

HAVING A BABY AND BEING IN SCHOOL: RESEARCHING PREGNANT AND PARENTING YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR EDUCATIONAL TRANSITIONS

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Abstract

This paper reports on aspects of the pilot phase of a continuing study of pregnant and parenting young people and their movements in and out of school (and other educational) settings. It presents an overview of the methodological approach employed, data collected and readings of that data. The paper draws on one specific case to identify how young people engage with school during this phase of their lives. This case represents one instance of how young people can see themselves *becoming somebody* in and around other identity work they engage in while pregnant and parenting at school. An insight into the dilemmas encountered in the interpretation of data and the construction of research accounts is also provided through a window on researcher reflections and research team discussions.

Introduction

This paper reports research in progress about pregnant and parenting young people and their educational participation and transitions. The research conducted during 2002 in Geelong, Victoria's second largest city, has grown out of our previous research activity focused on 'at risk' young people and their participation in education and training in the surrounding region (Angwin et al , 2001a & 2001b).

In 2002, The Advertiser, Geelong's daily newspaper, profiled teenage pregnancy as a hot local issue. On one level such media exposure highlights an issue of community interest, while on another it induces a moral panic about deviant risk-taking youth. In two recent examples, The Advertiser has run as a front page story "Teen Girls' Baby Trap" (August 27) and on page three "Pregnancy Centre Helps Girls Just out of Primary School - They're Only 13" (September 3). The articles report that 370 children were born to teenage mothers in the region between 1999-2000 and that there had been a sudden increase in 13 and 14 year-olds seeking pregnancy support in Geelong. While we know quite a lot about pregnant and parenting adolescents and their engagement with schools, training and employment in Australia (Boulden, 2001; Milne-Home et al, 1996) it seems that we need to know more about what is currently happening in Geelong.

In determining a focus for our initial research we were guided by the rationale, objectives and principles put forward by the Association of Women Educators in their Pregnant and Parenting Students Policy (Boulden, 2001). In particular, we have sought to pursue information about how schools and teachers act in maximising opportunities for pregnant and parenting students to complete school. Along with the Association of Women Educators we recognise that "school completion is critical to the quality of life and future life pathways of young mothers and their children" (Boulden, 2001, p.40).

Our research has been based on interviews with young mums and dads at school and school principals, teachers and youth workers in their schools. The interviews have been unstructured and designed to allow the participants to produce accounts 'in their own way' by continuously inviting the narrators to take up responsibility for telling *their* story (Chase, 1995). The interviews and our interpretation of the transcripts have been the catalyst for our exploration of a range of perspectives and theorisations of policy and practice as we come to terms with the particularities of pregnant and parenting young people in Geelong. In addition, these explorations have problematised for us the efficacy of interview-based studies, both from the point of view of revealing new information about pregnant and parenting students at

school, and in generating accounts that are not invisibly saturated by researcher self constructions.

This paper has two purposes. Firstly, it presents some data from the project, specifically about a young woman who remained at school during her pregnancy as a 15 year-old, and who, now a year later, continues on at school as a young parent. Secondly, it presents different readings of the data and the data collection process. The readings, from each member of the research team, present unique perspectives on the life of a young woman and her participation in school as a parenting young person. Taken singly they tell something different about her life and identity. Taken together, they raise as many questions as they do provide settled and unitary descriptions of her material circumstances and her educational life. These questions have encouraged us to look behind our taken for granted assumptions about what we think we know, what we need to know, and how we can go about gathering knowledge about parenting young people at school. Indeed, it is our explorations in these directions that this paper is mostly about.

Stronach and MacLure (1997) have provided an insight into how "a practical exploration of methodology in action" (p.34) can take place through reading multiple portrayals of the same subject against each other. They suggest that when this is done as part of a reflexive consideration of the role that authors play in the construction of a text - a portrait of the research subject - it is possible to engage the *paradox* of why very contextual and uncertain accounts are so easily presented and accepted. This for us has become the significant challenge of our initial research in this project - to explore the relationship between our textual construction of stories of pregnant and parenting young people and our methodological location and posturing.

