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Strong Portraits and Stereotypes: Pregnant and Mothering Teens in YA Fiction

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In recent years scholars have brought to light the difficulties adolescent girls face in their in-school and out-of-school lives. The report *How Schools Shortchange Girls* (AAUW, 1995) summarized findings about the decline of academic achievement experienced by adolescent females. Orenstein's *SchoolGirls: Young Women, Self Esteem, and the Confidence Gap* described the great risks of stress, depression, unwanted pregnancy and substance abuse adolescent girls face, and the ways these problems are exacerbated, not addressed, by most schools.

For girls who are already mothering or pregnant these stresses must be that much greater. Whether they are studying in traditional public schools or in teen parent programs—like the program where I taught during the early 1980s—mothering and pregnant teens have needs that are difficult for teachers to address. One way to address these needs, and to encourage pregnant teens to look with a critical eye at a society that is both fascinated by them and intent on demonizing them (Luker 80-81), is to make it possible for such girls to read and discuss, with a feminist and culturally critical critique, old and new young adult literature about young women in situations similar to theirs.

What are some of the ways pregnant and mothering teens, in particular, might use young adult novels on this subject? I believe, with Meredith Cherland, that novels can be used by readers for a variety of purposes: readers can imaginatively rehearse new ways of being in the world by identifying with characters who have more power in the fictional world than the reader has in hers (Cherland 166, 167). Readers can be nurtured and cared for, in a way, by books that bring them into “another kind of female community capable of rendering the so desperately needed affective support” (Radaway 96). Readers can be helped to think critically about gendered expectations (Cherland 174) when texts are mediated through thoughtful discussion. The image of the pregnant teen and the teen mom has become a focal point where societal anxieties about female power and about poverty, sex, youth and race have coalesced (Luker 12-13). By reading and critiquing selected novels about teen pregnancy, pregnant teens can learn to critique and to complicate the stereotype of the wild, unintelligent, lower-class teen who becomes pregnant. They can also learn to challenge the stereotype of the teenaged welfare queen, thus developing, perhaps, some intellectual armor against those who see young mothers only in these stereotyped ways.

I read the texts discussed herein thinking primarily of the ways pregnant and mothering teens I've taught might respond to them, but it's clear that many of these novels were not

written for pregnant or mothering teens. Thus girls who are not pregnant and boys who are not fathers can learn from reading and discussing these young adult books, too. Having boys and girls thoughtfully read and discuss books about teen pregnancy is one way of speaking to the suggestions outlined in the AAUW publication *Girls in the Middle: Working to Succeed in School*, which calls for teachers to develop opportunities for boys and girls to explore and discuss gender issues (in Sprague & Keeling, 641). Seeing the complexities of sexual situations from the viewpoint of female teen characters could provide thoughtful boys with new ideas about relations between the sexes. Boys might be interested as well in arguing against some of the ways male characters are depicted in these novels. And since most of the novels available on this subject seem written for not-yet-sexually-experienced girls, any one of the books discussed herein, and any one of those in the annotated bibliography attached, would prove fruitful for all-girl talks about sexuality, responsibility, societal expectations, and other painful and confusing topics girls must think about as they work toward becoming women.

Choosing Focal Novels

Of the many fine YA novels on the topic of teen pregnancy and parenthood that have been published, I've chosen to look in depth at six realistic novels written between the years of 1967 and 1999. In part I've chosen these particular books to trace the ways in which presentations of the female character, depictions of relations between young men and women, and attitudes toward early sexuality have changed over the years. In part I chose some of these books because they were ones that the teen moms whom I taught particularly liked. Others I chose because I wish I'd had them to use when I taught those girls. As I read these books, I tried to imagine how my past students might respond to them. I took notes of a reader-response sort, paying particular attention to any stereotypical images of the pregnant teen the novel might present, and trying to determine who the implied reader of each novel might be.

