addition to providing material support, the Shelter's program encourages independent living as single mothers who head their own households. However, many young women seek an alternate to this model and strive to create two-parent households and families with their boyfriends and baby's fathers.

Accordingly, the most successful Shelter residents were those mothers who made their children's needs primary and who sought self-development in terms of becoming an effective parent. They were responsible and diligent, with realistic notions about relationships with their baby's father or other men. In terms of this study, they were the mothers most able and willing to articulate and reflect on their experiences. Mothering seemed to stabilize and mature them.

Those young mothers who chose mating and mothering attempt to establish serious and committed relationships with their baby's father or the man they love. Though these mothers love their children, desire to complete their schooling, and get a good job, they often find themselves caught in the precarious and idealized sexual relationships of their earlier adolescence. They frequently replicate and reinforce the isolation, violence, and poverty which drove them to the doors of the Shelter in the first place.

After the Shelter: "A Sad State of Life"

After leaving the institutional "other mothering" provided by the Shelter, the young women are again removed from maternal love and protection. Former residents, though now mothers themselves, continue to need adult women. Since most will probably raise their children alone without marriage or support from their children's fathers, they will eventually become part of female and kin networks. However, initially, many Shelter mothers turn to living with their

boyfriends or child's father for support and help. Rather than love and family stability, these relationships are usually filled with anxiety and domestic violence, the same kind of danger and peril of their childhood. However, now, lonely, overwhelmed, and shamed, the young mothers must also cope with the responsibility of raising a child. In the eyes of the Shelter follow-up worker, these mothers and children are in a "sad state of life."

This chapter describes the initial experiences of a group of former residents of the Shelter who were visited by the outreach worker six months prior to the ethnographic study. Although most were not the same nine mothers I observed in the Shelter, they share common backgrounds and experiences. Also included is a taped interview with one of the earliest residents in the Shelter who is a single mother of a daughter who is now nine years old.

Follow-up Work

The housing management company which helps to direct the Shelter assists residents in getting apartments. Because they are on welfare and live in a shelter for the homeless, the young mothers receive special housing subsidies from government programs. While in the Shelter, the young mothers seem happy about moving into their own apartments. They talk with great excitement about furnishings and future neighborhoods. For many, this is their first apartment and additional evidence of their maturity.

But living on their own is not without difficulty. One day the directors of the Shelter and the management organization discussed examples of some of the worst problems. The shelter director spoke of a former resident who "only contacts the Shelter when she has a crisis but doesn't want to address the cause of the crisis. Right now she has nine people living in her apartment and lots of drinking and fighting." The housing manager described another former resident's apartment that was so dirty that it had to be completely overhauled. They agreed to contact these young mothers and try to help them improve their situations, but both the director and the housing manager felt that the women themselves had to want help to change. If not, they will probably end up in the shelter system again, but now placed with adult populations. However, failure to cope on their own does not seem to be the main experience of former residents. According to the director, most become adept at managing households, attending school or working, and caring for their child, especially if they receive support from relatives or the Shelter.

The Shelter invites all former residents to meetings, workshops, and special events. They can contact Shelter staff for advice and emergency help, or drop by to receive support and encouragement. Those who need special care and frequent attention are asked to participate in a core group with more intensive follow-up care. Many members of this group have more than one child or other family members living with them.

Others have children with physical or emotional handicaps. The director describes the situation facing one young mother in the core group who has a child with sickle cell anemia and also cares for her emotionally disturbed brother because her mother is addicted to drugs. The director described another core-group member who became heartbroken when she discovered a second pregnancy, because she wanted to become a doctor. But with support from the core group, she persevered and is graduating from college. Now a mother of two young children, she still plans to go to medical school.

Six months before this research project began, a follow-up worker was hired to visit each former resident as they leave the Shelter. Like other Shelter staff members, she treats her work as a form of "other mothering" and believes that "she is the mother that they may never have had or the grandmother that they may be missing."

My job here as I understand it is to go into the homes of the young ladies when they leave the Shelter...My job is to monitor them and to watch their actions to see if they are comfortable, to see what their needs are. Are they medically fit? What stresses do they have while they are there? Do they have any problem with their neighbors? the landlord? or some kind of medical problem?

A major part of her job is helping former residents with notices and forms because many "do not know how to take care of their personal business", such as paying bills, negotiating with agencies and landlords, and keeping appointments.

Because they are defensive, the follow-up worker approaches the young mothers with caution and respect. According to her, the young women usually say that their situation is fine, but the issues that trouble them eventually surface. On one occasion, after sensing defensiveness in the young mother she was visiting, the worker says she told her, "I am not here to pry into your business. You have the right to tell me when and when not to ask you certain questions." She then relaxed and began discussing her stresses with being a mother, her difficulties with her "somewhat abusive" personal relationships with the child's father, and problems with the landlord and housing. The worker was then able to offer advice and comfort to her by suggesting the mother come to a domestic-violence workshop at the Shelter.

Loneliness

After the protective and communal environment of the Shelter, the young mother finds herself alone in an apartment with a baby. There are no staff members to monitor and encourage them, no security guards at the door, and no other mothers to borrow from and share with. In many instances, there is no one to talk to and no one nearby to watch the baby. Former residents who move near the Shelter continue to drop in, hang out, and hold on to their connection to it.

H., one of the mothers I observed, moved into her apartment and came back to visit the Shelter a few days later. She has a one-bedroom apartment, a phone, and a

television. While talking with us, she says she is anticipating visitors: "I know my phone is ringing right now, I can feel it." She tries to attend church every Sunday with her aunts. H. says "I really thanked God this past Sunday -- for my apartment. Now all I need is a job, and then maybe a car." But on the Saturday afternoon H. visits the Shelter, she is broke and wishes she had enough money to go to Coney Island. Though she has reconnected with her aunts and other relatives, she seems lonely and bored.

