Teenage Motherhood And The Regulation of Mothering in The Scientific Literature: The South African Example

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Abstract

The mainstream literature on teenage pregnancy highlights teenagers’ inadequate mothering as an area of disquiet. ‘Revisionists’¹, such as feminist critics, point out that a confluence of negative social factors are implicated in teenagers’ mothering abilities. Whether arguing that teenagers make bad mothers or defending them against this, the literature relies on the ‘invention of “good” mothering’. In this paper I highlight the taken-for-granted assumptions concerning mothering (mothering as an essentialised dyad; mothering as a skill; motherhood as a pathway to adulthood; fathering as the absent trace) appearing in the scientific literature on teenage pregnancy in South Africa. I indicate how these assumptions are implicated in the regulation of mothering through the positioning of the teenage mother as the pathologised other, the splitting of the public from the private, domestic space of mothering, and the legitimisation of the professionalisation of mothering. I explore the gendered implications of the representations of mothering in this literature.
INTRODUCTION

Despite there being some voices to the contrary (e.g. Geronimus, 1991; Testa, 1992), teenage pregnancy is seen in the general Anglophone and South African literature as a social problem. This is in part to do with the ascription of inadequate mothering to teenagers. For example, in the North American-based literature, from which South African researchers draw many of their conceptualisations and methodologies, it is argued, *inter alia*, that adolescent mothers:

* vocalise less often to their young children and provide fewer stimulating experiences than do older mothers, thus contributing to later academic difficulties (Barrat, 1991);

* do not provide opportunities for affectional exchange, or else share emotions inconsistently, leading to increased risk of psychopathology in the child (Osofsky, Eberhart-Wright, Ware & Hann, 1992);

* display higher levels of parenting stress and are less responsive and sensitive in interactions with their infants than are adult mothers (Passino, Whitman, Borkowski, Schellenbach, Maxwell, Keogh & Rellinger, 1993).

The nascent developmental status of the adolescent caregiver is seen as increasing the probability of a maladaptive relationship between the mother and the child (Ketterlinus, Lamb & Nitz, 1991), and a link has been made between adolescent parenthood and child abuse because the purported patterns of adolescent parenting are akin to those described amongst abusive mothers (Miller & Moore, 1990). South African research has described teenage mothers as being ambivalent towards and covertly rejecting their children (Rubensztein, 1992), as lacking parenting skills (Mkhize, 1995) as well as knowledge concerning the emotional needs of the child (Erasmus, 1990), and as having negative
‘irrational’ thoughts and feelings concerning their children (Fouché, 1992).

Various North American ‘revisionist’ authors, who argue that teenage pregnancy is not as problematic as commonly assumed, dispute the adolescent/poor parenting association (Buccholz & Gol, 1986; Buccholz & Korn-Bursztyn, 1993; Trad, 1995). For example, Buccholz and Korn-Bursztyn (1986) argue that a confluence of factors other than maternal age are implicated. Many studies, they say, make comparisons between teenage and older mothers without identifying the sample’s socioeconomic status. They postulate that the parent-child interaction is influenced by a range of factors such as the financial, emotional and social support resources available to the mother. Buccholz and Gol (1986) concentrate on the strengths of teenage mothering, positing that in some cases becoming a parent can stimulate positive changes in the adolescent’s life, thus fostering reciprocal ego development between the mother and child. Revisionist arguments concerning teenage pregnancy in South Africa are found in the work of Preston-Whyte and colleagues (Preston-Whyte, 1991; Preston-Whyte & Louw, 1986; Preston-Whyte & Zondi, 1989, 1991, 1992), but otherwise remain absent. These authors use an anthropological framework to locate ‘black’ teenage pregnancy within a cultural and political context in which early childbearing mobilises extended family resources and therefore does not result in a significant deterioration of future circumstances.

