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Stereotypes of Teenage Mothers in UK Reality Shows

Master's thesis

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Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on 17th of December 2018

Pavína Moore

References

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Abstract

This thesis captures and describes the stereotypes of teenage and underage mothers regularly represented in British and American reality shows, broadcasted in the United Kingdom. The task of this paper is to explore and define the most frequent stereotypes presented by these TV shows on randomly selected samples. The thesis is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the phenomenon of teenage and underage mothers in the UK as a result of underclass demonisation, poverty shaming and social stigma in the context of British culture and society. The second part of this thesis applies the theoretical findings and analyses the common stereotypes represented and displayed in particular reality shows broadcasted in the UK using qualitative content analysis.

Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce zachycuje a popisuje stereotypizaci náctiletých a nezletilých matek, která se pravidelně objevuje v britských a amerických reality shows vysílaných ve Velké Británii. Úkolem této diplomové práce je prozkoumat a definovat stereotypy, které se nejčastěji v těchto pořadech objevují pomocí kvalitativní obsahové analýzy. Práce je rozdělena na dvě části. První se zaměřuje na fenomén těhotenství u náctiletých a nezletilých matek v Británii jako důsledku démonizace, zostuzování chudoby a společenského stigmatu v kontextu britské kultury a společnosti. Druhá část práce tyto teoretické poznatky aplikuje a analyzuje nejčastější stereotypy, které jsou přítomné v konkrétních reality shows vysílaných ve Velké Británii.

Keywords

Reality TV, reality show, teenage pregnancy, underage pregnancy, class, United Kingdom, stereotypes, underclass, taboo, Fallen Women, Folk Devils, moral panics, poverty porn, qualitative content analysis.

Klíčová slova

Reality TV, reality show, těhotenství náctiletých, těhotenství u nezletilých, třída, Velká Británie, stereotypy, underclass, tabu, padlé ženy, Folk Devils, morální panika, poverty porn, kvalitativní obsahová analýza.

Title

Stereotypes of Teenage Mothers in UK Reality Shows

Název práce

Stereotypizace náctiletých matek v britských reality shows

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1. Introduction – Teen Mothers as a Product of Society

In this chapter, I will tackle the problem of teenage pregnancy as a social construction as well as a product of society and explore the complexity of the problem making. The main focus will be on the negative social connotation often brought up when dealing with such an elaborate issue. First of all, I would like to reach out to sociology for a short explanation of the theory of the set of beliefs based on social constructionism. The theory of social constructionism feels the most relevant to the content of my work examination of teenage mothers as a social construct with strong ties to the past and will serve as a base for my further research related to underage pregnancy.

The social construction of reality is a core concept in sociology. It refers to the process whereby people create, through their actions and interactions a shared reality that is experienced as objectively factual and subjectively meaningful. As Bell (2018) puts it: “The principle of social constructionism or theory that all reality and meaning is subjective and created through dynamic interactions with other individuals and groups”. The social constructionist perspective advocates that individuals and their differences are created or constructed through social processes (e.g. political, religious, and economic) rather than an innate quality within the individual. Furthermore, the categorisation of individuals into group explains more about how society functions than about individuals. Social construct, in a broader perspective, resulting from interaction and based on human agreement confirms the existence of fact or reality in order to understand the objective world.

According to Creswell (2017) social constructionism is a world view, where individuals develop subjective meaning of their experience and significances, though often contaminated historically and socially, and by that are directed by that towards objects or things, striving for understanding of the world.

The concept of social construction of reality was introduced by sociologists Berger and Luckmann in 1966, who claimed that a human as a member of a particular society, lives in constant interaction with the surrounding social world. Moreover, they emphasise the idea

that society is actively and creatively produced by human beings, who then interpret and give names to societal interactions. “That is, the developing human being not only interrelates with a particular natural environment, but with a specific cultural and social order, which is mediated to him by the significant others who have charge of him. Not only is the survival of the human infant dependent upon certain social arrangements, the direction of his organismic development is socially determined. From the moment of birth, man's organismic development, and indeed a large part of his biological being as such, are subjected to continuing socially determined interference” (Berger, and Luckmann: 66).

Whether teenage pregnancy is glamorised or a subject of shaming by various TV shows, tabloids or the general public, it is a phenomenon that serves as an umbrella covering up further societal, economic, educational and health issues. Moreover, the institution of underage parenthood is historically surrounded by controversies, myths and sensations that are developed further by society. As Weed observes, the empirical results claiming otherwise are often ignored (Weed et al., 2015: 25).

The construction of a phenomenon causes inconsistency in the establishment and the creation of distorted views such as association with behaviour problems, additional cost for taxpayers, the institution of mothering, especially myths of pregnancy out of wedlock, images of troubled children, “bad mothering”, age-inappropriate sexual desire, the disgrace of loss of innocence, mitigating the chances for educational and professional achievements, contribution to the society and welfare problem and last but not least, popular culture falsely reinforcing the problematics through the optics of media.