According to the follow-up worker, most former residents like H are lonely, stressed out, and overwhelmed by the great transition they have undertaken. While in the Shelter, they make plans and anticipate the positive or "rosy side of the picture." The follow-up worker tries to warn and prepare them for "the other side." Most have underestimated the practical and emotional skills necessary for living on their own. And since most of the residents come from dysfunctional and violent families, they have little experience with creating stable and crisis-free households.

Many times the teen mother's rosy vision of living on her own includes having a well-paying job, going to a training program or college, and having nice furniture and clothes. However, she also envisions having a man or boyfriend who is emotionally committed and financially supportive to her and her child. Back at the Shelter, the young mothers brag how they would never live with former boyfriends and lovers who "don't have themselves together."

They talked about intending to raise their children by themselves without their baby's father until the right man comes into their lives.

Unfortunately, in many instances, their loneliness and more private emotions lead to reunions with their former mates and lovers. The follow-up worker found that almost 90 percent of the former residents she visited have moved their boyfriends into their apartments. Most of the time they are the baby's father. She explains that the young mothers suffer from an "inner loneliness" linked to their lack of self-worth. This inner void persists even after their mates are there because he is unable to "give them what they are looking for."

Like middle-class housewives and mothers suffering from "the problem that has no name," these mothers are confronting the limitations and emptiness of traditional mothering and marriage (albeit theirs is a more temporary common-law arrangement). Socialized to completely merge their self and satisfaction into mothering, the new mother soon discovers that this is not enough. She continues to seek self-fulfillment, competency, and contentment, popularly described as needing "self-esteem" or "self-worth".

While being a mother is considered critical to a woman's identity and there is happiness and some satisfaction in rearing children, meeting the seemingly never ending demands of the baby prevents the fulfillment of pursuits that could ennoble her identity and raise her self worth. The daily

grind and work of mothering is a set of devalued, private, labor-intensive routines.

Living on their own, young mothers come to realize that mothering involves almost continually ministering to the needs of another. Her own emotional and physical needs are marginalized and minimized. So out of loneliness and desire, the former Shelter mother allows her former lover and child's father into her apartment. Through his more or less permanent presence in her bed, the young woman has achieved another idealized or "rosy picture": her baby plus her man.

He also legitimates and proves that her efforts in having a baby were worth it. Now that she has her own apartment, she turns to her lover with hope and desire that her inner loneliness will dissipate and her needs will be fulfilled. Maybe he can become the ideal husband-father of her dreams. Perhaps he will provide financial and emotional support and help take care of his and her baby. His presence offers hope that through all her loneliness and travail, there will be a happy ending.

The man of the house

But in most cases the father and mate is as inexperienced in establishing a stable household and family as she is. He also has inner loneliness and seeks fulfillment and self-satisfaction. After he has moved in, conflict and stress soon develop between the couple. The follow-up worker says,

When they get together there are two different personalities and there's the clash...He's on the defensive, she's on the defensive...a lot of young fellows move in and take over.

Battering is a major concern of the follow-up worker because it affects the whole family, especially the child.

I had a case of a young lady with a boy friend who moved in with her and she has to stay at her mother's every weekend because he goes off. He comes in high. So I say why do you leave. She says to avoid problems. But I said you are leaving your home. You are taking your two children and going out there....

The abuser's control prevents many young women from seeking help from supportive family members or others and often stymies her effort to go to school or work. According to the follow-up worker, some family members have tried to intervene only to be told by the young mother that "he (her batterer) is the only one that cares about me...my mother never cared about me." For many young women, their mates are actually the only person who has cared and expressed love for them. Often, he does love her, but doesn't realize that violence is not an appropriate way to resolve conflicts or to discipline children. Many young men feel that women are there to satisfy their needs and scapegoat their pain and frustration. They use abuse as a means of control and shoring up their own sagging self-worth and lack of competency.

These young men grew up in the same kind of violent households as their mates. They have seen their mothers, sisters, and friends abused by men. The abusers have usually been their fathers, brothers, and uncles. Though many young women say they would never let a man abuse them, after leaving the shelter they continue this familiar pattern.

There are two examples of how young women seek to address the problems of domestic violence in their relationships. One resident attended a Shelter sponsored domestic workshop with her baby's father. His condemnation of violence against women was encouraging and demonstrated that young Black men could learn to prevent domestic violence in their own relationships.

The second example is from the follow-up worker, who has observed that counseling for both mother and her mate was another way of addressing the issue of domestic violence. She reports that one young woman threatened to leave her mate if he did not agree to go for counseling. He assented in this case, in part because both his and her mother also urged counseling.

However, those women whose partners refuse counseling or who attempt to leave the violent relationship are forced to live in danger. Many participants in the domestic violence workshops I conducted were afraid and felt defenseless and terrorized by their abusers. One resident said the police provided little protection from her boyfriend's abuse. She had to run away from him and sought refuge in the Shelter from homelessness and from his violence. Another resident said she had moved to Brooklyn from upstate in order to escape her jailed abuser's threat to kill her.

The issue of domestic violence does not affect only the mothers who lived in the Shelter. Recent studies of teen girls abused by boyfriends suggest that this pattern of abuse

is a significant national phenomenon. It is one of the factors explaining their seemingly self-defeating behaviors and choices. To agencies and institutions, such as the welfare and healthcare systems, young mothers are assumed to be "single" and alone because they are unmarried. The absence of marriage among young Black mothers should not suggest that they have no emotional commitment to enduring relationships with men. Many are actually in relationships that are as complex and problematic as those who are married. They depend upon their men to advise and direct their choices and behavior. Because of their intense relationship with their mates, many young mothers such as the former Shelter residents are not free agents able to make independent decisions about parenting, school, or work, or even future pregnancies. Many may want to go to school, but their attempts are often sabotaged and undermined by arguments, demands, and threats by their mates. Many want to involve their children in educational activities, but are unable to do so because he might disapprove. Others might want to come to the Shelter for support meetings but are prevented from doing so. Finally, most importantly, they might not want to have more children, but male violence can force women to submit to sex against their will. Spousal rape usually accompanies domestic violence.