Whether arguing that teenagers make bad or adequate parents, or, more subtly, that poor and/or unsupported teenagers make bad parents while middle-class and/or supported ones make adequate parents, both the ‘mainstream’ and ‘revisionist’ literatures rely on what Johnson (1990) calls the ‘invention of “good mothering”’ (p. 2). Underlying the debate on
teenage mothering is an implicit assumption concerning what it means to be a ‘good mother’. The characteristics of the universalised ‘good mother’ are taken-for-granted. In Derridian (1976) terms they form the normalised absence, the silent signifier on which the discussion of the merits of teenage mothering depends. Mothering is treated as a stable, inviolable category, something which is self-evident, rather than an activity which is informed by and reflects the socio-political pre-occupations of the particular time and place. A viewing of the post-structuralist and feminist writings on mothering (e.g. Glenn, Chang & Forcey, 1994; Jackson, 1993; Johnson, 1990; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989; Weedon, 1987) indicates, however, that there is great variability across and within historical periods and societies in terms of child-rearing practices and the relationship between mother and child as well as between both of them and significant others.

I analyse in this paper the construction and regulation of mothering in the South African literature on teenage pregnancy, highlighting (1) the invocation of certain taken-for-granted assumptions concerning mothering, (2) the positioning of the teenage mother as the pathologised other, (3) the splitting of the public from the private, domestic space of mothering, and (4) the legitimation of professionalised intervention. My analysis is Foucauldian in approach and is grounded in the work of Rose (1989a, 1989b, 1992, 1996) on the inter-connection of the psy-sciences and what he calls the ‘conduct of conduct’ (Rose, 1996, p. 132). Rose indicates how psychological expertise produces a positive knowledge concerning the object of government (be it the family, the child, the mother etc.) and provides the grids of visibility to bring the object into the plane of sight. The mundane operation of documentation undertaken in psychological research ‘makes the individual stable through constructing a perceptual system, a way of rendering the mobile and confusing manifold of
the sensible into a cognizable field’ (Rose, 1989a, p. 124).

Rose (1992) delineates three principal forms of connection between psycho-medical expertise and the liberal regulation of individuals. The first is rationality. The psy-sciences, with their claim to truthful knowledge and efficacious technique, provide the legitimation for the exercise of power through various intervention strategies. The second form, that of privacy, allows for the masking of the operation of power. Ostensibly the events which take place within the private space are outside of the formal scope of public powers. However, the public/private split is spurious, because, as Foucault (1978) shows so succinctly with sexuality, the supposedly private becomes intensely public and political through the plethora of texts, both professional and popular, concerning the private conduct of life. In Rose’s (1992) words ‘The Janus face of expertise enables it to operate as a relay between government and privacy - their claims to truth and efficacy appealing, on the one hand, to governments ... and, on the other hand, to those ... attempting to manage their own private affairs efficaciously’. The third form of connection is autonomy. The person is constructed as autonomous, free to choose or decide on the basis of individualised motives, needs and aspirations. The technologies of psychology promise to ‘sustain, respect and restore selfhood’ (Rose, 1992, p. 367) and as such participate in the production and regulation of the individual.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse how a specific instance of psychologised expertise produces and regulates mothering. An attempt was made to collect all published and unpublished South African research and literature in the field of teenage pregnancy for a larger study (Macleod, 1999) on teenage pregnancy through (1) conducting searches of
international and national bibliographic data archives, and (2) sending letters to Heads of Departments of relevant social science, education and medical departments at all South African universities, and relevant non-governmental organisations, requesting information concerning research conducted in the field of teenage pregnancy in their organisations. The result was a collection of 77 research reports, theses, articles and chapters, 41 of which are published. Methods used in this research range from anthropological vignettes to quantitative statistical analyses, with data being collected through individual and focus group discussions, standardised and non-standardised questionnaires, essay-writing, psychometric tests, and hospital records.

In some respects the South African literature can be seen as a sub-section of the Anglophone scientific discourse on teenage pregnancy and childbearing, as, in the words of Burman, Kottler, Levett and Parker (1997), ‘systems of invisible imperialism are ... played out in academic and intellectual life’ (p. 6). However, there are also points of divergence between the South African literature and that emanating chiefly from the United States and Britain, particularly in the construction and maintenance of particular racialised boundaries, a focus on demographic population dynamics rather than welfare concerns, and the use of African cultural and traditional forms as explanatory tools. Much of the research analysed here was conducted prior to the 1994 elections, a time when racial (as well as gender and class) power relations were permeated by Apartheid ideology and practice. As expected, race appears as a robust signifier in the literature (see Macleod, 1999, for discussion of racialisation in the South African literature).