These are the themes that shatter the general beliefs in the ideal set of life paths that one should follow in order to become a good citizen of society. Young mothers or pregnant teenagers do contravene this traditionally designed trajectory of life completely.

All the anomalies listed above are existent in the institution of Western late modern teen parenthood. “Teen pregnancy is today viewed primarily through public health and/or socioeconomic lenses, it has never been completely divorced from its original construction

– as an indicator of failure to adhere to social, religious, and moral values” (Fonda, Eni and Guimond, 2018).

Behavioural problems and a lack of control over sexuality are widely associated with teenage mothers and bring us to ideological problems with morality and moral panic over reproduction, the behaviour of youth and the concern over the behavioural and cognitive readiness of youngsters for the complexity of raising children. Moreover, as noted by Fonda, teenage pregnancy offends a morality which can identify children only by separating them from adults (Fonda, Eni and Guimond, 2018).

Not only do moral and ideological beliefs enhance the general demonisation of young mothers. Weed, et al. (2015) also seek to classify early childbearing as a scientifically constructed problem by analysing over 40 major studies of pregnant and parenting teens, of adolescents and emerging adults, and adults in later life, some of whom were teen parents. Weed, Nicholson and Farris (2015) highlight the fact that the investigators themselves facing their own beliefs and experiences will affect the conducted research and the potential outcome might lead to biased interpretations.

The authors point out that both types of studies, be it qualitative or quantitative, carry over certain ambiguities as well as being criticised for subjective and biased interpretation while overlooking what the teenagers themselves have to say. Insufficiencies, risks and the strengths on the other hand of both methods should be taken into account when drawing any conclusions. Whereas quantitative studies have been criticised for ignoring the voice of teen parents and their children, qualitative studies often detail unique and complex experiences of teen parents. In contrast to these qualitative studies that give voice to the actual thoughts and feeling of teens, “experiences of young people are often lost in quantitative reviews” (Weed, et al., 2015: 29).

Besides, there is risk that various motivations and interests of numerous stakeholders coming from governmental agencies, healthcare organisations, healthcare agencies, private companies and social scientists, who do not cooperate and have different goals, can lead to inconsistency and dysfunction of the outcomes. “In order for the research process to

effectively achieve its goal of uncovering important truths about pregnant and parenting teens that can be used to optimise individual and societal development, stakeholders need to work together” (Weed, et al., 2015: 31).

Another significant factor contributing towards creation of problematics of teenage pregnancy as a product of society is the one of media reflection and continuous demonisation of the girls and consequently the young fathers. Not only the media, but popular culture today is overly preoccupied by sexuality that is exposed to almost everyone in the Western, so-called developed world. As it was described (Boseley, 2018) “Sex sells underwear, perfume, cars and almost anything else you want it to sell. Sex pervades our magazines, newspapers, literature, music and films. Sex is the most powerful force we know”.

To balance the exposure to the pressure is uneasy and challenging for an adult person, yet how difficult is for teenagers to cope with messages about the simplified world, unreal values and body images and lifestyle. To keep a reasonable distance from the simplified picture of the world and creation of artificial needs for the sole purpose of profits and sales is difficult, and requires strength, experience and education that the youngsters are still in the process of acquiring.

As we will see in the further chapters, the phenomenon of teenage pregnancies has been a massive and persistent part of British culture and society over time. The impact of the media and the associated problems will be further analysed and examined in chapter three where I will closely look into the taboo created by British media.

2. Concept of Class in Sociology (Marx, Weber and Goldthorpe)

This chapter on key sociological term of class and its importance within British society will be best shown in by the first and classical theory of Marx, followed by Weber and compared and contrasted with another non-marxistic and the contemporary newweberian

sociologist John Goldthorpe, to support the description of the class structures of modern Britain.

The term class; as defined by Deery, and Press (2017) refers to one's position within a social structure of unequal access to available resources; material, social and political. Therefore class can be understood as a group of people within a society who hold the same socioeconomic status and participate on the assets mentioned above to a similar extent. Besides being important in social theory, the concept of class as a collection of individuals sharing similar economic circumstances has been widely used in censuses and in studies of social mobility, is closely connected with the Industrial Revolution era and the massive impact the industrial revolution had on the organization of society. The major change brought by the industrial revolution to the system and as defined by Edgell (2004) "is the one of the creation of new classes in a transformed class structure and the tendency for class positions to be allocated on the basis of ability rather than birth. Defining class and analysing class relationships in the context of a rapidly changing society became a central issue among founding sociologists, and controversies surrounding the concept of class have continued unabated to this day" (Edgell, 2004:1).