But because Black teen mothers are assumed to be alone and their reproductive decisions are often ascribed to monetary rather than emotional rationales, their intense and

volatile relationships with their mates are overlooked. The Shelter director's emphasis on single motherhood is an effort to offset the girl's dependence and resignation to these "unhealthy" relationships. Although encouraged by the Shelter staff to learn to live independently, far too many former residents want a man around the house and that invites abusive and troublesome results.

However, not all former Shelter mothers have live-in mates or problematic relationships with boyfriends. Some young women do live only with their children, having ended all connections to their baby's fathers. Usually friends and relatives provide emotional supports to these mothers. Some have new and more supportive boyfriends.

Other former Shelter mothers return to their birth families no longer dependent, but respected as women managing to survive on their own in their own apartments. Because of their relationship to the Shelter, they have entrée to jobs, schooling, and other resources. They return more independent of their family and in fact, have themselves become a source of stability and support to their mothers, grandmothers, and siblings. Though the director reported that some former Shelter mothers living in the same housing complex have formed an informal support group, most young mothers have folded back into their family networks. N.'s story demonstrated the ability of young mothers to overcome rather than succumb to the difficult circumstances of their childbearing.

N.'s Story

At the time of this study, N. was a 24-year-old mother of a nine-year-old who had lived in the Shelter for a year after leaving foster care. She grew up with her mother, father, grandmother, and many siblings. Both parents were workers with no history of violence, separation, or domestic violence.

However, as she approached adolescence, there was increasing estrangement between N. and her parents. Rather vaguely, she attributes this estrangement to their fear "of her growing up and being older." When N was about 13 or 14 years old, she began staying out late, not attending school and running away. On these occasions, she stayed with friends who were three to four years older than she was. Her parents thought she would be better off moving to a group home only nine blocks from their home. N. said, "The group home had 15 girls with little supervision." N. became sexually active while living in the group home. She was influenced by her peers, but says,

I preferred to be at home with my parents
...My friends were not into anything, they
would just complain about their parents
....I was just caught up in the whirlwind
of it all, particularly sex.....

Her baby's father was a childhood friend, but she wasn't particularly attracted to him.

I was just there and maybe we were in his
house or someone's house and sitting
around, talking and one thing leads to
the next thing.

After discovering N. was pregnant, he promised to help her and the child. She said he wanted to marry her, but their relationship ended before the baby was born. His mother lives close to her parents, but she rarely sees him. He neither calls nor sends money and now lives in the Bronx with a woman and five or six children and doesn't want his daughter to visit. N. also considers it detrimental for her to see her father.

N.'s parents were supportive after their initial disappointment when learning that she was pregnant. Her mother urged her to keep the child rather than consider an abortion and accompanied her to the hospital when she had the baby. In spite of parental support, N. continued to be part of the social service system and lived at a shelter for pregnant adolescents.

N. and her child were subsequently placed in foster care in Long Island. She lived with two families for two years each and eventually graduated from high school and started college. But low grades and difficulty with child care forced her to drop out. After she was discharged from foster care, N. moved into the Shelter in Brooklyn for nine months, where she enjoyed the friendships and camaraderie. At the Shelter "I learned to ask for help which means needing to know when I needed help."

"Before I became a mother", N. says, "I was like a fly on the wall, misunderstood but determined to become a doctor, writer and traveler." However, after becoming a mother, "I

couldn't think of myself anymore. Everything stopped." The hardest part of being a mother for N is "seeing myself and my daughter as having separate but intertwined identities.' But N. says if she had to do it all over again, she would have had the baby, for the best part of being a mother is being able to shape and mold her child. N. thinks a lot about her daughter's development and is pleased when she has had an honest exchange with her. Now that she is a mother, N. better understands her own mother's fears and concerns.

N. is currently receiving public assistance, although she would like to return to college once her financial aid issues are resolved. Her goal is to become a self-employed artist in order to express what she has learned. Because she is articulate, contemplative, and reflective about her experiences, the director has asked N. to conduct several workshops for the residents of the Shelter and sought funds to hire her as a counselor.

Her advice to teen mothers like herself who have come through the system is to understand that

the child is a living human being in your care and what does that encompass? What is it you have to do for this child and yourself? And how are you going to do it?....The child is a real person who is going to grow up carrying what you've given them.

N. has come to understand as well as embody Black motherhood's core value of women taking responsibility for raising children. As young women become aware that the quality of their child's life will be determined by their

choices, especially regarding education and employment, they begin to understand that effective mothering requires hard work and sacrifice. One Shelter mother summarized this understanding, "I must get an education, so I can teach my daughter. I want her to know more than I do."

Taking responsibility for what their children will carry is the critical difference between a young woman overcoming or succumbing to the difficult circumstances of her child's birth. The Shelter program offers resources and support to resilient survivors and overcomers such as N., who are able to "seek out and develop an oasis from the chaos" and deprivation in their life. The director is right to challenge the hype of permanent pathology ascribed to Black teen mothers by highlighting the experiences of overcoming mothers.

Though the contradictions between mothering and adolescent cultures are not resolved for all residents, and enduring structural and personal problems continue for many, a support system is available to those who will take advantage of the nurturance offered by the Shelter. Its institutionalized other mothering has enabled many to become more resilient and effective mothers and women.

Conclusion

Although the Shelter's origins, ideology, and framework grew out of a feminist collective which supported sisterhood among Black single mothers, the issues of its residents are framed in terms of individual experiences and solutions.

Residents lived with a staff that reflected a female support network, but the Shelter's programs and practices emphasized individual responses to their needs. In-depth counseling and support work at the Shelter was devoted more to individual problem-solving than group or collective solutions.