The data (i.e. all the documents collected) were analysed using what I have termed
deconstructive discourse analysis, a method which draws on Foucault and Derrida’s work. What is analysed in this method is the discursive ‘event’ (Fairclough 1992) which is simultaneously a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice and an instance of social practice. The discursive events in this instance are simultaneously the texts written on teenage sexuality and pregnancy, the discursive construction contained in that text, and the research practices engaged in to collect information and produce the text. The aim was, following Foucault (1991), to question these discursive events concerning their codifying effects concerning the known (effects of veridiction) and their prescriptive effects regarding action (effects of jurisdiction). In other words, I aimed to elucidate how particular conceptualisations of mothering have been used to construct our knowledge of teenage pregnancy, and how these constructions of mothering and our knowledge of teenage pregnancy legitimate certain practices. To effect this, a deconstructive process in which discourses on teenage pregnancy were questioned in terms of their claims to presence, and their dependence on absences – in this case the nature of mothering – was undertaken (Derrida, 1976). The deconstructive aspect focused on dominance, contradiction and difference.

Concretely, this translated into:

(1) reading and re-reading the texts;

(2) chunking the material according to themes (mothering relationships, mothering tasks, fathering);

(3) applying Parker’s (1992) Foucauldian-based seven basic criteria for identifying discourses (viz. that a discourse: is realised in text; is about objects (e.g. teenage mothering); contains subjects (the mothering teenager); is a coherent system of
meanings (e.g. that mothering requires a certain level of skill); refers to other discourses (e.g. the discourse of mothering as natural ability); reflects on its own way of speaking; and is historically located), and

(4) infusing the analysis with theoretical insights which drew on feminist post-structuralist writings on mothering, and Rose’s work on the psy-complex.

In the analysis which follows, twenty extracts were chosen as illustrative of the discourses concerning mothering identified in the full body of the literature. In choosing these, many others were discarded. The discourses identified basically formed a coherent set of meanings concerning mothering in the context of the topic of teenage pregnancy in the scientific literature in South Africa. These discourses centre around mothering as (1) essentially a dyadic relationship, (2) a task that requires a certain level of competence or skill, (3) a pathway to adulthood for females, and (4) supplemented by the public figure of the father. In the analysis I refer in many instances to British-based feminists’ work, in particular those with post-structuralist leanings. There is a general paucity of feminist ideas in psychology in South Africa, even in progressive sites (Levett & Kottler, 1998), although the topic of mothering has been taken up in linguistic circles (Wicomb, 1994). Of the feminist work available in South Africa, much draws on a post-structural framework (e.g. Levett, 1988; Kottler & Swartz, 1995; Wilbraham, 1996a, 1996b), indicating the usefulness feminist theorists have found in this approach in the local specificity of South Africa.
MOTHERING AS A DYAD

Extract 1
There exists the real possibility of a lack of bonding between the young mother and her infant, leading to adverse psycho-social consequences for the child, its family and society (Boult & Cunningham, 1993, p. 57).

Extract 2
Teenage mothers see their friends as having fun and enjoying life without the added responsibility of a child. Resentment, jealousy and feelings of having ‘lost out’ often become apparent and are adversely projected onto the child (Greathead, 1988, p. 26).

Extract 3
The vast majority of these girls intended returning to school within months of giving birth. A considerable proportion of their infants, therefore, would in all likelihood be placed in a high-risk situation (Loening, 1992, p. 84).

Extract 4
Many of the girls in this group showed little preparedness for motherhood, (sic) they were not going to care for their children themselves and usually expected the mother to care for the child. In fact, babies born under these circumstances are considered typical ‘unwanted’ children (Van Regenmortel, 1975, unpaginated).

Extract 5
[A] seriously impoverished environment can lead to changes in the life of the care giver, resulting in the baby becoming a ‘football child’, passed from one relative to another with no opportunity of bonding with any one individual. The result is maternal deprivation, the indelible consequences of which have been well
documented (Loening, 1992, p. 85).