The crucial term that leads throughout Marx's work is the one of class conflict as the key moment that enables social change as well as the result of class division. The conflict takes place between the two class based stratification models grounded on the participation on production process that forms the basis of class construction creating fundamental antagonism and clash of interests. Marx's definition of class is based on the access of a social group to means of production. He defined class in terms of those who own the means of production and those who do not (with a residual class in between) (Macionis, Plummer, 2012: 300). Therefore, according to Marx, class is a group of people, who has the same access to means of production, those who own these means, Marx calls capitalists and bourgeoisie, those who sell their labour power; workers or proletariat. Marx concluded that socialism would overcome the inherently conflictual nature of capitalism and inaugurate a classless society (Edgell, 2004: 11).

It is necessary to highlight that while Marx's central idea to the class is classified as economic determinism that sees that the economic results and needs are the factor determining the development of society and all aspects of civilisation, whereas Weber is the founder of culturally focused approach, that centres culture as the determiner. Weber highlighted that validation of class (apart the participation on power) also involves cultural status or social prestige that is indicated by lifestyle and associational groupings (Deery, Press, 2017:15).

The culturally oriented approach was followed and further advanced by Bourdieu (1977) or Goldthorpe (1987). Bourdieu later enhanced the cultural approach by the addition of social capital to Weber's cultural capital and developed the framework based on description of four different types of capital - economic, symbolic, social and cultural. To sum up, according to Weber, class is not defined by the economic indicators, moreover, class is defined by prestige as a cultural capital.

Moving into times after the Second World War, the late twentieth and twenty first Century capitalism, where the world and the nature of employment relationships are found in different position than the one of Marx's times, Goldthorpe has developed some of Weber's ideas about social class and established system that classifies the population in different social classes. The concept of market situation to distinguish different class position – skills, advantage at market situation of workers, took account the work situation (job security, the control over work or supervision of other workers).

Goldthorpe's class theory is the one being considered as current paradigm when it comes to classification of classes and the class scheme and is widely used not only in the UK, but can be found in Europe or North America. The labour has changed and the increase of desire for education and training, thus technical and professional skills are the main theoretical premise behind when capturing the notion of class.

As Goldthorpe (2016) writes "Class positions we see as being determined by the social relations in which individuals are involved in their economic lives—that is, in labour markets and workplaces; or, in short, by their employment relations. This understanding of

class is in fact that which informs the main social classification in use in British official statistics since 2001: the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC). To summarise the short introduction to what is much of a complex theory of social class and social mobility; essential to Goldthorpe's class schema is the set of categories of employment relations and education, knowledge, economical status and 'general desirability'.

Humans are evolutionary conditioned to be concerned about their prestige and status within the society they live and engage with. Moreover, we are concerned about how we are perceived by other people and this is not self-defined and also we do compete for status. Status defines the position in societal hierarchy and therefore the access to various resources, material or spiritual. Status of an individual or a group can be confirmed by the society either by prestige or power held against other humans. In this case, prestige works as tool through which the individual can offer or provide certain benefits to individual or society. On the other side of the scale, power as defined by Weber as "the ability of an individual or group to achieve their own goals or aims when others are trying to prevent them from realising them". The outcome of the unequal participation on power or prestige within society, creates beliefs that some humans are worth more than the others. Those, who are less fortunate feel looked down on or humiliated and these emotions trigger frustration where the visible differences between people are apparent.

2.1 The Class Stratification in Britain

English society has been always distinctively stratified by its classes. The British have always been obsessed by class and labelling people by their appropriate social status still plays a key role in everyday life. The British have label for any style, identity or set of values, beliefs, communities, different life-style or fashion changing over times. An example of this specific cultural habit are the terms such as: Toffs, Rahs, Sloanies, or the one of Worcester woman, describing and profiling social groups that share for example similar political views, race, economic aspiration, social background, age or fashion taste.

Also, labels that are defined by the place where one was born, such as Scouse-Liverpool, Cockney – East End London or Geordie – Newcastle, are not uncommon in everyday language.

The class system seems to be flexible as the need to create new categories occurs alongside changes within society. The occasional addition or recreation of a class according to current needs is not a difficulty. Furthermore, it is very important in terms of identity and social status held within British society and it represents certain boundaries in society, specifically between members of different classes. Classes are defined by occupation, income, education, number of properties, and their location and most importantly by the vague sense of good taste. The vertical social mobility (moving on the class scale from one class to other) mostly the desired upper class is quite possible, but not always accepted by the members. The terms ‘chav’ and ‘underclass’ are proof of the class system flexibility.

According to Murray, the underclass is a “term coined in the US and was popularised there in the early 1980s by the journalist Ken Auletta who emphasised the behaviour and values of those deemed to be members of the ‘underclass’, though without claiming that these were necessarily the cause of their plight” (Worldcat.org, 2018).