Moreover, the young mothers were encouraged and expected to be able to successfully establish individual households and live only with their children. The Shelter's idealized forms of single mothering and independent living were initially difficult to achieve for most young mothers. Because most will eventually become permanent single mothers and will need supportive networks of "other mothers."

The Shelter program also reflected several practices and contradictions which might explain the choices of many of its former residents to live with their boyfriends. One factor explaining the gap between collective vision and individualized solutions was practical. The Shelter funds are primarily based on money from the HRA or the welfare system that has traditionally limited its housing, medical, and other support to poor women and children, not to poor unmarried couples or collectives of women and children. Ironically, the Shelter's feminist goal of promoting independent living has dovetailed with the short-range and task-oriented goal of the Human Resources Administration, its primary funding source. Programmatic objectives were shaped, in part, around measurable demonstrations of success, such as obtaining housing, school, and work placements, in order to

accommodate a constantly changing group of indigent young mothers.

Along with this pragmatic concern are the false assumptions suggested by the term "single" mother and "independent living." Although most Black families are headed by women who are not currently married, most do not perform their childrearing and provider roles without consistent help from others. Notwithstanding the official data, welfare statistics, or the Shelter's viewpoints, nearly all Black teen mothers **co-parent** with male partners or with their mothers. Few mothers are actually single or alone. It is precisely the problem of isolation that caused African Americans to shape a more social approach to motherhood. Rather than leaving isolated couples or unmarried women responsible for raising children by themselves, family members help out. The Black conjugal unit most often functioned within a supportive network that included other family members and a church community. Both single mother and married couple families were often held together by mothers who made childbearing and childcaring central to their lives, yet men played essential roles in these networks and families. Hence, the culture of motherhood was embedded within kin systems that supported marriage and patriarchy. Black feminist critics have accurately pointed out that the culture of motherhood reinforced habits of survival, tolerated male sexism, and demanded such sacrifice from women that they were forced to deny their own needs. Most

seriously, the culture of motherhood reinforced habitual childbearing, reproduced the woman-as-mother patterns and encouraged women to bear the onus and burden of mothering before they are economically and emotionally able to do so.

However, the critics have not been able to create viable alternatives to the efficacy and efficiency of traditional marriages and female support networks in stabilizing the lives of Black children and for fostering responsibility for their nurturance and sustenance among both men and women. Many feminists and contemporary mothers and have an abstract and somewhat idealized vision of single mothering that marginalizes, excludes, and ignores the essential roles of fathers, husbands, and brothers that were part of the traditional culture of motherhood. Successful adult single mothers have been able to manage their households without the daily input of men, but often have organized systematic ways for their children to be fathered by male relatives, friends, groups, and organizations.

Poor young mothers do not have such social skills or stability; they must rely on their own means of involving men within their own and their children's lives. Though it seems convoluted and ineffective, young women have to rely on the adolescent cultures promise of romance and love. They seek commitment and care from men who are unable or unwilling to attempt the arduous work of being husband and father. Young men often lack adult male support for these roles.

Unfortunately, many are more familiar with men who abuse and abandon their wives and children.

These situations force young women to confront the choice to mother on her own or to continue to search for the ideal romantic man to complete their life. If they continue to seek emotional support solely from mates, they probably will continue to bear children and remain destitute. If these searches and choices continue to take place in an isolated and autonomous fashion, the young women have no safety net if they err in judging the capacity and commitment of their mates. When young mothers rely on support from "other mothers" within organizations, churches, or even their families, they are better able to care for themselves and their children, complete their education, and become gainfully employed, and even able to establish successful marriages.

Interestingly, however, marriage as a viable option for young mothers within the Shelter program was never programmatically considered, for example, in the form of mandatory counseling for both parents. Nor were groups or other projects set up for both mothers and fathers. Although Shelter staff encourages young fathers to visit their children and participate in workshops and special programs, I heard of no discussion of legalizing their commitments to the child or mother. In fact, the Shelter perhaps inadvertently promoted sexual liaisons and casual relationships because it neither monitored nor discouraged weekend visits by residents

to their boyfriends or mates. Young women were left to fend for themselves when it came to sexual relationships even before leaving the Shelter.

Those who wanted committed relationships with their baby's father seemingly had little encouragement or strategy for avoiding domestic violence and abandonment. Although there were workshops, there was little consistent follow-up work available to address the issues facing young women and their mates. By not discussing practical ways to establish two-parent households and families, the single-parenting model was privileged. Single mothers with sole authority and responsibility for childrearing was the model presented to the Shelter resident and their mates.

After leaving the Shelter, young mothers were left without the traditional patriarchal protection of marriage, without the cultural of support of other mothers, and without the class privileges that provide adequate support for single mothering in the United States. Unless they are resilient survivors who know how to handle autonomy and create systems of support for themselves, these young women continue to reproduce the social and material impoverishment the society finds so problematic.

Introduction

The goal of this study has been to demonstrate that adolescent pregnancy and childbearing among African American women is a social phenomenon connected to contemporary adolescent patterns of sexuality and sex roles, and to historical patterns of mothering among African American women. Black adolescent music, beautification rites, and relationships were shown to reflect the role of adolescent gender construction in fostering sexual experiences that lead many young women to become pregnant. This study has then demonstrated that African-American mothering is part of a complex culture that supports practices that enable pregnant teens to mother. An ethnography described the experiences of the residents of a Shelter for the most destitute Black teen mothers, those who were homeless young women with small children. The Shelter reflected institutionalized cultural patterns of African-American motherhood that organize and stabilize personal, familial, and community life.

Although Black teen motherhood is a social issue with cultural, structural, and moral dimensions, this study has focused on its cultural dimensions. Cultures are tangible, malleable, and accessible to social actors and their groups. Moreover, cultural patterns, styles, symbols, and ideologies have been used by the colonized and oppressed as a means of resistance, sustenance and survival. Many aspects of the cultures of motherhood and adolescence among African-American women reflect this oppositional stance.