**Extract 6**

It comes as no surprise that half the young prospective mothers did not welcome their pregnancies. While many of them changed their attitudes once they held the baby in their arms, there was a nagging fear in the minds of doctors and nurses that they would be unable to sustain this love once the children began to make greater demands on them. In fact a substantial number (one in five) reported persistently negative feelings even after birth of their babies (Loening, 1992, p. 83).

The South African literature on teenage pregnancy follows the general trend within developmental psychology of treating mothering as a dyadic relationship (see Burman’s (1994) discussion of developmental psychology). The mother’s influence on the child is foregrounded, and isolated from its contextual background. This serves to obscure the relationships that surround and involve infants and young children and their mothers, as well as the context and the sexualised relationship within which women become pregnant (Pateman, 1992). It splits the domestic from the social, the private from the public. In the words of Burman (1994):

The focus on the interpersonal dyad leaves out of the picture the wider social structural relations, relations of power ..., and thus correspondingly works to obscure the ways those wider structural relations enter into and are (re)produced within micro-social relations (p. 44).
This emphasis allows for the simultaneous idealisation and pathologisation of women’s relationships with, and their actions with regards to, their children.

In the teenage pregnancy literature the idealisation of the dyad is silent. Instead, teenage mothering becomes the repository of blame for later deviance. We see how teenage mothering is associated with ‘adverse psycho-social consequences’ (extract 1), the ‘adverse’ projection of negative feelings (extract 2), and unwanted or ‘football’ children (extracts 4 and 5). The pathologisation of the mothering dyad is taken up in the literature on teenage pregnancy with the added dimension of the equation of adolescence with childhood. In extract 2 notions concerning the nature of adolescence (having fun, enjoying life) allow for the invocation of a negative dyadic relationship, while in extract 6 the depiction of the adolescent as inconsistent legitimates the anxiety of medical professionals and hence their intervention.

This pathologisation of the teenage mother-infant dyad is made possible by the taken-for granted absent trace of the idealised ‘good’ mother. The negative casting of the teenage mother as not bonding with her infant (extracts 1 and 5), resenting her baby and feeling jealous of her friends (extract 2), returning to school (extract 3), lacking preparedness (extract 4), not welcoming her pregnancy and being inconsistent (extract 6) implies that the ‘good’ mother, *inter alia*, is prepared for, welcomes, and bonds well with her baby, feels no ambivalence or negative emotions, is consistent in her approach, and stays at home. Those not fitting into this idealised portrait pay the cost of the professionals’ censure (external and internalised).
The ‘domestic’ dyadic activity of mothering has become saturated by what Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) call ‘Bowlbyism’. Bowlby’s work on maternal deprivation and attachment, which served to redefine women’s responsibilities in the post-war period in Britain, ‘is imbedded in a history of misogynist discourse’ (Franzblau, 1999, p. 29). It has been taken up within the professional and popular literature to emphasise the importance of bonding between the mother and infant at birth as well as the continual presence of the biological mother. This underlies the present depiction of the ‘good’ mother as the caregiver who is always available and always attentive. In extracts 1 and 5 the concept of ‘bonding’ is linked to child outcomes, while in extracts 3, 4 and 5 teenage mothers are depicted as reneging on their care-giving duties, either through returning to school (extract 3), lack of preparedness (extract 4), or unforeseen changes in their lives (extract 5). The result is portrayed as ‘unwanted’ (extract 4) or ‘football’ children (extract 5), who are placed in a ‘high risk’ situation (extract 3), carrying the ‘indelible consequences’ of maternal deprivation (extract 5).

Burman (1994) believes that ‘This rendering of the cosy world of innocent and dependent childhood both reproduces and produces the division between public and private realms’ (p. 79). This split is spurious, however, as the plethora of research, child-care manuals, antenatal classes, and parenting programmes (offered both in countries like Britain and South Africa) which utilise, inter alia, concepts such as bonding, renders mothering intensely public and political. However, the illusion of the domestic privacy of motherhood is maintained in order to mask the powerful regulating effects of the professionals’ prescriptions on mothers’ lives and nurturing practices.
Nicolson (1993), furthermore, calls the separation of the mother-infant relation from its relational, social and historical context the ‘patriarchal myth of maternal power’ which ‘renders women culpable’ while simultaneously ‘depriv[ing] them of effective social influence’ (p. 203) as they are seen as inadequate in what is cast as their central role. Although mothering is portrayed as an essentially private role, marginal mothers such as teenage mothers become accountable for social problems. The irony is twofold: (1) they are shown to be responsible for problems in a realm (the socio-political world) from which they are largely excluded through the depiction of mothering as a domestic activity, and (2) as such, they become targets for public remedial programmes on mothering (see, for example, extract 7 below).