The chav is a caricature of an unemployed, uneducated "feckless lump" housed on estates, living off benefits or working in low status jobs or in jobs that not need qualifications, such as workers in supermarkets, fast food restaurants, cleaning or security services, having little interest in anything apart from alcohol consumption, bling, and promiscuity. “When ‘chav’ first appeared in the Collins English Dictionary in 2005, it was defined as ‘a young working-class person who dresses in casual sports clothing’. Since then the meaning has broadened significantly” (Jones, 2011: 8).

The term chav is also related to certain kinds of disturbing behaviour and aggression. “Above all, the term ‘chav’ now encompasses any negative traits associated with working-class people – violence, laziness, teenage pregnancies, racism, drunkenness, and the rest (Jones, 2011:8).

Chavs represent the hatred of the working class, defined by long-term unemployment living on benefits, by the upper and middle classes. “Many use it to show their distaste towards working-class people who have embraced consumerism, only to spend their money in supposedly tacky and uncivilized ways rather than with the discreet elegance of the bourgeoisie” (Jones, 2011: 8). Another recent term, that expresses certain hater and negative attitude towards socially disadvantaged people and indicates social class even lower than working class; so called ‘underclass’ got established. The terms ‘chav’ and ‘underclass’ have been widely spread and used by the media, especially by tabloids.

In the following subchapters, I would like to explore some of the historical concepts relevant to the study of teenage pregnancy as distinctly female lower-class issue. Also, I will focus on the description of the media portrayals of those females subjected to moral panics over the times.

2.2 The Phenomenon of Fallen Women

This sub-chapter is exploring the fascinating historical concept of so-called Fallen Woman, associated with social welfare and disorder, focusing on the development of young pregnancies from historical point of view.

Early childbearing has also been stigmatising for the girls, from the earlier phenomenon of historical stigma that is defined as the “Fallen Woman”. The portrait of deviant woman I would like to begin with has its roots in the Victorian era and might help to understand better the depiction of young mothers and the underclass today. The archetype of the “Fallen Woman” according to Jacobs (1997), besides other stereotypical characteristics (e.g. lower-class woman seduced by upper-class man, left with an illegitimate child, or mother of illegitimate child trying to provide for it by selling her body, etc.), refers to a woman who has lost her good reputation by having sex with someone before she is married. Moreover, the term usually refers to a lower-class woman who has lost her innocence and consequently fallen from the grace of God. We can even find portrait of an ancient predecessor of the Fallen Woman character in the Bible itself: Eve. Eve was not

able to control her temptations and consequently has lost her innocence by plucking and eating the forbidden apple from Tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The Fallen Woman is the one who displayed engagement in sexual activity by visible pregnancy and would be classified as a disgrace to her family and society, broken, disgraced and worthless and associated with shameful behaviour.

In the traditionally prudish Victorian society, the woman who had sex before marriage and was not worthy of any respect, played a role of society scapegoat and tended to be ostracised. This tendency is still visible in media and pop culture or is experienced by the young girls in public space, from peers, superiors or when dealing with local authorities. Walker's (2014) statement clearly defines the twist in perception of 'sin' that has shifted from something to be ashamed of, to almost of something of a commodity that should be admired or respected and the shame of being pregnant at such young age is not accepted or admitted, as in the example of online YouTube confessions. "Indeed, shameless behaviour, viewed by the non-poor is considered as deviancy, as a threat to established order that is potentially socially destructive, whereas viewed through the eyes of a person in poverty it might be a necessary survival strategy" (Walker, 2014: 89).

Although sex before marriage was not a uniquely lower-class activity, families of those with means would be able to hide the illegitimate child through many methods not available to those without money or contacts. The Fallen Woman may also simply refer to an unmarried mother. The meaning was also associated with women's promiscuousness and prostitution. This topic of control and legitimacy can be still found problematic, even in these days of raging feminism and call for women's equality.

According to beliefs at the time, women, her life, decisions and her sexuality should be controlled by the institution of marriage and the man especially, on whom she should be completely dependent. "The figure is a young girl whose corruption is related to her feminine weakness, her poverty or her isolation. She is an outcast because of her sin" (Watt 9). The Fallen Woman is a symbol of the humiliation of femininity.

Depictions and portraits of poor women with shameless behaviour can be found in classic literature works, the best example of such characters would be Jane Eyre written by Charlotte Bronte (1874), or in Thomas Hardy's novel Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891) that explores the consequences for a heroine who became a fallen woman as a result of being raped. This is a key point because the author is trying to show that the consequences are independent of the heroine's actions or intentions (Birdi, 2018).