Though about a third of the students I taught during my time working with young mothers were African American, I've found only two YA novels written by and about African American women dealing with early sexuality and pregnancy. In “Images of Black Females in Children's/Adolescent Contemporary Realistic Fiction,” Deirdre Glenn Paul indicates that young adult and children's novels featuring White heroines refer to sexuality and bodily development more than twice as often as do novels featuring African American heroines. Paul suggests that this “sexual conservatism” “might

be a backlash from previous myths about adult Black female sexuality" (62). She suggests that this conservatism might be found particularly in children's and young adult literature since that literature is intended to serve an educative function. (63). At least one of the African American writers I study here has had to defend herself against charges of feeding into this and other stereotypes of female African American teens (Porter 214).

As someone who worked in a school where issues of female sexuality were necessarily foremost in many conversations, Michelle Fine's seminal 1988 article, "Schooling, Sexuality, and Adolescent Females: The Missing Discourse of Desire," spoke loudly to me. Fine's article examines perspectives on adolescent female sexuality embedded both in public discourse and in high school sex education curricula. Because this article spoke so clearly and so well to some of the problematic attitudes I recall my female students expressing, I use it as a frame to look at the ways three of the young adult novels that are the focus of this article—the 1967 YA classic *Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones* and the later novels *Don't Look and It Won't Hurt* and *Get It While It's Hot. Or Not*—describe the sexual choices and thinking of their main characters. *Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones* and *Don't Look and*

It Won't Hurt were books some of my pregnant students particularly appreciated reading and arguing with. Later, I show ways in which I appreciate and argue with those books still.

First, though, I look at three more recent novels—*Like Sisters on the Homefront*, *Imani All Mine*, and *Detour for Emmy*—each of which offers a complex, rich picture of a strong and thoughtful teen mom. In the reviews below, I suggest some of the aspects of these three texts that a teacher might emphasize in class discussions: I suggest paying attention particularly to images of voice and silencing in each main character's life, and paying attention to ways each author describes female communities that support the main character. A teacher could also encourage students to compare, as I have below, the ways these YA writers have used mentions of other texts, "intertextuality," to comment on the character or novel in question and on novels of the past.

Porter, the author of *Imani All Mine*, states in an interview that she sees her novel "as being a kind of bridge, a way for adult women and adolescent women to have some conversations about some issues women face" (215). I'm hoping all of the books discussed in this paper can be used in the way Porter suggests.

Three Strong Mothers

A Faith That's all Mine

The 1999 ALA Best Young Adult Novel of the Year winner *Imani All Mine* presents a brave and thoughtful African American teen mother who carefully and conscientiously tries to raise her daughter well. With Tasha, the young mother who names her daughter Imani when her friend Eboni tells her the word means faith in "some African language," (Porter 7) Porter is clearly questioning the stereotype of the teen mother. At fifteen, Tasha is a mother on welfare but she is also a girl who is on the honor roll. Tasha has strong moral sense that

compels her not to abort this baby produced by a rape, and who is contemptuous of her mother's White boyfriend in part because he was once foolish enough to take drugs (Porter 100). Tasha mothers her daughter lovingly and shows confidence in her ability: "Even though I done had her just five months, I got things down right. It's what you call a routine" (Porter 1). She bravely continues school even though almost every day there she sees the boy who raped her.

Imani All Mine offers a critique of the wider society that surrounds the neighborhood her characters live in, as well. Porter uses the technique of intertextuality to critique aspects of the society that is mass-marketed to White female teens: "They always be having them articles in *Seventeen* about how great it is to be old enough to wear makeup, how to dress for the prom, what twenty pieces of clothes you got to have to go back to school in the fall, how to tell if a boy likes you. I ain't think I was going to look like them girls in there,

all skinny and all, but I did think I might feel like them. Happy" (Porter 8).