**MOTHERING AS A SKILL**

**Extract 7**

It is clear that much needs to be done to facilitate the teenager’s adjustment to motherhood. One suggestion is to establish school-based programmes for adolescent mothers that equip them with life skills (Parekh & De la Rey, 1997, p. 228).

**Extract 8**

The majority who perceived mothering to be very difficult, had a problem in performing every mothering related task. They felt this task is not really for teenagers. .... Such experiences were in spite of the fact that the teenage mothers did receive lessons during their prenatal sessions (Mkhize, 1995, p. 86).

**Extract 9**

[T]he teenage mothers’ dependency on adults for norms of parenting and preparation
for child care exacerbates difficulties associated with the transition to motherhood (Mkhize, 1995, p. 99).

**Extract 10**

The girl is usually unable to comprehend that motherhood is a 24 hour per day, 7 day per week, role and that her responsibility for the child will last for a minimum of 18 years - longer than she has lived. This, plus the teenager’s total inability to cope, results in a high incidence of child abuse, neglect and possible abandonment by teenage mothers (Greathead, 1988, p. 23).

**Extract 11**

[A]dolescents give birth to LBW [low birth weight] infants who will require skilled nursing and are at risk for rehospitalization, as are their infants with normal birth weight owing to the mother’s lack of skills and poor socio-economic background (Boult & Cunningham, 1993, p.44).

Within what I have called the ‘skill’ discourse, mothering is seen as a set of tasks and activities which require basic prerequisite skills for their successful accomplishment. In this discourse:

Normal development has become a problem, something to be achieved, necessitating continual nurturing and surveillance. The ‘interaction’ of the child with its environment is to be structured, organized, and managed to produce the optimal outcome (Burman, 1994, p. 199).

The ‘skill’ discourse stands in contradistinction to one of the dominant discourses of motherhood, viz. the ‘natural’ discourse in which mothering is seen as biological and
instinctive (see Marshall’s (1991) account of this discourse in child-care manuals). This latter discourse, while dominant in the general literature on mothering, is marginalised within the teenage pregnancy literature. This foregrounding of the ‘skill’ discourse and the backgrounding of the ‘natural’ discourse is powerful in a number of respects with regard to teenage motherhood. If mothering were natural, then, given the biological capacity to conceive and bear a child, mothering would follow automatically for teenage mothers. This would render teenage pregnancy unproblematic, in at least this sense. On the other hand, ‘skill’ implies that a deficient state exists, viz. a state in which the relevant person does not possess the necessary skills. An implicit focus on teenagers’ developmental status (see the use of the words ‘girl’ in extract 10 and ‘dependency on adults’ in extract 9) allows for the depiction of teenage mothers as finding mothering difficult (extracts 8 and 9), unable to cope (extract 10), and lacking skills (extract 11). This creates a space for a linkage between teenage mothering and future negative outcomes for the child.

The depiction of teenagers as deficient in mothering skills opens a space for the intervention of the professional through a process of pedagogisation. Extract 7 suggests school-based programmes for adolescent mothers. The role of the expert in the pedagogisation of mothering is not one of dictation, instruction or imposition. Instead s/he ‘facilitates’ (extract 7) the autonomous, intrinsic processes involved in becoming a mother. The regulation thus is not overt, but rather covert as the teenager is incited to be true to herself and the taken-for-granted characteristics of the ‘good’ mother (for an in-depth analysis of the covert regulation of child-centred pedagogy see Walkerdine, 1984). The failure of this pedagogisation may be anticipated, however, as seen in extract 8 where teenagers are depicted as inadequate in their mothering despite efforts from the experts. Nevertheless, the experts remain in the position
of authority. We see, for example, in extract 9 how the teenager’s reliance on other adults (who are not experts) actually exacerbates her difficulties with regard to mothering.