In what follows we present our attempt to conduct this practical exploration of methodology in action through engagement with the *paradox* of order and disorder in our textual portrayals of a parenting teenager and their life at school. It begins with some interview data and this is followed by three different researcher accounts of that teenager's life at school. These accounts tease out the *paradox* of order and disorder and allow us to reflexively consider the role that we play in the construction of our text. Parts of our conversations together, and with another researcher, are presented as a window on our attempts to "acknowledge that 'we are always on a street corner somewhere' (Richardson, 1992, p.104) and that there are no privileged views on getting at the truth in the generation of research problems, processes, and accounts because these things are, like the researcher, socially situated" (Smyth & Shacklock, 1998, p.7).

Jemma's story - from the interview transcript

Below are three sections from one interview transcript. Two members of the research team, Jennifer and Lyn, conducted the interview with Jemma, a parenting teenager at school, in Year 11, studying for her VCE. At the time of the interview, Jemma was sixteen and her baby, Kaz, was around five months old. In the previous year, she completed Year 10, as a pregnant student, at the same school. Kaz was born in January during the summer vacation and Jemma returned to school as a mum at the start of the new school year in February. Jemma and her boyfriend, Leon, live with her parents and her five siblings, the youngest of whom is three.

The interview covered a wide range of topics, including: getting pregnant, contraception and safe sex, the birth of the baby, being at school while pregnant and parenting, and educational aspirations and pathways. The sections of transcript below focus on being at school and having a baby.

Transcript - Section 1

Jemma: I had her in January...

Lyn: ...yeah so if you're working back 9 months it would have been...yeah it would have been April.

Jemma: Okay April, yeah. I had school that time. The only good thing was I was due to have her on the 2nd of January which was in the holidays so the last bit of my pregnancy were at the holidays when I was the fattest so at school I just...everyone told me I could wear casuals to school and stuff but I thought I would get zoned out as a different person so I wore the school uniform and wore extra big clothes right up until the last day. But school was fine apart from sometimes I had my little outbursts, I was crying. But that was really good and the kids always use to ask me stuff about it and they were getting really excited and I sort of gave them and insight into it as well which was good. So yeah.

Lyn: So how did the teachers react at school?

Jemma: The teachers were actually good I think cause a lot of my favourite teachers are like health and human teachers and they've all got information out of me and books and stuff like that and they always ask me to go and talk to people and that so its been good.

Lyn: So they've sort of got you to be a stand in teacher when it comes to pregnancy?

Jemma: Yeah and for our year 11 we had a renewals, a camp and our class had to follow and they told me I could take Kaz with me if I wanted but it was going to be to hard cause the transport of her down there so I didn't go but I was sort of to tired at that time to go anyway. But yeah they've been really good.

Lyn: So in terms of your school work and being able to attend school while you were pregnant so you were fairly healthy up until the birth?

Jemma: Yeah.

Lyn: Were you tired or did you find that you couldn't concentrate or...

Jemma: Not really, I lost my memory I reckon as most pregnant people say. I don't know why, it does though. I sort of haven't been a person that's strived to always get their homework in or anything but yeah I did my homework and stuff and handed it in but I don't want to

be sort of zoned out as a person that gets special treatment cause I've got a baby and everything cause I think that's unfair for the rest of the students. But they've been fairly good.

Lyn: So you were in year 10 when you were actually carrying the baby?

Jemma: Yeah.

Lyn: And you're in year 11 now?

Jemma: Yep.

Transcript - Section 2

Lyn: So you were talking about the school and what sort of response they had to you in terms of helping you after the baby and you said you didn't think much.

Jemma: Oh they talked to you and everything and like they gave me one of the support welfare people and he talked to me and he said if I need anything just to come to him but I haven't really. But I went to our coordinator, the VCE coordinator and dropped a subject cause the homework was getting to be too much and [not doing] this extra subject just gives me time to catch up on everything and they were really good about that and my attendance has been pretty poor lately cause of Kaz, she's been sick and stuff like that and I've been tired. But they've been really good with that, they're just like trying to keep me going and stuff.

Lyn: Now is there any particular teacher that you would sort of single out as being the most helpful or have they all been?

Jemma: No I think they've all been really good. My English teacher has been really good. Like sometimes I won't do some work like if I miss a lesson or something and they did some work he's go oh we did this but its not important so don't worry about it and stuff like that. Whereas some of the other teachers, like my photography teacher, he's just goes its due, I don't care if you're away and its like oh, okay.