The understanding that poverty causes shame is not new the degradation of people forced by poverty to do the unthinkable in order to survive is the subject matter of numerous novels and fables in many cultures. Radical novelists in many countries have also suggested that the rich should feel shamed by the poverty around them (Walker, 2014).

The characteristics of the Fallen Women are still present in public discourse when tackling the issue of teenage pregnancy. It is still widely deemed and recognised that adolescent pregnancy contradicts the ingrained beliefs in patriarchal control over sexuality and the fact that teenage pregnancy is against the ideology of childhood sexual innocence (Gregson, 2009: 5).

However, this period is generally characterised by the contradictions between its values and reality, such as perceived sexual restraint. Undeniably, parallels can be drawn between these modern-day views and those held during the Victorian era and the double standards used for men and women are still visible and observable today.

A stigmatised individual is not accepted fully into society in that those with whom they have dealings do not accord them the respect they would otherwise expect, and that any person (including the person stigmatised) would normally anticipate.

Walker (2014) discusses the causes and reasons why some individuals or groups are shamed and stigmatised, he notices the crucial role of morals. The public is less supportive of unemployed claimants (despite most having a history of employment and contributions) and of lone mothers (especially in the United States and Britain). For persons who are unemployed and lone mothers, lack of evidence of reciprocity is compounded by moral

opprobrium: unemployment taken as “evidence” of indolence; out-of-wedlock pregnancy as indicative of irresponsibility if not immorality (Walker, 2014: 56).

The differential treatment of the young mothers by the public is one of the prominent terms experienced by the girls, often mentioned in the TV shows as well as in the studies focused on tackling the issue.

2.3 Folk Devils and Moral Panics

In order to link the connection with the perception of moral scandals presumably caused by Fallen Women and to return to previous point, it is worth to examine the terms ‘Folk Devil’ and ‘Moral Panics’, formed by labelling theory, cultural politics and critical sociology (Cohen, 2011: 27) and brought to the public discourse by Stanley Cohen in 1972, when he published the study ‘Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers. Cohen explores the reaction of society induced by media reporting on the conflict between former youth subcultures that were not on friendly terms: the Mods and Rockers in the 60’s. The confrontation between those two groups took place on the beaches of southern England and Cohen used this conflict as a case study.

The interest and the subject of research of Cohen is not the subcultures itself. He is looking into the reactions that the popular media in the UK of that time caused and he follows the pictures and the beliefs of society that the media triggered off by exaggeration and reporting in the style that suggested the conflict was worse than it actually was. The Mods and Rockers were widely described as threat and danger to otherwise decent members of society. According to Cohen, usually those who are often portrayed by the media have some characteristic signs in common: as disadvantaged, behaving and looking differently, coupled with being poor, deviant, being dependent on welfare, lacking taste and moral credits and being a thread to values of society as well as general safety. As mentioned above, members of various youth subcultures after the war have been the recurring subject of moral panics, their behaviour deemed by the media to be delinquent and, as Cohen (2011) traces, these cultures have been associated with violence. The Teddy Boys, the Mods and Rockers, the Hells Angels, the skinheads and the hippies have all been

phenomena of this kind. Furthermore, among many examples of the media creation of Folk Devil, Cohen lists young, working-class, violent males, school bullies, drug users and finally welfare cheats and single mothers. 'Welfare cheats', 'social security frauds' and 'dole scroungers' are fairly traditional folk devils. So too are unmarried mothers. Through the 1980s, though, there was a 'kind of subdued moral panic' about young, unemployed girls becoming pregnant, staying single and taking themselves out of the labour market by opting for full-time motherhood, becoming dependent on welfare benefits rather than a male breadwinner (Cohen, 2011: 20). It is also important to mention that calling some phenomenon a 'moral panic' or group of people 'folk devil', does not imply that this something does not exist or happened and that reaction is based on fantasy, hysteria, delusion and illusion or being duped by the powerful social and media reaction"(Cohen 2011: 7). As it can be observed, the deviant character of the single mother has all the attributes to serve as the classic media case of folk devil causing moral panics; feckless, irresponsible, ineffective parents, getting pregnant to avoid respectable jobs and skip the housing queue. Their children are deemed to be the future criminals and like their mothers, are the enemies of decent citizens.

3. Teenage and Underage Mothers in the Social and Cultural Context of the United Kingdom

Teenage pregnancy has been a symbol of social and moral breakdown in British society for generations. Moreover, teenage pregnancies have been the focus of media attention and political debate due to its relatively stable occurrence in British society over a long period of time. Even though according to a BBC article from March 2016, OSN research had reported that the number of teenage girls getting pregnant in England and Wales was continuing to fall among under-18s and the conception rate has halved in eight years to 21 per 1,000 women in 2015 (BBC News, 2016). However, according to the research Teenage Pregnancy Policy conducted by the FPA, The Sexual Health charity in 2017 (Fpa.org.uk, 2017) the United Kingdom has one of the highest birth rates among under-18s in Western Europe. This means that the social phenomenon of underage pregnancies is still a massive and persistent part of popular British culture as well as a significant issue and societal problem that interferes with many aspects of life.