Other, less direct, linkages are made around teenagers’ inability to mother, as illustrated in extract 11. The first linkage made in this extract concerns the professionalisation of teenage reproduction. Note how a contrast between the teenage mother’s lack of skills and the professional nurse’s skillfulness is created. The adolescent is positioned in a double bind situation in the extract. She is cast as physiologically incompetent (giving birth to low-birth-weight infants), but even where she avoids this by having a normal birth weight infant, she puts her child at risk (which implies professional intervention) through her mothering incompetence. The second linkage made is between ‘bad mothering’ and poverty. The authors of extract 11 do not go so far as to say that poor socio-economic status causes a lack of mothering skills (or vice versa). However, the close linguistic association, and the implication that poverty is a personal attribute of these teenage mothers rather than a social structural factor which constrains their experience, gives lie to the assumed sociological link. This link has been commented on in the feminist literature (e.g. Smart, 1996; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989). For example, Smart (1996), in her history of motherhood in Britain, shows how ‘In the context of “normalizing motherhood”, working-class unmarried mothers are perceived as most disruptive of the norms. They are presumed to be “bad mothers”’ (p. 38). She indicates that the rise of the ‘psy’ professions led to a range of persuasive policies and professional practices which were gradually brought to bear on working-class mothers to alter their mothering practices. ‘These strategies were strongly supported by ideologies of motherhood that express the natural characteristics of mothers as coinciding with a class-specific, historically located ideal of what a mother should be’
In South Africa this link takes on a racialised aspect, with the signifier ‘poor mothers’ implicitly meaning ‘black’ poor mothers (see Macleod, 1999, concerning the intersection of racialisation and class-based effects in the South African literature).

The ‘skill’ discourse of mothering has important effects in terms of the regulation of women. As Burman (1994) points out, mothers have, in many respects, replaced children as the primary focus for developmental psychological investigation. This allows for infinite definition, categorisation and calibration concerning what constitutes ‘good’ mothering, or what Woollett and Phoenix (1991) call the professionalisation of motherhood. These principles are then brought to bear upon women in a number of ways, viz., through 1) direct intervention in women’s lives (e.g. advice from nurses); 2) women’s subscription to psychological accounts (via magazines, for instance) concerning the best practices with regard to children and 3) through the impact developmental psychology has on the cultural climate and provision of services for mothers and their children (Burman, 1994). Marginal, ‘bad’ mothers (including poor and teenage mothers) provide the pathologised backdrop against which the characteristics of the ‘good’ mother are defined, as well as the legitimation for the proliferation of professionalised discourse on mothering, and the incitement for mothers to subscribe to the professionalised images of the ‘good’ mother.

**MOTHERHOOD AS A PATHWAY TO WOMANHOOD**

**Extract 12**

Emotionally they [teenage mothers] are children, physically not completely developed, insufficiently schooled and economically totally unsuited to caring for
themselves or the child (De Villiers & Clift, 1979, p. 195, translated from Afrikaans).

Extract 13

Childbirth confers on girls the valued status of motherhood and it may be the pathway to adulthood in cases where marriage is delayed by lack of money, suitable accommodation or the necessity of amassing bridewealth. By having a child a girl realises an important aspect of her femininity (Preston-Whyte & Zondi, 1991 p. 139).

Extract 14

So strong is the value placed on fertility that, as we have seen, even where marriage does not occur, childbirth can and does stand on its own. Indeed having children is seen as the necessary foundation of successful womanhood and even a professional career cannot compensate for not having children (Preston-Whyte & Zondi, 1989, p. 65).

Extract 15

The teenage mother’s perception of mothering as a reward for fulfilment in womanhood, is an indication of a psychological problem. They are looking at womanhood in their own persons disregarding the norms and values of society bearing a child under these circumstances. This points out to (sic) a great psychological need (Mkhize, 1995, p. 87).