Porter also gives Tasha powers far beyond those society gives her, powers to use her imagination to "sustain life and maintain critical awareness" (hooks 55). Tasha baptizes her daughter, turning the ritual into one of her own: "I poured [water] gentle over the

top of her head, and I say, Imani Dawson, I bless you in the name of the Father and the Son and Holy Ghost. I say it to her like I have the power to say it. Like I have the right to be the one that blessed her" (Porter 80). With this phrasing, phrasing that becomes more ironic when we see that Tasha has no ability to keep her daughter safe, Porter comments on the creative, loving, and courageous ways her character and real women like her try to live good lives in neighborhoods filled with violence. A teacher, reading this book with her students, could highlight the author's respectful perspective. Porter's view could be particularly hopeful to students who are young mothers themselves.

The Complexity of Desire

Rita Williams-Garcia's very appealing 14-year-old protagonist Gayle, in the 1996 novel *Like Sisters on the Homefront*, presents a stark contrast to characters we will look at later. That Gayle is pregnant and has a 7-month-old child is presented matter-of-factly in the first few pages of this lyrical book. Unlike characters in teen novels written well before the 90's, Gayle, a smart if rather troubled character, is given command of her own sexuality. Sent away to stay with relatives, she writes to her most recent boyfriend: "I member the last time we did it. It so good" (Williams-Garcia 62). The freshness of this voice, the clear unrepentant enjoyment of the act is compelling: whether or not she's using "erection protection," (105) sex is a natural part of Gayle's life, part of her rebellion and confusion, maybe, but also part of who she is and of how she enjoys life. Gayle is a rare character in young adult literature because of her enjoyment of sex, though. As Davis and MacGillivray point out, in "Books about Teen Parents: Messages and Omissions," "Gayle's braggadocio is problematic because she was introduced to sex by an adult male at a young age" (Davis & MacGillivray 93). Gayle

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does provide readers with an “explicit example of the complexity of sexual desires” (Davis & MacGillivray 93).

Gayle’s cousin Cookie is curious about sex. When she asks Gayle if having sex hurt, Gayle replies, “ ‘I won’t lie . . . It hurted. But that goes away. I didn’t bleed much, and it felt good after the second and third go-round’ ” (Williams-Garcia 69). Here is explicit, unromantic sexual talk in a real girl’s language, and here is a girl who, like July Jones in *Mr. And Mrs. Bo Jo Jones* (discussed below) has had some disappointment with sex but who, unlike the old-fashioned July, wants to talk and think about it. Cookie vows that she’ll wait till she’s married. Author Williams-Garcia presents adolescent female sexuality as desire, with its attendant complexities, and she suggests, through her character Cookie, that sexual enjoyment must be tempered by moral choice.

In some ways this book, which celebrates female friendship as well as family, explores the problematic issue of what goodness means for girls. Cookie is a good girl if there ever was one, a talented singer wrapped up in her family life and in the life of her church. Through watching Cookie make decisions about her own first love, Gayle comes to see ways that a kind of goodness can help her live her life right—not a pleasing, conforming goodness, but a thought-out awareness of what choices are most affirming and helpful for her in the long run. By allowing Gayle to voice the pleasures of sexuality, and by creating in her such an engaging, intelligent picture of a young mother, Williams-Garcia avoids the implicit condemnation other books suggest. These questions of what goodness means, and of the complexities of desire, are ones a skillful teacher could open up for discussion with her students as they read this book. A

teacher could point out that it is not by finding a man or recovering from a love affair, but by getting to know her family better, and by becoming a valued part of that family, that Gayle grows strong.

All the Love You Deserve

The last of the three books which tell the stories of strong teen mothers is *Detour for Emmy*, which is the only one of the six novels discussed here whose implied reader may be the girl who’s just discovered she’s pregnant. Marilyn Reynolds’ character Emmy is a thoughtful, quiet, good girl who’s about to enter high school. That her friends read *Forever* and the *Joy of Sex* signals to the reader a critique of those 70’s era sex-manuals (Seelinger Trites 32; Willinsky & Hunniford 102). Though Emmy is poor and the daughter of a single mom, she becomes far more than a stereotype. As we watch her fall in love with Art, the handsome, ambitious Mexican-American senior involved in the singing group the Harmonics, and as we watch her learn about love, discover her pregnancy then struggle through the first year of her daughter’s life, Emmy becomes a full and complicated character. She is someone with strength and intelligence, a girl who is finally triumphant over her adversity.