According to the World Health Organisation, teenage pregnancy is defined by pregnancy in girls between the ages of 10-19 years. “The term “adolescent” is often used synonymously with “teenager”. In this sense “adolescent pregnancy” means pregnancy in a woman aged 10–19 years. In most statistics the age of the woman is defined as her age at the time the baby is born. Because a considerable difference exists between a 12- or 13-year-old girl, and a young woman of say 19, authors sometimes distinguish between adolescents aged 15–19 years, and younger adolescents aged 10–14 years” (Adolescent Pregnancy, 2004).

The definition of teenage pregnancy by the World Health Organisation complies with the age range generally referred to when speaking about underage, teenage or adolescent pregnancies. The age implied is below 20.

Teenage and underage pregnancy has represented social delinquency, immoral values, misguided mind set and general breakdown over the years and even with occasional reductions in the number of pregnant teenage girls, is still significant part of British society as explained above.

Girls, who become pregnant at a very young age, tend to suffer from stigmatisation and the myth of alleged illegality is still very present in public discourse as well as in the media’s presentation of the girls. Public outcry is also powered by concerns of the decreased chances for “respectable” living of the teenage girls and their children. There are concerns about whether they will be able to complete education, gain future employment opportunities and income status fuelled by the assumption that insufficient schooling will automatically lead to poverty (Gregson, 2009: 3). On the contrary, it is argued that teenage pregnancy is rather an outcome of poverty rather than its symptom.

The above indicates that pregnancy in young girls is widely associated with poverty and low manners and is often attributable to lack of effort. This is one of the perceptions or rather misperceptions that pregnancy at a young age occurs only in those families who are classified as delinquent, in long term unemployment, irresponsible, showing criminal behaviour and

even appearances. Similarly, according to Macnicol (2018), a key defining characteristic is that the underclass is said to be intergenerational, sometimes by heredity and sometimes by socialisation.

The culture of poverty is a social theory as well as a term formulated by anthropologist Lewis in 1966. Lewis's theory indicates that poverty is an element that unifies disadvantaged people culturally. People in poverty create an organised group with its own organisational structures, logics and specific ways of living that is conveyed through generations. According to Lewis (2000), membership in a group that has been poor for generations constitutes belonging to a separate culture. The environment of poverty impacts those who live in it and share it, and is transmissible through parents to children. This process is deemed and accepted by the group as a natural one, through which the norms of social behaviour are defined and shared. "The most likely candidates for the culture of poverty would be the people who come from the lower strata of a rapidly changing society and who are already partially alienated from it" (Lewis, 2000).

The "members" of social groups living in poverty, nowadays called the underclass are a potential threat to thriving society. Furthermore, mothers of any respective age and background are exposed to the judgement of society as either being fit or unfit to parent (Podnieks, 2012). "The individual who grows up in this culture has a strong feeling of fatalism, helplessness, dependence and inferiority" (Lewis, 2000).

Moreover, the scapegoating of the young single mother represents nothing else than the panic over the status and future of the nuclear family. The moral panic was transferred into a national political topic and later used as major theme of various political campaigns.

Due to the limited scope and extent of this thesis, I will mention only the most important figures of political life who had a severe impact on the life of society, such as Thatcher, Major and Blair. The most controversial politician, that still divides public opinion today, is Margaret Thatcher, who was the United Kingdom's first female prime minister from 1979 to 1990. It is necessary to mention that under her reign Britain experienced vast economic and cultural changes that are still prevalent in the society today due to Thatcher's strong Victorian approach towards family and the economy and its desired restoration that

was supposed to bring ‘greatness’ to Britain again. The result of this striving to bring Britain back to its time of political supremacy, was the privatisation of nationalised industries, the breaking of the trade unions and the sale of council houses. It is argued by many (e.g. Jones, 2011) that the steps towards shutting down the traditional mining industry was the cause of the breakdown of communities, severe unemployment and relative poverty for many and marked the beginnings of the creation of the underclass.

The moral panic was transferred into a national political topic and later used as a major theme of other political campaigns that followed, e.g. the huge campaign ‘Back to Basics’ created and led by John Major (Prime Minister from 1990-1997) and the Conservatives, that presented a lack of morals as the cause of various societal problems, highlighting the sentiment and longing for the ‘good old days’ and bringing the core values of British Victorian virtue back to society. Ironically, later the campaign failed due to the various financial and sexual scandals involving members of Major’s Government. The main theme of Major’s successor, Tony Blair, was not only to repair the reputation of political parties and the cleansing of politics, one of the key aspect of his political programme was the clear focus on the reduction of teen pregnancy and tackling the issue of unemployed, uneducated youth who lacked confidence and aspiration and who had only one thing: insecurity about the future.