Extract 12 places adolescents firmly in the ‘child’ category as physically, scholastically and emotionally immature, with motherhood implicitly placed in the ‘adult’ category. This dichotomy (adolescent = child // mother = adult) underlies some of the pathologisation of teenage pregnancy in the mainstream literature (if adolescent = child, and mother = adult, then adolescent should not = mother). The revisionist literature, however, takes a slightly
different tack in this regard. In an attempt to ‘understand’ teenage pregnancy in South Africa and to put it into a cultural and political context, these researchers emphasise how teenagers may see becoming a mother as a pathway to the desired status of adulthood, as seen in extracts 13 and 14. Two interesting features emerge in these extracts. The first is the slippage between adulthood and femininity (extract 13 associates the pathway to adulthood with the realisation of femininity, while extract 14 depicts having a child as contributing to the successful accomplishment of womanhood). The underlying, unexamined assumption is that the type of adulthood achieved by women is different from that achieved by men. It is strongly gendered around the conception and bearing of children. The second feature is the association of marriage with adulthood. It is implied that where gaining adulthood through marriage is delayed, the girl may attain this status through bearing a child. Adulthood status is thus achieved for women through a relationship with another, either a man or a child, but not through the masculinised path of career building (extract 14).

While revisionists’ use of the ‘motherhood as a pathway to adulthood’ hypothesis is an attempt to ‘de-pathologise’ teenage pregnancy, the maintenance of the adolescent = child/mother = adult dichotomy implicit in the hypothesis creates the conditions of possibility for the pathologisation of teenage mothering. We see in extract 15 how an adolescent’s attempt to become an adult through reproduction is cast as a psychological problem. The individual adolescent is singled out and psychologised, while ‘society’ is exonerated. This allows for the professional to step in to ameliorate the individual’s ‘great psychological need’.

FATHERING THE ABSENT TRACE
Extract 16
This [migrant labour] has negatively affected the family in that there is no one playing a paternal role in the family and most women find it difficult to rear children on their own (Mkhize, 1995, p. 39).

Extract 17
The most important areas in which a father has a pertinent influence are the development of his child’s sex role, the development of his child’s cognitive potential and the motivation of his child. Fatherly involvement is attached to influence (Dreyer, 1991, p. 37, translated from Afrikaans).

Extract 18
His fatherly role can be jeopardised by practical problems with which he may be confronted, such as where they are going to live or where he is going to work in order to care financially for his family (Dreyer, 1991, p. 37, translated from Afrikaans).

Extract 19
Whereas her husband or boyfriend may have been a fine spouse or lover, the mother-to-be may wonder, and at times with a realistic basis, whether he has the capacity or desire to be a responsible father and provide the emotional security necessary for themselves and their future children (Malivha, 1993, p. 26).

Extract 20
Most if not all young women had no expectations of finding interesting employment or having a career, and saw their future prospects as being confined to the domestic sphere (Preston-Whyte, 1991, p. 35).
The male counterpart in teenage pregnancy is largely absent from the literature, and fathering is mentioned very seldom. This lack of comment on fathering has, until recently, been a feature of the developmental psychology literature as well (Burman, 1997). The recent rise in interest in fatherhood in Britain has to do, according to Alldred (1996), with the change in family structures, in particular with the increase in single-parent families, a trend in evidence in South Africa as well. The ‘threat’ to the nuclear family that this implies has created the conditions of possibility for the rise of fatherhood as a counterpart to motherhood. However, as seen in the above extracts, fathers are depicted as different from mothers. They are represented as adding positive ingredients to the deficient mother-child relationship (in extract 16 the paternal role is depicted as supplementing the maternal one as mothers cannot cope on their own). These include, as evidenced in extract 17, sex role development (for boys), and the masculinised concept of rational cognitive development (see Walkerdine, 1988). This positioning re-produces the masculinity/femininity duality. While mothers are seen as sufficient for the development of a feminine identity in girls, fathers are needed to overlay masculine identity on the potential (dangerous) feminine identity imposed by mothers on boys. Fathers’ ‘influence’ in terms of motivating their children and developing their cognitive abilities emphasises their (fathers’) public role, a role which stands in contradistinction to the tenets of motherhood.