This chapter begins by summarizing the patterns of conflicted motherhood found among the teen mother residents in the Shelter examined in the ethnographic study. This chapter also examines the relationship to the welfare state and to the transformations in sexuality, marriage, and childbearing taking place throughout society.

Part I. Summary of the Ethnography

Conflicted Motherhood

The culture of motherhood was institutionalized in the work of the founder and staff at the Shelter whose pragmatic program matched the traditional way most Black women parent their young daughters who become mothers. Older mothers provide their daughters and grandchildren with shelter and other necessities, but require them to work or go to school. They often override the daughter's parental authority when the grandchild's well-being is at stake. Young women who refuse to follow their mother's rules are asked to leave, often without their children. Grandmothers care for their grandchildren until their daughters get themselves together.

These older mothers are generally supportive of their daughters' dating and having social activities with men. They believe however, that the men in their daughters' lives should show themselves to be responsible fathers and mates. Young mothers are generally encouraged to postpone romantic relationships until she and her male friend become experienced parents, better educated, and gainfully employed.

The experiences of the homeless teen mothers in the Shelter reflect ruptures within the culture of motherhood that have occurred because adult mothers die or are too incapacitated by illness or addiction to parent their children, and when grandmothers or other adult women relatives cannot care for adolescent girls. "Motherless girls" were left to fend for themselves, moving in with friends and male lovers and even with their estranged fathers. When these arrangements failed and when they became pregnant, the young women moved to shelters and group homes. Eventually, they were referred to the Shelter, where they obtained resources to continue their education, get jobs, and move into their own apartments. During this time, they were mothered by a network of supportive adult women. In spite of their common experiences with welfare, homelessness, and disruption in maternal care, the young mothers had varied responses to the Shelter's program. The most successful mothers were those few who were able to balance schooling and work with effective parenting. Some mothers were weak in all three areas. But most showed more ambiguous results in trying to balance the roles of mother, worker, student, and household manager. Some were better at mothering than at working or meeting educational goals; many who were successful students and workers had difficulty being sound and nurturing mothers.

After leaving the Shelter, employment and education goals were often interrupted by those who made sexual

relationships their priority. An outreach worker reported that most of these young mothers moved their lovers or baby's father into their apartments; however, these arrangements stopped short of marriage.

This research suggests that young Black mothers are poised between an adolescent culture that supports sexual relations and motherhood, but not marriage, and a culture that privileges education, employment, and motherhood while marriage and romantic relationships are postponed.

These two cultural directions have fostered two forms of mothering among the Shelter residents. One form is single mothering where the young woman heads her household and raises her child without any significant input from the baby's father or other men. She doesn't live under any adult or male authority, and focuses exclusively on parenting, employment, and education. The other form, romantic mothering, involves a mate or lover who has a dominant role in the life of the mother and child.

In choosing romantic mothering, young women behave like traditional wives. Work and school become less important. They idealistically expect their mates to become devoted fathers and lovers, although they lack support and resources of their own. Nor have these young men made any explicit or long-term commitment to the mother or the child. The Shelter provided no programmatic support for those residents who wanted to pursue romantic mothering. Since the single mother/head of household model was privileged in the Shelter,

the attempts by young mothers to create viable relationship with their mates received little attention.

The preferred single mothering model was based on economic self-sufficiency, also leaving these young mothers on their own after leaving the Shelter. Although it grew out of a support group of Black single mothers that promoted a sisterhood or collective approaches to family life, the Shelter did not built a similar sisterhood among the current or former residents. The Shelter model's promises of financial and professional success were not always fulfilled. Not only were many of these young heads of household unable to find employment, they lacked the necessary emotional support and maturity to both work and care for their children. Ironically, the Shelter's focus on work and self-sufficiency models the new demands of the welfare state that mothers must work in order to receive any financial support.

By the mid 1990's both advocates and opponents of public assistance urged welfare reform because they grew concerned with the destabilizing role of public assistance for young single mothers. However, with the new welfare reform laws, irrespective of the form of mothering they choose, young Black mothers will continue to have to undertake the dual roles of childrearer and economic provider with only minimal assistance from the state.

II. Black Teen Mothers and Welfare

Distorted Image: The Youngest Welfare Queen

My study has demonstrated that Black teen motherhood is a complex and intricate cultural phenomenon, but the study of any other group of teen mothers and their social world would be equally compelling. However, Black teen mothers occupy a unique and central role in public policy debates around welfare reform.

During the mid-1990's, "...although the substantially higher rates of out-of-wedlock childbearing among African Americans were often remarked upon, few observers point out that the illegitimacy rates of Blacks were falling or stable while rates among whites were increasing" (Luker, 1996:, 85). Yet Black teen mothers, not adult white women, are the symbol of sexual and family deviance and the worst excesses of government spending. Black teen mothers are portrayed as junior welfare queens who embody the moral deviance and economic dependency that are supposedly destroying the "American way of life"(Lubiano, 1992:338).

Feminist political scientists noted that the focus on welfare in public policy debates is a code for criticizing the reproductive patterns of Black women social actors (Lubiano, 1992; Abramovitz and Fox Piven, 1993:A23). Discussions of the problems of teenage parenting in general "...permitted people to talk about African Americans and poor women (categories that overlapped) without mentioning race or class..."(Luker, 1996:, 86).

Portraying young Black women as lazy and promiscuous welfare queens helped to convince many that they were

undeserving cheats who would rather have babies paid for by the taxes of working Americans than get married or go to work. Distorted images about Black teen mothers are the latest in a long list of pejorative stereotypes about Black women that usually accompany the economy's need for cheap female labor. The negative views of about Black teen mother welfare queens have provided the rationale for welfare reform while creating the conditions that will force many into low-paying work.