In *Detour for Emmy*, the main character finds important support from her friends. She also finds another kind of female support through reading books, particularly Anne Frank’s diary: “My life was so easy compared to Anne Frank’s. But

in some ways, we had a lot in common. I was sort of confined, too. . . . I longed for a girlfriend I could talk with and know we would understand each other” (Reynolds 163). In this way, Reynolds “articulates a central issue of female bonds in feminist . . . adolescent novels: female community established between the characters and between the author and reader can provide a source of empowerment like no other” (Seelinger Trites 93).

Finally, through going to a Teen Moms program, Emmy comes in contact with another very important kind of female community. She meets other girls who can understand her, and she meets a tough and kind teacher who tells her things any pregnant or mothering teen needs to hear:

“Give yourself all the love you deserve, even when it feels like no one else is loving you. And never give up. Every person is different and every story is special, but I’ve heard so many stories from so many girls, some with easy lives and some with lives as tough as yours, and a few who’ve lived through hells beyond what most of us care to imagine. And the amazing thing is, so many of you girls end up doing okay” (Reynolds 128).

Detour for Emmy is in some ways a simplistic novel: Emmy’s problems are solved perhaps more easily than most pregnant teens’ will be, her alcoholic mother and troubled brother both reform rather remarkably toward the end of the novel, and Emmy discovers a way to go to college. But though the book is clearly intended to be didactic, though it is jam-packed with too-straightforward lessons, the messages never get in the way of what is a good story.

Each of these books about strong teen mothers could allow a pregnant or mothering teen to experience some “psychic nourishment” (Ricker-Wilson

59) and also let her experience a “heroic female as active agent” (Ricker-Wilson 61). Each might allow a struggling young mother, learning to get along with her child and perhaps expecting herself to be “naturally nurturant and generous . . . selfless and therefore cheerfully self-abnegating” (Radaway 94) to develop expectations of herself as a mother that are more realistic and gentle than those Radaway describes. A teacher could easily use each of these novels to help a teen mom look critically back at society as society points a blaming finger at her.

Three Pregnant Teens

Female Sexuality as Violence

Other older and less clearly positive novels can be used to help students explore their own attitudes toward teen sexuality and society’s attitudes toward teen mothers. In “Schooling, Sexuality, and Adolescent Females: The Missing Discourse of Desire,” Fine argues that there are few places, in most schools, where girls are encouraged to talk out—and hence, think out—their own feelings about sexuality and the expectations society has of them. Boys’ desire is acknowledged just by classroom descriptions of the biology of sex (83), but classroom instruction and discussion about girls’ sexuality is limited largely to warnings, corrections, and descriptions of ways girls can keep themselves from being victimized (77). Fine contends that girls are entitled to a “discussion of desire” (79) where they can “breathe life into positions of social critique

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and experience entitlement rather than victimization, autonomy rather than terror" (Fine 99). She bemoans the absence of such a discourse, which would help girls gain a sense of their own agency in difficult negotiations about sex. While the three books discussed above could each help a teacher make available that discourse of desire, the books I look at in the following represent three less positive attitudes toward female sexuality Fine discovers in schools and in society (Fine 77).

The ideas in Fine's article could be discussed with students in conjunction with discussions of these books about pregnant teens. Working through and discussing ways in which the attitudes Fine's article describes are reflected in the novels discussed below might help girls begin to articulate, even just to themselves, their own attitudes toward sex. Such discussions might also help boys see how girls' attitudes have been shaped by the discourses around them, and how those discourses might have affected the sexual choices both genders have made.