Transcript - Section 3

Lyn: How important do you think it is for you to finish your VCE?

Jemma: Yeah its pretty...cause I'm basically like with my half year to go now so I figure its only another year

and I past, might has well do it. Just to get it and say I did it. Like I'm doing it now so I should be able to do it next year.

Lyn: So your ideas about the place of education changed over the times you've had Kaz or did you always think you would finish VCE and go on to do something else?

Jemma: Not really. I was pretty like I don't know what I'm going to do. And I was considering just leaving at year 11 and getting a job and then I figured I'm tired enough as it is. There's school and I can just take days off to just rest sometimes and stuff so just wait, do year 12 then take a year off or get a job and then go into my course.

Lyn's story - interviewing Jemma at the end of a long and desolate sort of road

Jennifer and I conducted the interview with Jemma and then when Jennifer had to leave early I interviewed Jemma's live-in boyfriend and the father of their child Leon. The sense of 'all girls together' created by us jointly in Jemma's interview was of course no longer present in Leon's. I am a middle-aged woman (perhaps only slightly older than his step-mum who is difficult? Certainly older than Jemma's mum) interviewing a 16 year old boy(?) in an open kitchen/dining room area. Concrete floors, no floor coverings, messy kitchen, messy table, continuous interruptions. The house is at the end of a long and desolate sort of road. Lots of paddocks. New houses some with established gardens, not this one. Younger girl and slightly older boy come into the kitchen to make jam sandwiches, come and stare, smiling shyly. This happens in Jemma's interview as well but unlike Leon she tries to shoo them into the next room. The girl leaves, the boy goes to the far end of the room to fiddle with a computer - Jemma asks him to go but he comes back again in Leon's interview to make noise on the computer. Leon ignores him. Jemma's father hangs around as well until he is made aware of the fact that we are recording. Have a feeling that he just wanted to hear what we were saying. It just so happens that he comes in when I am asking Leon questions about unsafe sex. Leon shifts uncomfortably.

Jemma's mum figures prominently in the life of the family. She doesn't work but does 'courses' and people ask her 'to do jobs and stuff'. Jemma's father works in a local factory. The impression is that Jemma's mother is a bit 'arty' although it is not evident in the house. The overall impression is of a family struggling - new house in the backblocks - old furnishings, no garden, messy. Not made more pleasant by the grey, wet and windy day. Jemma's mother arrives home and is introduced. Another disruption. The second eldest, a boy, is going for a job interview at the local Safeway. Typical gawky boy, won't look me in the eye. She wants him to borrow a pair of trousers from Leon. Gets into a conversation with me about how she really wants him to get this Safeway job. Crosses herself as she says this. She is a friendly woman, rather worn looking, old trackies. Offers me a drink. I opt for tea but they haven't got any. Coffee will be fine. The interview with Leon is finished really. I am annoyed at too many interruptions. I have this feeling that there is more to Leon. Of course this is always the case but I think I would have got something different, maybe more honest (?) if we were alone. Maybe not. Jemma comes back and we make small talk. The coffee finally arrives - plunger, nice coffee, nice cup. I'm surprised. Jemma's mum wants to know what the research is about. I do my spiel. She says we should be looking into the support available for the mothers of young mums. She talks about the trauma of finding out Jemma is pregnant, the subsequent disruption to family life. The fact that they feel they have

to support them but really she wished that they would just leave and make a go of it on their own. Of course they aren't going to leave - where else would they get it so good she says.

I've talked to Jennifer since about this research 'troubling me'. Can't quite put my finger on it. One of the things is about my assumptions about the family. I am always saying to my students, my daughter, anyone that will listen really - "Don't make assumptions". Yet I was surprised at the coffee plunger. I was surprised at the 'happy family'. I was taken aback by the concrete floors - shades of my childhood? Bare, cracked linoleum - not as many siblings but a much smaller house so it always felt crowded anyway. House in Melbourne's western suburbs - another kind of cultural desert. Moving so far away, yet so close.