These representations also reveal "what, from patriarchal perspectives, women ought to be and not to be" and have been useful in "making patriarchal arguments about women serve racial arguments and causes" (Morton, 1991:154). In addition, negative views about Black women have been significant in attempts to control white women's marital and maternal patterns. Because they have always measured their status by comparing themselves negatively to Black women, notions of white female racial supremacy could be evoked even when both groups shared similar gender patterns and ideas about womanhood. By demeaning Black teen mothers, politicians and policy makers can warn white women to change patterns of employment, maternal, marital, and welfare usage that are increasingly converging with those of Black women.

The current campaign that ended "welfare as we know it" was part of an attempt by the state and the economy to rein in and control poor women's fertility in order to more efficiently direct their participation in the lowest levels

of the labor market. Focusing on the dangers of "illegitimacy" among the underclass, rather than better jobs for both men and women, ruling elites continued to give the impression that because poor women choose to become single mothers, they are responsible for their own impoverished conditions.

As Mimi Abramovitz and Frances Fox Piven, note "Welfare mothers make good scapegoats at a time when politicians and experts need scapegoats." Welfare "signals out the most vulnerable people in our society" and "point the finger of blame at poor women" because they have few solutions for the declining economy power of most Americans (Abramovitz and Fox Piven, 1993:A23).

The Welfare Reform Bill

When Aid to Families with Dependent Children and other New Deal programs began, racial segregation and discrimination limited benefits to poor Black men and women especially in the south. In many states, Black women received fewer benefits than white women and often did not receive money or food for their families. Only in the aftermath of the civil rights movement, when the rights of citizenship were expanded to include African-Americans, could Black women claim their right to government aid. These entitlements were considered the right of all poor women to receive help in caring for their children, irrespective of their circumstances, age, or marital status.

During the 1960's, federal courts disallowed attempts to deny welfare benefits to "illegitimate" children and to restrict unmarried women on welfare from having romantic attachments (Abramovitz and Fox Piven, 1992:A15). During the same period, welfare policies were broadened to include more single-mother families and younger women were also able to claim benefits. Extended welfare payments to adolescent women included Medicaid-funded services such as abortion, birth control, and pre-natal and childbirth services. In their support of independent caseloads and money for apartments for young mothers, AFDC could legitimately be charged with having underwritten the costs of teen sexuality and parenting.

As early as the 1980's, Black welfare workers questioned the wisdom of these practices: "Young unwed mothers began submitting written requests for moving moneys, since there was nothing in the procedure to deny it, the grants were issued. As a result of this liberal policy, scores of undereducated and ill-prepared young women moved away from the only nurturing place they had ever known, the home of their parents. Workers would remark how wrong this was..." (Conner, 1995:4). Luker notes how the extension of federal funding for birth control to young women served to undermine parental authority over their daughter's sexuality: "Minors still living at home could, with the tacit support of the state, engage in behavior that their parents might be ambivalent about or might disapprove of completely" (Luker, 1996:79). Knowledge of these practices regarding teen

motherhood helped to gain widespread public support for reforming welfare. Black welfare workers, community activists and politicians agreed that AFDC, especially in its role in excluding men from family funds, supported potentially negative lifestyles. What had begun in 1935 as a widower's pension had become a policy serving a "new class of dependent families of mothers who were usually, unmarried, separated, or divorced" (Moynihan, 1995:15).

Using growing public concern about teen pregnancy, poverty, and troublesome welfare policies, President Clinton made a pre-emptive strike against his Republican rival in the midst of the 1996 national election campaign by signing into law a sweeping welfare reform bill. The bill aimed at single mothers "abolished Federal guarantees of welfare benefits, principally AFDC". At the time of its enactment, AFDC accounted for only one percent of the Federal budget or about \$22 billion a year" with grants averaging \$370 a month in 1992 leaving families below the poverty line even when food stamps were included (Abramovitz and Fox Piven, 1993:A23). The bill ended AFDC as an entitlement to indigent women and children, and redefined it "as a form of temporary assistance, with a wholly new emphasis on getting a job and becoming self-supporting"(Moynihan, 1995:15).

Although the bill covered specific guidelines for teen mothers and mothers of children under 5 years old it contained four essential parts:

- . the head of every family on welfare must work within 2 years or lose benefits;

- . lifetime welfare benefits will be limited to five years.

- . states can provide payments to unmarried teen-age parents only if the mother under 18 years old stays in school and lives with an adult.

This last provision was aimed at the 40percent of AFDC mothers who are unmarried mothers under 18. In his weekly radio address, the President said, "The only way for teen mothers to escape the welfare trap is to live at home, stay in school and get the education they need to get a good job...We must make sure the welfare system demands that teen mothers follow the responsible path to independence" (Mitchell, 1996:22). This was already common practice within Black families, especially those headed by single mothers. Many poor families used welfare payments and programs to help them provide for their daughters and grand-children. In fact, they encouraged their teenage mother daughters to at least get food stamps and Medicaid until they are "on their feet" or are financially self-sufficient.

The narrowing focus of the welfare reform issue around stereotypes of Black teen mothers blinded many to the creative ways adult Black women and families had used public assistance. By using its resources to help them stabilize their families, African-American women have had a more

complex relationship to the welfare state than simply as recipients of AFDC.

Black Women and Welfare State

The Shelter program in this study is an example of how a broad array of welfare state entitlements have enabled Black women, their families, and institutions to function. The Shelter mothers used welfare payments to pay for the cost of their stay. Welfare provided for their food and clothing as well as medical coverage and child care. Additional state aid in the form of special educational and training programs helped them get needed schooling. Government subsidies for the homeless helped pay for their apartments.