The first attitude Fine suggests equates sexuality with a largely metaphorical violence. This perspective on adolescent female sexuality "presumes that there is a causal relationship between official silence about sexuality and a decrease in sexual activity—therefore by not teaching about sexuality, adolescent sexual behavior will not occur. The irony, of course, lies in the empirical evidence . . . Teens who believe sexual involvement is wrong deny responsibility for contraception. To accept responsibility would legitimate 'bad' behavior" (Fine 77).

Female Responsibility in *Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones*

This attitude toward sexuality can be seen in Ann Head's novel, *Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones* (1967). This novel is remarkable both in that it tackled this oh-so-contemporary subject thirty years ago and in that the author lets July Jones tell the story herself, encouraging readers to identify with the character and to see that though she has made a mistake, July does not fit our society's prevailing stereotype of the pregnant teen: this pregnant teen is White, wealthy, intelligent, and responsible.

July doesn't seem that interested in sex, either. During a conversation with her friend Lou, July thinks: "The truth was it scared me that when Bo Jo made love to me. I just wasn't with it after a certain point. . . . It scared me that just when I should be feeling closest to him I felt farther away than ever. But I didn't even like to think about it, much less talk about it" (Head 135).

July exemplifies a girl who never planned to have sex and never explored her own sexual thoughts or feelings. She doesn't want to think it, even now that she's married, and the subject is brought up only two times in the novel. July Jones is a girl who proves Fine's point that teens with sex-positive attitudes are less likely to become pregnant out of wedlock than are teens who think sex is not the sort of thing a good girl thinks about (Fine 77).

It is true, as Caroline S. McKinney states in "Finding the Words That Fit: The Second Story for Females in Young Adult Literature," that, caught in a "situational shift" (McKinney 3), July grows stronger as she works through some difficult choices. McKinney suggests that July begins to develop a true "inner voice" that allows her to defy her parents in the end, but since her choice to stay with Bo Jo is so much in keeping with what was expected of women of the time, it's

difficult to see July as any kind of true feminist heroine. After her baby dies, July gets a job while Bo Jo goes to college; she learns how to do laundry better and takes a course in Elizabethan drama "mainly for kicks" (Head 118). Because Head chooses to write the baby out of existence, her character doesn't have to deal with the many realities a child might bring. July doesn't have to choose to give her baby up for adoption or learn how to be a mother. She doesn't have to figure out how to love and support herself and take care of her child at the same time. She just has to learn how to deal with her husband's moods.

Because this book is structured as a romance—girl meets boy, falls in love, and gets married, with—one could say, now—the little oddity that the girl gets pregnant young, and before marriage, thrown in—it is a book best read in combination with thoughtful discussion and critique. If she reads this book alone, a girl who is pregnant out of wedlock might feel reassured that "standard female development does indeed lead to emotional rewards" (Radaway 95). It might also convince her that though she's made a mistake, being as feminine as she can be could still make her life come out all right. And if a pregnant teen reads this book without thoughtful discussion, she might be convinced that marrying could solve many problems and that teen marriage itself won't be that difficult.

Female Sexuality as Victimization in *Don't Look and It Won't Hurt*

In *Don't Look and It Won't Hurt* (1972), Richard Peck presents the reader with the "more prevalent" (Fine 78) attitude that sees female sexuality as a form of victimization. In this novel, as in many others studied, Ellen is a pregnant teen who serves more as a warning to another girl, and to the as-yet-inexperienced reader of the book, than as a character from whom the reader learns and with whom she identifies. Ellen is clearly presented as a victim. Through this portrayal, and through Ellen's sensitively rendered confusion about whether to give up or keep her baby when it comes, the reader is invited to sympathize with her. But it is Carol, Ellen's bright college-bound younger sister, with whom the reader is expected to identify. Through Carol's eyes we are encouraged to see Ellen as naïve, self-absorbed, and not very bright. Carol says that Ellen "was always smack in the center of a gang of high school hotshots who all looked like they were on the verge of flunking Remedial Reading" (Peck 35). "But now, she'd met Mr. Wonderful, so it was good-bye to the Old Life" (Peck 29).