Geoff's story - constructing Jemma as a student just like all the rest

To me it would seem that there are three storylines or narratives that run through Jemma's story. These storylines maintain an individual presence throughout but, at the same time, they are regularly intertwined (sometimes tightly and sometimes not) in the narrative that is Jemma's story. Firstly, there is a storyline about teenage pregnancy-parenting. It tells about Jemma, Leon, her family and their relationships, about the birth of Kaz, and about the contested social terrain of being a teenage parent. Secondly, there is a storyline about schooling. This tells about relationships with teachers, about supports for students who are different, and about coping with the rigours of being at school as a parenting student. Finally, there is a multidimensional storyline about identity. In this one I can see how Jemma works courageously at putting together a secure identity around being a teenager, a mum and a student.

1. A storyline about teenage pregnancy-parenting

Becoming pregnant produces fear because it transgresses the boundaries of what might be considered acceptable teenage behaviour. Of course, these boundaries are drawn around assumptions that deny the sexual lives of young people. Nevertheless, I can see the potential personal and relational cost of this transgression in Jemma contacting Pregnancy Help before talking to her parents, in her uncertainty about her parent's reaction, and in the pain (and frustration) experienced from being subjected to the judgemental gaze of those who see teen parents in a negative light.

2. A storyline about schooling

I see a familiar plot about how schools offer support to pregnant and parenting students and how this support extends only so far and in certain directions. There is counselling and support from individual teachers who take an interest in Jemma and Kaz and offer 'to be there'. Informal support with learning and assessment does exist but this does not always translate into a recognition that schedules and patterns of participation for most are also likely inappropriate for the pregnant and parenting student.

I can see that the school supports Jemma as *a student different to the rest*, that is as a young parent, by permitting her, for example, to bring Kaz to Year 11 camp and to wear casual clothes when she was pregnant but it struggled to build from this to the next stage of supporting her as *a student just like all the rest*. To do this required recognition that Jemma had the same desire for learning and school success as other students but that this desire was translated into practice through different life circumstances. While the school is good at providing personal support, it cannot provide educational support through additional (or extended) opportunities to do work missed and to complete and hand-up work on different time-lines. For me, this is

crucial because it lies at the heart of taking responsibility for ensuring success as opposed to fiddling around the edges and hoping that Jemma can marshal the stamina and personal resources to cope like a 'normal' student. It is likely that systemic constraints and rules imposed upon the school from outside do work against educational supports of the kind stated above from happening. That the school cannot (or will not) respond in this way leads to Jemma dropping a subject, not going to camp, missing classes and not doing the same work as others and so on. Ultimately, I would consider that this is unsatisfactory because Jemma's educational experience is diminished because it is not the same in fundamental ways. Whether intended or not, or explicitly stated or not, both Jemma and the school operate from an expectation that she needs to conduct her participation in learning *as if she was not pregnant or parenting*. To me this is an ontological contradiction and sets up the conditions for failure, the consequences of which must be borne by Jemma alone.

Being treated as, and developing an identity as, *a student just like all the rest*, is important to Jemma and it is reflected in her desire to wear the school uniform and not casuals (as permitted). This is clearly evident in her statement that: "I don't want to be zoned out as a person that gets special treatment 'cause I've got a baby and everything 'cause I think that's unfair for the rest of the students".

3. *A storyline about identity*

Jemma has to weave together narratives of identity about being a mum, a student, a daughter, a partner, not to mention being a 16 year old! If we insert 'good' in front of each of these identities, it only highlights the complexity of the task. For instance, how can you be a good student if you miss class (or don't hand-up your homework) because you are tired from being up all night being a good mum to your sick child? There are many similar contradictions that occur on a daily basis. For example, what does it mean when school says let us help you because we know you are a mum (and most of our students are not) but then says that you have to do exactly what the others must do in completing your assessable work? And what does a teacher mean in saying don't worry about what the others did in class when you were away because it's not important - is this supportive, or this exclusion? I feel I must ask these questions even if they seem to cast a shadow over the school and its support to Jemma.