Tony Blair and the Labour Party, who came to power in the election of 1997, also brought a new specific term that became a part of public debate it defines everything that was wrong with society: the term ‘NEETs’. The abbreviation stands for ‘Young people not in education, employment or training’. “Only since the mid-1990s, however, has the acronym NEET come into play to describe what previously had been called youth unemployment. The New Labour government from 1997 onwards, made the tackling of social exclusion a prime aim of its domestic policy with the problems of ‘NEET’ high on their agenda. Helping people, especially young adults, move from ‘welfare to work’ was a top policy goal” (MacDonald and Shildrick, 2018).

4. Breaking the Taboo – British Media and the Development of Demonisation of Teenage Mothers

Television gained huge popularity mainly between the 50s and 60s and since then scientists in the field of cultural studies have been keen to discover how powerful the media of television is on viewer's attitudes and behaviour and its general impact on society. "Initially, debates centred on the potential of television to sway children and teens to engage in aggressive and violent behaviours. More recently, attention has turned to the sexual content of television programming" (Weed, et al. 2015: 42). When looking at demonisation through the media in the context of British culture, the question of whether television and its programmes do normalise abnormal behaviours, once the topic has lost its tint of taboo, especially in the case of presentation of adolescent pregnancy. Clearly, through the regular presence of teenage pregnancy within printed media, radio, television, newspaper and magazines, something previously deemed as a taboo became public discourse. The discussion evolving around media challenges the traditional demonisation and portrayal of teen mothers as deviant.

Teenage mothers or pregnant teenage girls are a common feature in British and American reality shows, a phenomenon so dominant in the various media channels available in the United Kingdom and the impact can be hardly overlooked.

The appearance of TV shows trying to show a realistic picture of what used to be, until recently, taboo, is forcing us to rethink the myth. "Implicit messages suggesting that teen pregnancies result from lapses in judgement or poor decision-making skills of otherwise responsible young women obscure the roles of social and cultural factors that also contribute to early childbearing. Portrayals of teen mothers as capable and autonomous may also convey the message that social and governmental supports are unnecessary" (Weed, et al., 2015: 41). However, not all reality shows portray the everyday reality and life of a typical teenage mum and might be rather fragmental. Over the years, the ambiguous figure of the pregnant teenage girl and teenage mother gained full media attention and coverage started to appear excessively over the media channels. It is seemingly impossible to go through the TV channels or flick through glossy magazines

and papers without seeing mention of it. Cultural obsession and what might be a guilty pleasure for society took the media and public space by storm and the theme gradually became a pop-culture staple. This heightened attention boost continuously supports the classification to mainstream discourse and enhances the stereotypes. The media construction of a social problem is often followed by taking further the labelling of young mothers, spreading and supporting stereotypes accurate at a given time.

The normalisation or glamorisation of teenage mothers, showing them living seemingly easy lives, supported by the state or family can seem attractive to economically disadvantaged young women. They see on television shows that other young mothers have their own accommodation, money and style that would not be available through working at a minimum wage job in the United Kingdom. Indeed, in disadvantaged areas of the country, it can be perceived as an acceptable career choice; after all the people on so many television shows live this way, why can't others.

4.1 Display of Teen Pregnancy in Film

The film *Juno*, classified as a comedy-drama, by Jason Reitman was released in 2008 in the UK. The film's release marked a milestone for introducing the theme of teenage pregnancy and broke into the mainstream pop culture and general public through the cinema halls. The film was awarded an Oscar in 2008 for best writing and original screen play (Diablo Cody) and was nominated in three other categories (Reitman et al., 2018).

The plot revolves around the protagonist character, likeable, smart and charismatic 16-year-old Juno. Juno is of white and middle-class background and she is facing the consequences of her first sexual encounter with her best friend Bleeker: an unplanned pregnancy. Juno is considering solving the unexpected by abortion, but her friend Leah talks her out of it and Juno changes her mind. Together with Leah, she finds adoptive parents for her unborn child and decides to opt for adoption. Interestingly enough Bleeker, the father of the child does not have much to say, quite literally and all the decision-making process is left with Juno. Juno is, according to America's back then anti-abortion campaign 'pro-life'. However successful and critically acclaimed the movie was, some did

point out the taboo-breaking and voiced concerns about it being teenage pregnancy advertisement.

“Some criticism of the film had suggested it might advertise teen pregnancy, but the BBFC took the view that the film’s treatment of an important theme was ‘suitable for young teenagers’ as it presented Juno’s pregnancy and its effects on her relationships realistically, rather than through rose-tinted glasses” (Reitman et al., 2018).