"Mr. Wonderful" turns out not to be a worker in the fight against the Vietnam war, as he has told Ellen, but instead proves to be a drug dealer and an ex-con. Peck thus acknowledges that Ellen has been victimized emotionally and sexually, but he doesn't underline the gendered quality of the other kinds of victimization he describes in the story. Ellen's mother is a victim, too. She has suffered unfair divorce laws and an anti-female economy. She is raising three daughters by herself, and working the 4-12 shift hostessing at a restaurant in town. The run-down father whom Carol meets early in the book gives her money, but he doesn't know her little sister's name (Peck 18). There is no indication that Peck intends to combine the picture of foolish, tough, not-very-bright Ellen becoming victim of an older, lying man's sexual desires, with a critique of the society in which Ellen

and her family live. This omission points up the “problematic assumptions” (Fine 78) that underlie the view of female sexuality as victimization. Fine comments on this kind of portrayal when she notes: “Both arguments present female victimization as contingent upon unmarried heterosexual involvement—rather than inherent in existing gender, class, and racial arrangements . . . The full range of victimization of women—at work, at home, on the streets—” is not recognized in this discourse. And “while narrowly anti-sexual, these messages nevertheless buttress traditional heterosexual arrangements. These views assume that as long as females avoid premarital sexual relations with men, victimization can be avoided” (Fine 78).

A teacher, helping students see this range of victimization in the book might, by extension, help her students—who, like some of the teen moms I’ve worked with, might find much of “women’s lib” talk irritating—slowly see ways in which our culture works against women. Discussions about what has improved for women since this novel was written might be of value; discussions about the perspective this male writer brings to descriptions of these women’s lives might help boys feel freer to imagine themselves in the situations these characters face: raising children alone, facing those children’s mistakes, making the difficult choice to put a baby born out of wedlock up for adoption.

Female Sexuality as Moral Choice in *Get It While It’s Hot. Or Not.*

Fine seems to oppose the third discourse she says girls hear in the schools, that of sex as moral choice, primarily because of the way that choice is presented. Considerations of personal morality are important, Fine seems to say, and this discourse provides the female teen with some subjectivity, but still this third way of speaking about female sexuality poses it as “a test of self-control; individual restraint triumphs over social temptation. Pleasure and desire for women as sexual subjects remain largely in the shadows, obscured from adolescent eyes” (Fine 79).

Valerie Hobbs’ *Get It While It’s Hot. Or Not.* (1996) is a book which speaks to this vision of female sexuality. It is clearly a feminist book, one that emphasizes the importance of female community. The first sentences read: “What does it mean to be friends to the end? I thought I knew” (Hobbs 1). The girls in this story take care of each other: they are evidence of that “common conception of females strengthening each other” that Seelinger Trites describes in her chapter about “literal and metaphoric sisterhood” (Seelinger Trites 80).

This is another book that has been written for the not-yet-experienced girl, though, and it is one of many in which the pregnant character is not the main character, but a friend or relative of the main character. It is a book which a not-yet-experienced girl might read to help her explore her sense of agency in relation to boys and sex (Cherland 166). A middle-class White girl might find the characters in this book “continuous” with people in her own world (Cherland 170). Thus, when the narrator, Megan, a smart middle-class daughter of a lawyer, thinks out her experiences of romance with her boyfriend (“Kissing Joe is a whole-body thing, at least it is for me. But the straight little voice in my mind never quite shuts up: if he’s this good, it says, he’s had some experience. If he’s had some experience, who’s he had it with?” [Hobbs 28]), a

reader might be encouraged to think carefully about the way she manages her sexual encounters as well. When Megan eventually lays it on the line with Joe (“My mind’s not going to change. . .” [Hobbs 95]), a reader could imaginatively rehearse speaking this assertively to a boy—keeping her virginity and keeping the boyfriend—as Megan does in this book. A reader could see that some girls have sex just as an experiment and learn that “it is not something you do as an experiment” (Hobbs 82) and she could hear the arguments for and against sex education in schools. But finally, this is a book that shows that for Megan, sexuality is that test of self control Fine describes. The reader is encouraged to identify with Megan in part because we see her win that test.