Even before the enactment of the welfare reform legislation, Black women recipients implemented their own ways to leave the welfare rolls. They usually started or returned to work when their children went into daycare or public school. Then former recipients usually moved into the lower levels of public sector employment as daycare and hospital aides when their children began public school. Many Black women who were not on welfare also worked in the public sector. By the 1980's, more than one-third of all Black women worked for federal, state, and local governments in various agencies, programs, and divisions of the public sector. A decade later, because of seniority, large numbers of Black women had moved into managerial and supervisory positions just as their agencies were being reorganized, downsized, and dismantled.

Therefore, the welfare reform bill can be seen as much an attack on Black women who work for the welfare state on those who receive welfare payments. Ending welfare has been a thinly veiled means of creating a strata of low paid women workers, especially young Black women who perform the same work as older unionized public sector employees. The trend toward workfare or making welfare recipients work for their checks without wages, protection, or benefits, displaces and cheapens the value of Black women's labor in the public sector.

In the past, when confronted with employment barriers and obstacles, Black women were able to rely on education as a means of overcoming restrictive employment barriers. Special government-sponsored programs helped Black women workers receive training. Access to public higher education and government-sponsored financial aid to students increased the numbers of Black women college graduates during the 1970's and 1980's. Many of them have become professionals and administrators in public sector institutions and agencies. The heavy reliance of Black professionals on the public sector for both schooling and employment is also being undermined by efforts to downsize the government and to dismantle affirmative action.

Like most Black parents, the Shelter program emphasized education as the means for achieving family and workplace stability. But many, not all, Shelter mothers had negative experiences in high school due to their socializing

and the school's inadequacy. However, after becoming mothers, obtaining an education became the major goal of many Shelter residents. High school diplomas and college degrees were desired not only for their marketplace value, but also because the young mothers believed that they would help them become good mothers and role models for their children. However, the new welfare laws requiring mothers to work while receiving less financial aid threatens to severely curtail the ability of poor women to get a decent education.

Other forms of government funding effectively used by Black women in the past to help their families are also in jeopardy. These include housing subsidies, legal services, training programs for themselves and their children, as well as a myriad of mental health, drug rehabilitation, and recreational programs. These agencies and programs also rely on a large numbers of Black women and men employees for administration and implementation. In spite of the benefits to African-Americans as a source of employment and economic support, the large-scale downsizing of social welfare threatens to de-stabilize future young mothers and their families.

These young mothers will have little opportunity to pursue either romantic mothering or educational advancement. The defunding of adolescent sexuality that has been the not so hidden goal of anti-AFDC legislation is an attempt to control Black women by offering them three choices: stay with their families, get married or abstain from sex they are

economically self-sufficient. As a result of becoming mothers, young Black women have accelerated their entry into the labor market as poorly paid and unprotected workers. This process will be intensified even more as the welfare state is being dismantled.

During the past 30 years, Black women have used the welfare state resources that they were entitled to in order to sustain their families. Welfare had been a way station that enabled most poor women to bear and raise children when their incomes were meager or non-existent. Bridging the disjunctures between work, marriage, and motherhood has become the work of the culture of motherhood, which socialized women to help each other by sharing domestic and childrearing responsibilities. Mutual support among women provided the means for Black women and their children to function as welfare recipients or workers, whether they were married or single mothers. Now Black women will have to re-organize their families, extend their other mothering, and work harder in order to survive.

The "end of welfare as we know it" and the decline of the welfare state lays bare the structural relationship of Black women to the economy and the state. Having never been completely subsumed under the wages or dominion of their men, Black women have always been independently tied to the economy as workers. This relationship to the economy has caused Black women to be exploited by ruling elites or the racial patriarchy while being liberated from many of the

demands of the patriarchy of their own men. But their status as workers has always diminished their position as wives, and the demands of the economy for their labor has always impinged on the emotional needs of their families. Even when "freed" from the demands of marriage, Black women were increasingly tied to the work force. The racist character of the labor force has had double implications for Black women: Black male employment and wages, always precarious and low, were rarely able to support wives and children; though their own employment was more reliable than that of their men, their own wages were equally low and their jobs arduous and demeaning. Black adolescents were unable to earn enough to significantly add to their families income. The end of welfare entitlements and the cutbacks in jobs and resources have undercut the precarious financial base of the Black female working class. Yet many scholars who focus on race and class continue to conflate the "inequality of African-American life with Black men's inequality" (Brewer, 1993:18). However, "Black male joblessness alone does not account for the tremendous disadvantage of the Black poor. Race and gender segmentation and low wages of Black women workers is also central to African American class inequality" (Brewer, 1993:24).

Yet in spite of her precarious economic position, Black women have persisted in becoming become mothers, even when they have no husbands, and even when motherhood restricts and contains their positions as workers. The question remains why

do young Black women not postpone mothering until they have more favorable economic and emotional support? The cultural analysis put forth in this study addresses these questions which are more related to gender transformations than economic issues.

Part III Gender Transformations

The Right to Mother

White families composed of a married couple, whose husband and father was the main economic provider for his wife usually a full-time homemaker and their children has been held up as the normative family pattern for all groups to emulate. Other family forms, such as families with working wives or those headed by women were believed to be deviant, immoral, and dysfunctional. However, these assumptions have to be re-examined in light of the radical transformations of gender that have taken place.

Within the last thirty years, American sexual patterns have been moving away from Puritan Christian values that restricted and legitimated sex and reproduction only within marriage. The sexual revolution during the 1960's liberalized sexual attitudes. Sex and pregnancy were "decoupled by the contraception revolution of the 1960's and pregnancy and birth were decoupled by the legalization of abortion in the 1970's" (Luker, 1996:83).

In spite of the growing significance of political conservatives and Christian fundamentalists who have made the restoration of traditional family values a key part of their

agenda, the sexual behavior of most American adolescents and adults reflect liberal and secular attitudes. Most consider sex an expression of healthy recreation and affection between consenting adults.