We see in extracts 18 and 19 how fathering is presented as a more encompassing activity than motherhood, which is confined to the infant-mother dyad. In extract 18 the role of decision-making concerning broader issues such as place of abode and financial issues are relegated to the father. In extract 19 the job of providing emotional security for the family (as opposed to the child) is attributed to the father. Where the mothering role is extended beyond the infant-
mother dyad, it is to labour emotionally with regard to the desire or capacity of the father to be responsible and provide for the family (extract 19).

These representations of fatherhood have important gendering effects. Fathers, although enjoying a higher profile than previously, remain excluded from primary care-taking. Mothers, on the other hand, have their roles restricted to the domestic sphere (extract 20), without the powerful aspect of decision-making concerning broader family issues (extract 18), or access to ‘interesting’ economic activity (extract 20). Mothers are thus excluded from the public sphere inhabited by fathers. Fathers, on the other hand, while principally inhabiting the public realm, also occupy the private one, but in a custodian role. This equation of mothering with the private space allows for the installation of psychologised discourse concerning mothering in the lives of women who have children. Women are encouraged to monitor and manage their children’s behaviour and their own interactions with their children in minute detail - an encouragement not levelled at men.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have illustrated how the South African psycho-medical literature is involved in the re-production of particular normative understandings (effects of veridiction) as well as the regulation (effects of jurisdiction) of mothering. The scientific literature, with its claim to truth and efficacious method (Rose, 1992), produces a positive knowledge of the teenage mother and her inadequate mothering practices. What remains invisible are the taken-for-granted assumptions concerning the idealised ‘good’ mother which render the teenage mother, as the pathologised other, visible and cognisable. The ‘skill’ discourse, for instance,
situates teenage mothers as deficient through their youthfulness, while in the dyadic relation the idealised aspect of mothering is silenced.

Rose (1992) delineates privacy as a form of connection between psycho-medical expertise and the regulation of individuals. The literature on teenage pregnancy (as well as the more general literature on mothering) places mothering within the private, domestic sphere, thereby obscuring the relations of power surrounding the mother and child. This perpetuates the ‘patriarchal myth of maternal power’ (Nicolson, 1993, p. 203) which renders marginal mothers culpable for social deviance while excluding them from effective participation in the public sphere. It also masks the regulation of women with children. Psychologised discourses, based on psychology’s claim to truth and efficacy, are installed in the lives and practices of mothers through psychological accounts, child-care manuals, magazines, and advice from service providers. In this respect, the pathologisation of teenage mothers is important. They, along with other marginal mothers, act as the negative, the fall-away, the other, simultaneously providing the legitimation for professionalised intervention and the motivation underlying the encouragement of mothers to manage their mothering practices.

The legitimation of the expert as authority, and hence for professionalised intervention in the lives of teenage mothers, is achieved in a number of ways. The saturation of the literature with Bowlbyism allows the expert to make pronouncements concerning the ‘risks’ and ‘outcomes’ of maternal deprivation, which in turn implies that ameliorating action needs to be taken. The ‘skill’ discourse allows for the endless definition, categorisation and calibration of what constitutes ‘good’ mothering - tasks carried out by the expert. It also allows for the pedagogisation of mothering. This process proceeds not by imposition or overt
regulation but rather by ‘facilitation’ or covert regulation whereby mothers are encouraged to be true to themselves and to manage their behaviour in terms of the tenets of ‘good’ mothering (note that Rose’s (1992) third form of connection between psycho-medical expertise and regulation is autonomy).

The reproduction of mothering in the psychologised literature on teenage pregnancy is intensely gendered. A clear example is the implication that women achieve adulthood firstly in a different way to men (through the conceiving and bearing of children), and secondly through relationship with another (either a man or a child). The relegation of mothering to the private sphere allows for the encouragement of women to monitor, evaluate and manage their mothering practices, an encouragement to which men are not subjected. Fathers, instead, are situated firmly in the public domain; when stepping into the private space, it is to bring the public into this space through the provision of economic and emotional security, the overlaying of masculinised identities and cognitive skills on male children, and the action of decision-making concerning familial matters.

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NOTES

1. I acknowledge that the term ‘revisionist’ may be politically loaded especially in the European context. However, I retain the use of the word here as it is one used in the North American literature (i.e. is not one coined by myself).

REFERENCES


Data references


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