A teacher could also lead her students to see that this book is troubling because, though one character says, “I mean, not to be rude, but it isn’t just bad girls who get themselves pregnant. It can happen to anyone” (Hobbs 90), the narrative distances the reader from the pregnant teen character. It presents her as “other” and in this way serves to “reassure those prejudices the reader has already seen mimicked from other sources, or perhaps the book is introducing them to these young students for the first time in such a coherent way” (Willinsky and Hunniford 102). A teacher could help students see how Kit, the pregnant teen, is in no way a character with whom the reader is encouraged to identify; she spends most of her day whining in bed, she has low self-esteem (Hobbs 4), and has had problems with drugs (Hobbs 7).

It is my hope that the books listed above, and some of the books in the accompanying annotated list, could be used in the classroom to serve three purposes. First, reading and discussing some of these books might be part of helping make a “discourse of desire” available to girls in the classroom. That is, such discussions might begin to provide safe places where girls could talk about “passion, pleasure, danger, and responsibility” (Fine 85) in their relationships with boys, and such discussions might help girls develop the beginnings of the sense of social, sexual, and vocational entitlement Fine speaks of when she describes evidence “that women who lack a sense of social or sexual entitlement, who hold traditional notions of what it means to be female . . . are disproportionately likely to find themselves with an unwanted pregnancy . . .” (Fine 96). These books could be used to stimulate discussion of relationships in sex education or parenting classes; in an English class, in conjunction with a social worker’s speech about the problems of early pregnancy; in connection with an all-class debate about the school’s role in pregnancy prevention.

Second, I hope that reading some of these novels might help both boys and girls look at and discuss our society’s gendered expectations of them, and help students begin to look critically at the stereotypes surrounding the image of the sexually active and pregnant teen. Pairing *Like Sisters on the Homefront* with *Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones*, or reading the beautiful and complicated *Imani All Mine* just after *Get it While it’s Hot. Or Not*, might encourage much fruitful discussion about stereotyping in novels and about societal expectations of girls.

Last, I hope that reading and discussing some of these novels could provide a kind of community-through-literature to girls who are already pregnant or mothers. A teacher might want to have some of these books in her personal library, to hand out in private conversation with a lone pregnant teen or

young mom. She might also want to suggest them to a girl who seems to be considering an increased closeness with a boyfriend; these books could provide a basis for continuing teacher-to-young woman talks.

Clearly many school districts, particularly in today's conservative climate, will not welcome the use of books such as these. I'd suggest that even in those districts that do allow use of these books a teacher needs to be sure to express his or her own critique of some of the books' stereotypical, classist pictures of the pregnant teen, presentations of unhealthy attitudes toward teen female sexuality, and overly romantic presentations of teen marriage and motherhood. Creating an opportunity for voicing such critiques—whether those criticisms come from teacher or student—are one of the values of using these books in the classroom.

The typical school curriculum provides little opportunity for pregnant and mothering teens to talk openly about the anxieties, difficulties, sorrows and joys that make up their lives. There are few places in schools where girls can talk openly about their sexuality or about the expectations society places on them. Through reading and critiquing young adult novels in which girls meet the challenge of pregnancy or of mothering, teachers can help pregnant and mothering teens, and boys and girls who are not yet parents, examine some of the crucial issues in their lives.