Jennifer's story - feeling troubled by Jemma as I drove away

Let me tell you about one of my research encounters this week that I find deeply troubling. For some time now a group of colleagues and I have been concerned about the ways in which very early pregnancy and parenting most often results in the young person dropping out of school. With a sociological hat on, we can all understand some of the reasons for this as indeed we can as parents. No one tells you how difficult life becomes when you are looking after a new baby! I can't begin to imagine what it must be like if you are fifteen, and at one moment wanting to go and hang out with your friends, but now, you have this baby to look after and you are still a kid! Research tells us of the complexity of young people's lives, the factors that cluster around young people who are at risk of becoming early school leavers. Good longitudinal data shows us that the long term prospects for early school leavers are now compounded by years of part time and casual low skilled jobs. Women fare worse than men in the long term and often remain welfare dependent for anything up to twenty years. Research also tells us that some schools cope much better than others in providing environments that are supportive of young parents, but still most girls leave school during the pregnancy with only a minority returning.

Research also tells us that the 'typical' teenage mother is a troubled young person, usually from a very disruptive family background, frequently not living with her biological parents, often having spent some time in care. The list goes on. In school this 'typical' teenager is less likely to have made strong relationships with teachers and the school in general, is often disruptive, frequently truants and is making little academic progress.

Nothing could have prepared me for this interview. To start with we were driving south, when statistically the teenage mothers live in the north. We were driving through better suburbs, with new houses, roses in the gardens. The door was opened by a young woman wearing school uniform, an elite girls school, the picture of a young woman who would complete secondary school, move on to university, end up with a career, marriage, family and living in a new house with roses in the garden.

I was overwhelmed by the life inside. Every where I looked there were children, and cats and dogs barking and an overwhelming smell of cats urine. But above all there was a certain quietness and sense of calm. Children were watching TV, quite unconcerned to see strange adults walking through. We went out to the back, a large family room overlooking still more garden. All was new and neat and tidy and apart from an extremely long table with pews, no signs of the nine or ten people living here. Here was the young mother, making us tea in her school uniform, discussing assignments and subject choice, before we moved on to why were we there.

J became pregnant at 15, whilst her youngest sibling could have only been less than 2. She was in a relationship with her first serious boy friend. They are still together, living at home with her mum and dad and all her younger brothers and sisters. And now her baby too. So now J parents have taking in the boyfriend and the baby, with five or six younger children all still at school.

As this was gradually sinking in to me, our chosen quiet interview space was continually interrupted by a constant stream of small children, coming through, looking in the fridge with that air of expectancy that all children have on coming home from school and looking hopefully into the fridge, before resorting to the favourite standby, a white bread sandwich. All this was done quietly, so unlike my own children, who managed to create, in me at least, a sense of chaos on coming home, bags and clothes everywhere, and lots of demanding talk.

And then the baby arrived, from day care, with her dad, the boyfriend, and j dad, and more kids. I felt on safer ground here, with a baby, happy and well cared for, sitting with us at the table, quite unconcernedly looking around at all the people, the kids and animals.

Here is a happy story, in part. J's story is not like the other stories we have gathered, where the young mother is really struggling to hold her life together, struggling with accommodation, childcare, no longer in a relationship with the father, uncertain about her own future. At the same time, having to take on all those adult responsibilities of parenting, that I remember finding so difficult in a fully supported situation.

J plans to complete school, to continue on, to further study, to get a job, to move into her own place. And will all these things fall into place for her? Possibly; probably, who knows? She still has to finish school, with her daughter growing up and wanting to spend more time with her. Will her boyfriend stay on at school, or will the desire, for him in particular, to move out of J home into their own place, lead him to cut short those long term goals, for the sake of a place of their own? How long will J's parents be able to keep supporting them, as their other children become teenagers and perhaps more demanding?

As I drove away from the interview I wondered why I was feeling so deeply troubled. Here was a success story. A safe, secure, happy baby, the young parents still at school, living in good accommodation, surrounded by a supportive family. They had reflected on their situation, and were planning for a future together, a future that included further education and training, and no more babies in the short term.

But it would take the slightest beat of a butterfly's wing to throw all these plans into chaos, and leave this young mother and her baby with a different story.

I feel so lost; I am trying not to be judgemental, but am I? Is it that my experience of family was so markedly different, and yet formative of me in all sorts of ways I don't understand, that what some other researchers may see quite differently and in a far more positive light? Is it that my experience of family having just sat with a happy, intact tribe, so limited?

How can a teenager see her life when she is also a mother, with all the demands that places on you. How can she live out her youth, her supposedly relatively carefree years? What made them believe so vehemently, that this simple accident of conception had only one trajectory? What is going to happen in the future? Will she suddenly wake up at 30, and wonder where her life has gone, as her own daughter is entering the same years that changed her life so profoundly?

