

The Phenomenon of Teenage and Underage Pregnancy in the UK
Bachelor Thesis
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This thesis deals with the very complex issue of how teenage and underage pregnancy is reflected in British culture. It begins with an historical overview – first exploring the preoccupation with the 'deviant, irresponsible and dangerous' qualities attributed to „the fallen woman“ (p. 7) in the 19th century, and then proceeding to look at how the issue of underage pregnancy became an important aspect of the political rhetoric of three post-war Prime Ministers (Thatcher, Major and Blair). It then examines „The Chav Phenomenon“, which began in the 21st century, and also considers contemporary cultural representations of teenage pregnancies in the media, above all the popular Little Britain character, Vicky Pollard.

The topic of the thesis is fascinating. The UK has the highest rate of teenage pregnancies in Europe (though the reason for this fact is not explored in any depth) and the author does show, in what is the strongest section of the work, that the figure of the pregnant teenager has loomed large in post-war UK political rhetoric as a signifier of moral decadence and societal breakdown.

My main concern with the thesis is its lack of coherence at times. The issue is very large and complex – touching in particular on issues of gender and class – and many interesting and suggestive points are made, but not explored or connected well. In the chapter on The Fallen Woman, for example, the author quotes Abrams with regard to the danger an unmarried pregnant woman posed to society, one main factor being that she was „not subject to a man within marriage“ (p.7). This very interesting aspect of the denigration of „the fallen woman“ is not explored or developed at all, although the author sees a direct connection between this historical construct and the present day; „teenage mothers ... are somehow treated as fallen women, not only by representation in the media but also by the new ideal of womanhood and femininity“ (p. 8). Does the author think that one of the reasons for the denigration of contemporary teenage mothers is connected to their freedom from male control through marriage?

Though, as stated, the section looking at the varying attitudes of politicians to teenage pregnancy is one of the strongest of the thesis (though the section on Tony Blair is extremely perfunctory), there is also a certain lack of clarity. The author states (p. 16) that Blair's words „could be considered as the starting point of the denigration of the young mothers“ - in what way, given that she has already outlined the ways in which both Thatcher and Major saw single mothers as „enemies of decent society“ (p. 15)? And in what ways did Tony Blair's attitude significantly differ from his predecessors?

The author rightly considers teenage pregnancy in terms of class, though the chapter on „The Chav Phenomenon“ sits uneasily within the main body of the thesis and the relevance of focusing on it is not sufficiently justified, beyond a rather general „Chavs, the underclass and teenage pregnancy are topics popular in various media“. The following section on media treatment of teenage pregnancy is also rather unfocused. The growth of what has been called 'poverty porn', i.e. reality TV shows following the lives of working-class people is indeed a fascinating recent phenomenon, but it is in itself a very large topic and there seems to be some confusion and lack of focus in discussing the issue. On p. 23 the author says that teenage pregnancy „is presented by TV as a moral cautionary tale“ and also „the shows do not seem to be criticising the phenomenon“. Which does the author feel to be generally the case?

The author of the thesis carried out extensive research in looking at this topic, and despite its lack of cohesion and occasional contradictions I recommend it for acceptance and, if defended well, a mark

of 2.

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