Annotated Bibliography of Contemporary, Realistic YA Novels about Pregnant or Parenting Teens

What follows is a list of a few more novels that feature pregnant teens. The titles that are starred are ones I found particularly imaginative, well-written, and pro-girl.

Anonymous. (1998) *Annie's Baby: Diary of a Pregnant Teenager*. New York: Mass Market Paperback.

Fourteen year old Annie confides in her diary from the time she discovers she's pregnant till her baby's birth. Written by the author of *Go Ask Alice*. Very popular.

Cole, Shelia. (1996) *What Kind of Love?* New York: Mass Market Paperback.

Told in diary format, this is the story of fifteen-year-old Valerie, a classical pianist who finds herself pregnant after one encounter. Though many of the characters are one-dimensional, Valerie's inability to accept that her boyfriend has left her rings true.

***Dessen, Sarah. (1998). *Someone Like You*. New York: Viking/Penguin.**

Halley's best friend, Scarlett, is pregnant with the baby of Michael, who has recently died. Halley begins a romance and struggles to understand her friend, her mother, and herself. Halley decides against sleeping with her new boyfriend and comes to appreciate her overbearing psychologist mother.

***Doherty, Berlie. (1992). *Dear Nobody*. New York: Orchard Books**

Told alternately from the point of view of the young mother and the young father, this 1992 Carnegie Medal winner presents a realistic and positive image of the pregnant teen and her parents. Sympathetic, multi-layered portrayal of the boyfriend. Beautifully written.

Eyerly, Jeannette. (1987). *Someone to Love Me*. New York: JP Lippincott.

Patrice Latta, a naïve sophomore whose divorced mother has no time for her, falls for an older boy who has sex with her, then leaves her. Patrice decides to keep the baby. Simplistic characters, stereotypical young mom, sudden plot resolution.

Fienberg, Anna. (2000). *Borrowed Light*. New York: Delacourt press.

Callista May, whose astronomer-grandmother has given her scientific/poetic language with which to describe her life, discovers she is pregnant. Interesting parents; Australian setting.

Grant, Cynthia D. (1998) *The White Horse*. New York: Simon Schuster.

A single English teacher who has always wanted a child becomes intrigued by the journal entries of a troubled, homeless student whose heroin-addicted mother has abused her. When that student becomes pregnant, the English teacher must decide whether to adopt the student's baby or not.

Johnson, Lissa Halls (1982). *Just like Ice Cream*. Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale House Publishers

Didactic Christian series book. A poorly-written romance, but filled with much good information about early sexual experiences, birth control methods, sexually transmitted diseases, and what doctor visits are like for a pregnant teen.

Kaye, Geraldine (1992). *Someone Else's Baby*. New York: Hyperon Books for Children

Teresa Browning, a White, middle class, 17-year-old secretary, discovers she is pregnant after she passes out at a party. She is sent away to live with her aunt as she waits to give birth to the baby she has decided will be "someone else's."

Lantz, Frances. (1997). *Someone to Love*. New York: Avon Books, Inc.

Troubled White middle class teen gets to know Iris, the unwed mother whose baby her parents plan to adopt. Stereotypical picture of the mixed-up, poor, irresponsible pregnant teen.

Neufield, John. (1972). *For All the Wrong Reasons*.

When 17 year old Tish becomes pregnant, her boyfriend Peter refuses to allow her to have an abortion. They marry and drop out of high school. Young mother as selfless helper.

***Pennebaker, Ruth (1996). *Don't Think Twice*. New York: Henry Holt.**

Told from the point of view of a White lawyer's daughter who spends time in a home for pregnant teens in Texas. The pregnant teen's sharp, cynical voice, her growth in perspective, her courage, and the author's clear feminist message makes this look back at the late sixties both funny and moving.

***Sapphire (2000). *Push*.**

Told from the point of view of an African American young mother, this painful novel is a *kunstlerroman*; we watch as, with help from a kind teacher and female students, Precious Jones learns how to read, to write, and to stand up for herself.

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