Is it that I look at my own daughter and her friends from school and university. Several have had babies and are now no longer are with the fathers. Their lives seem difficult, so difficult. Their babies are in full time care as they struggle to continue with their education or manage a job.

I believe that childcare should be easily accessible and available for all mothers, regardless of their situation and that for many mothers and children fulltime childcare is the best option, indeed for survival. Why is being a fulltime parent becoming a privilege of the wealthy, rather than a financially supported viable option for all parents?

A team story - talking amongst ourselves

After writing these accounts about and from the research, we shared them with each other and then had a conversation about what we had tried to accomplish in those accounts. This conversation included a discussion about what the stories contained and what they did not - that is, we talked about what had been left out, either intentionally, or incidentally, and how what was included told versions of Jemma's story and each of our own stories. The following is taken from a transcript of our conversation.

Lyn: It could be. I guess the thing is and we've only got...and this points to it, her absences and the silences in interviewing situations you know they raise more questions than they actually...

Jenny: ...and it's the way we actually read what's on the page, that we're reading it so totally differently.

Geoff: And I guess it's also what we bring in, in terms of our other experiences of what happens in schools and so on as well.

Jenny: Exactly and I suppose I'm reading that with a degree of charity towards the teacher.

Lyn: Yeah. I think it's interesting because you're actually taking the teacher's perspective there and you're taking the student's perspective for what you see as a likely story.

Geoff: Yeah I guess I am and I guess part of that is...even though there's a lot of positive stuff about Julia's story. I actually see Julia as being fairly vulnerable and not very far off being chewed up and spat out by the school. Once you make a commitment to going back to school and to doing things and then you start thinking oh I can't cope with this, I'm going to have to drop this subject and you rationalise it away with that I wasn't really interested, it was boring but I'll find something else. Well, why did she choose it in the first place, she must have made a decision about it being appropriate in some shape or form. Once those kinds of accommodating decisions are made in order to actually try and survive in the system then it's really hard to reverse that trend. I mean I think that's the case. So she's on the slippery slope, that's what I read into that and I guess that's one of the reasons why I take her side to it.

Lyn: The student different from the rest stuff that you've written about. You've written about it in a negative sort of sense, I'm just wondering if there is an alternative reading as well because even though there are negative connotations to that in terms of marking her out as different when she said in a couple of spaces that she doesn't want to be. There's also a hint that it's not all that bad to be different because the teachers are actually coming and asking her to talk to other students about her experiences. So in some ways you could read that as a positive validation of the fact she's a young parent and has something to say about that experience that would be useful to the other students in that context and in the processes of identity formation. I guess around these sorts of crises that could also be a positive validation for her that being a parent is not all that bad in those circumstances.

Geoff: I agree. It's never black or white. It's always a dance between the black and white you know ...

Lyn: ...and it's a dominant reading.

Geoff: But there's a dominant reading probably which flows through from go to whoa I guess and.... I mean my view would be that there is a positive to that because it probably makes her feel valued and it probably makes her feel as though, what in many other readings is a negative experience, you know being a teenage mum, actually has a positive spin off here

because my knowledge is valued and the teacher sees it as important and that it's useful, but in the dominant reading throughout what she says is, that she doesn't want to be zoned out and engaging in that process zones her out. So even though there are the positives in terms of the major narrative that she's weaving for herself that's actually in contradiction to that.

Ian's story - conversing with us about our research troubles

We had a conversation with Professor Ian Stronach, a research scholar visiting our institution, about our project and about our different interpretations of Jemma's story. Ian seemed well placed to provide yet another perspective on our multiple readings of one research story. After all, Stronach and MacLure (1997) had written, in their paper 'Jack in two boxes: a postmodern perspective on the transformation of persons into portraits', about the methodological and epistemological challenges that are presented when researchers prepare separate accounts out of the same empirical material. In that paper they said that "narratives that promote coherence, singularity and closure, and which aim to set up a cosy camaraderie with the reader, are ultimately conservative and uncritical of prevailing ideological and representational arrangements" (1997, p.57). Being uncritical of prevailing arrangements is the last thing we would hope for and so it is the disruption of coherence, singularity and closure that our three stories, sitting juxtaposed, we hoped, would achieve. Each story tells of something that the others are silent upon, and in each telling we, in turn, deliberately omit something that we knew about Jemma so as to serve our purpose for a particular ideological and representational arrangement. But, what would Ian have to say on this issue?