The separation of sex from marriage and mothering has been accompanied by women's expanded roles in the paid labor force. As a result, all American women have become less dependent upon marriage. Moreover, those who were in the past most likely to reflect traditional marital values: older, affluent, white women -- are postponing marriage and having babies out-of-wedlock. Even the lives of middle-class white women are no longer defined by marriage and now pick from an array of mating and reproductive choices. Increasingly, women can have children under any circumstances they choose; they can now exercise their right to reproduce without societal taboos and limitations.

The decision of a woman to produce a child, under any conditions she chooses, is viewed as a personal right. In short, the right of any woman -- fifteen year old now receive this designation -- to use her reproductive powers cannot be vetoed or overruled...Under the imprint of this freedom, more single women than ever before are deciding they want to be mothers (Hacker, 1992:70/71).

Ironically, these views about the validity of single motherhood reflect the values of the culture of African-American motherhood. In the past, the separation of marriage from motherhood seemed a particularly deviant family pattern that Black and progressive social scientists associated with

racism and poverty and racists associated with biological inferiority or immorality. Within the Black community, however, validating single mothering seemed a humane to treat widows and single and divorced women and their children. Eventually, it became a habit of survival that enabled Black women and their families to survive (Scott, 1991).

The point here is not that race and class do not matter and have no impact on the choices of young Black women; it's that they don't matter all that much. While it makes rational sense for poor Black girls to get an education and good employment skills before they marry an equally educated and employed man, the milieu created by gender transformations has presented young women with another set of choices. In the final analysis, teen motherhood has become the normative social behavior of a significant number of young women with biologically mature bodies, who in expressing their desire for love and mating, make a series of choices that were in the past contained within the institution of marriage.

Although poor, nearly all of the Shelter residents were healthy young women who happened to get pregnant after having unprotected sex with their boyfriends. They were in a shelter because their mothers were incapacitated. Some also came from two-parent households. Their being homeless and in that particular shelter was a direct result of their race and class, but their getting pregnant was not.

Many teen mothers want the right to mother without getting married, or having any responsibility or commitment

to a husband. Romantic mothers in the Shelter seemingly wanted to try living together with their lovers, perhaps to see if they were compatible for marriage. But more than likely they only wanted to live together as so many adult couples do. These Shelter mothers were like many young women across the country are also experimenting with living with their children and boyfriends. Today, among "96% of American teenagers have sex before they are married" (Luker, 1996:90). Even parents are growing more tolerant of their young daughters living with their boyfriends. These teen mother attitudes toward single mothers seem to be simply the more youthful version of adult gender patterns asserting a woman's right to mother in anyway she chooses.

The Price of the Sexual Revolution

The spread of teen sexuality, pregnancy, and parenting among African-Americans and other women highlights the troublesome consequences of gender transformations for both young mothers and for society. This sexual revolution taking place among adolescents has been a disaster for young girls. Their economic and medical problems are widely acknowledged but the long term emotional and moral issues are often ignored. "Even more now than in the past, girls bear the heavy burdens and penalties of non conjugal sex" (Whitehead, 1994-95: 48). Observations at the Shelter revealed the nearly overwhelming tasks facing the young mothers trying to negotiate work and schooling, while also meeting the needs of their young children. Although many of these mothers will

undoubtedly piece together effective strategies, the crucial question is why young women should assume the weight of family responsibilities that even two adults have difficulty in managing.

The sexual revolution was a response to the rigid and coercive double standard of Puritan sexual values. But it has been replaced by a gender code that has no boundaries offers no stability. A society without gender rules, roles, and responsibilities is not a free society but one dominated by the tyranny of sexual freedom and habits of mothering and machismo. The issues associated with teen motherhood highlight an underlying question facing our society is: can marriage, sex, and childbearing be legitimately separated without long-term negative consequences for everyone?

The culture of Black motherhood that has enabled Black women to survive must also be critiqued for its role in fostering teen motherhood. The mother-is-equal-to-woman paradigm. Sex and motherhood at an early age has reproduced a warrior syndrome where women spend a lifetime struggling to survive. In sacrificing so much of their youth to mothering, Black women then spend time trying to make up for romantic, financial and educational lost time. Many overcome, but others are overwhelmed by the emotional and financial weight of mothering alone. It is particularly troubling to see young women mother alone when, more than in any previous era, Black women and men have greater possibilities of creating viable and satisfying long-term marriages and successful

careers. Non-patriarchal marriages offer an effective way for women to receive the complicated love and care they need to mother effectively and for children to have the care, context, and continuity they require. Children have a right to families, not just to mothers.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that one way to address the problems associated with Black teenage sexuality, pregnancy, and childbearing is to strengthen the hand of adult parents in rearing adolescents, and intercessors in addressing family problems. Black intercessors are divers: some live within and others outside Black urban areas. They members of the Black working and middle classes and formal and informal organizations. These intercessors best know that young people need tough love and bold parenting in order to take advantage of economic and educational opportunities. They recognize that there is a pregnancy, the mother, father and baby need support and to be part of families and communities in order to survive.

Furthermore, they recognize that teenager parenting is limiting because of the material, emotional, and moral jeopardy it places on immature mothers and fathers and children. But because they feel a moral responsibility, intercessors persist in helping young people. For all the limitations of the Shelter program in terms of its weak follow-up and support for couples, it still has provided one of the more effective and humane ways to deal with teen

mothers and children. The resiliency of such African-American intercessors to respond to such restraints signals cautious optimism. Various strategies are being pursued in order to provide a stable households for Black children and youth. Strong families have been traditionally the major way to resist the worst outcomes of racism and economic dislocation,

Although the political and economic structures can frame and limit options, they have never been able to determine the choices of Black social actors. Cultures of adolescence and motherhood were constructed in part by social actors at specific historical junctures in order to manage their sexuality and parenting. They can also be deconstructed and reconceptualized by those same social actors in order to create new ways for adolescents to become adult men and women.

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