Ian thought that we had each 'mobilised' a different context to read the data and that this is reflected in the way in which we have constructed Jemma and ourselves in our accounts. We cannot undo or disentangle from the interviews/experiences that we have had in the past with young people like Jemma and Leon, when engaging with them in person, or in 'text' through the transcript. He said that there were limited opportunities for us as researchers to develop a sense of self because the interview situation was tightly proscribed in its conduct and in its textual unfolding on the page.

Some of the themes that emerged in conversation with Ian:

- Ordered versus disordered text - Geoff's sociological version contrasts with Lyn's and Jennifer's reflexive and troubled musings.
- Embodied versus disembodied researcher - we see Lyn and Jennifer as joint constructors of the interview text against Geoff as a reader (and subsequent re-creator) of that text.
- The moral economy of the school versus the educational? The school is going out of its way to help but within the normative goals of the school - does this lead to production of guilt for Jemma in her double failure (in being pregnant and failing school).
- Is there an active-passive tension between the educational-welfare at work. (Jemma has to come to them when she needs help? What would she need from them? More hours in the day?)
- Parenting students are vulnerable - often they are forced into managing discourses of risk and individualism (such as teen versus super mum).
- The different readings/positions. For Jennifer and Lyn what is the advantage, if any, as a researcher in 'being there'? Are they over-invested in their classed gendered selves - and does this enhance or constrain their analytic approach?

- Do researchers shift to prescriptive selves when trying to work out answers and solutions?

Our conversation with Ian didn't provide the comfort of certainty and closure. Ian didn't assuage our angst, nor did he explain away the things which were troubling us. Instead he led us into talking about contradictions and into an interrogative mode of engagement with our own texts - of reading against the grain. Lyn, why did you make this into a story about mums (and coffee)? Geoff, what are you doing when you dismiss the worth of the support the school provides? Jennifer, why is this about daughters and the loss of carefree youth? The answers, we know, tell us as much about ourselves as they tell us about Jemma! In getting us to face up to these questions, Ian has encouraged us to embrace rather than flee the messiness of this troubling research and our troubling texts. This means recognising which 'street corner' we are standing on and that once we step off the kerb of assumed centrality (and neutrality) we have exposed our starting point for both us and those we walk towards to clearly see. In this project it has meant recognising that our street corners are classed, gendered and ideologically located and that what we do when we converse, think and write as part of our research cannot leave the legacies of these locations behind.

Where to from here?

In this project we have interviewed young mums and young dads who are at school and the school principals and youth workers that they engage with in their schools. From the beginning this research was always a way-in to conducting inquiry and to learning to theorise about the educational participation of pregnant and parent young people. It has revealed to us just as much about the process of researching this cohort of young people as it has about the particularities of material and educational circumstances.

Moreover, it has revealed to us that, because the category of young people 'at risk' is a social construction (Fine, 1995, cited in Proweller, 2000) and often offensive to young people seeking to build and maintain identities as responsible parents and successful students (Milne-Holme et al, 1996), our appropriation of the category in the conceptualisation of pregnant and parenting school attenders is highly problematic. This is especially the case when such appropriation of the category cannot be disentangled from our desire, as privileged academics rich in cultural and educational capital, to describe and contain their difference in ways that suit our personal and theoretical agendas for reflexive and sociological analysis. In the end, we need to answer the question: who is producing the knowledge here and to what end?

We feel that this will require us to move toward "looking *to* pregnant teens, rather than *at* them" (Proweller, 2000, p.115) in order to simultaneously engage with what have been described as *canonical and autobiographical narratives* (Kirkman et al, 2001) where the voices of pregnant and parenting teenagers can drive a process of *re-writing/-righting* their lives (Proweller, 2000). Conceptually, this will mean beginning to theorise conterminous discourses around difference and sameness for these young people and their participation in education (Kelly, 2000). Methodologically this will mean moving away from a reliance on interview studies and developing less researcher dominated settings in which media and other public discourses (including those about education) can be contested as part of knowledge production about *having a baby and being at school*.

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