Another example of a film breaking industry taboos is the less light and heart-warming film *Precious*, based on the debut novel *Push* from 1996 by Sapphire (Day, 2018). The film, released in the UK in January 2010, goes even further and opens the bleak theme of child sexual abuse, the story happening in the poverty-stricken background of Harlem, New York. *Precious* is traumatised, 16 yearsold black girl, massively overweight (the obesity of *Precious* works as the symbol of poverty in the film), emotionally abused and rejected by her mother and sexually taken advantage of by her father. The sexual attacks result in her first pregnancy at the age of 13 and second one at the age of 16. Her everyday hardship struggles with basic tasks such as feeding herself and the baby, neglect, illiteracy and regular abuse are portrayed in especially bleak tones. Despite the tremendous obstacles, tormented *Precious* is able to make a connection with her teacher, who is keen to listen and help and *Precious* can confront the stigmas and stereotypes connected with her pregnancy.

4.2 Celebrity Pregnant Teenagers

The following undoubted contribution towards breaking the taboo through the media was the announcements of pregnancy by various celebrities or their children that gained sufficient media attention. In 2007, the former Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin’s announcement that her 17-year old unmarried daughter Bristol was expecting a baby piqued media interest and got Bristol and her mother enormous attention (Bash, 2018).

Another celebrity example is Jamie Spears, the younger sister of late ‘90s-00s’ pop star Britney Spears, who announced her pregnancy when she was 16. “Magazines painted the

formed Nickelodeon starlet and seemingly ‘innocent’ younger sister to tabloid favourite Britney as a negative influence on the many little girls who looked up to her and questioned whether she would do the ‘right thing’ in continuing her relationship with her child’s father” (Podnieks, 2012: 186). The sheer publicity of these early celebrity pregnancies contributed towards the visibility of this topic and bridged it to mainstream culture.

Not only does the frequency of media presence make the issue less taboo, it is also the increasing time spent exposed to the content. The average proportion of the day spent by teenagers on media, especially the internet and TV, actually quite staggering and there is no doubt that the extensive exposure to the content has quite a significant impact on the development of attitudes and the sexual socialisation of the young adults. As Weed observes “The potential impact of story lines with sexual messages may depend on how closely the audience is able to identify with the characters. Teen viewers may be more likely to identify with teen or young adult characters than with older characters” (Weed, et al., 2015: 44).

If this premise is valid, then the young audience of TV shows centred around pregnant adolescents do identify with the main protagonists, who do go through the depicted hardships and joys of early motherhood. There is a general belief that the unmaking of the taboo and the visibility will lead to the encouragement of the emerging adults to become pregnant.

4.3 Teenage Pregnancy and New Media

At this point, it is worth considering new media and the model of many-to-many (Lister, 2009), when rethinking the conventional models of information transmission.

The characteristic feature of the platform of internet-based social media is that it is easy to use media by many. The users have almost unlimited opportunities to create, share and exchange content of conversational notions in a many-to-many context, meaning the interaction happens between multiple users contributing and receiving information. This situation is described by Murphy (2013) as a seismic shift in the way media is created and distributed. “For many years, the dominant paradigm in media was a model in which one

broadcaster sends a message out to a mass audience. This broadcast model is referred to as ‘one to many’. Today, this model is being challenged by the advent of the Internet and user-generated content in which many people create media and distribute it to their networks”. The users have particular impact when importing minor topics to mainstream, in terms of visibility, types of representation and identification, where child-expecting adolescents in particular can serve as the example. The phenomenon of online sharing culture helped to de-taboo many topics that shifted to regular establishment. Moreover, according to Deery and Press (2017) the media has a vital role to play in forming and understanding class identities.

There is increasing popularity and accessibility for internet platforms such as YouTube, where anyone can share video content and anyone with access can view and comment. Among the contributors are again teenage girls, who voluntarily present their stories revolving around their pregnancy or depict their pregnant bellies with a description of their changed lifestyle and share with the anonymous audience details of what they eat, wear or the activities they engage in. For example, there is a series of videos of a teenage pregnant girl documenting her pregnancy and becoming a parent, called A Day in the Life of a Pregnant Teen in High School (+ What I Eat in A Day)¹ with 674, 164 views, or a video called TEEN MOM AT 13 | MY STORY² with 1, 242, 608 views.

These online confessions are done without a professional team of editors or producers and are less likely to be manipulated. However, again, the exposure is of the controversially detailed displays of swollen and pregnant bellies of girls who have the faces of angelic children and the last thing they evoke is any connection with motherhood. The new interactive forms of online media encourage the engagement of the content producers and content consumers at a new level, without the intervention of interfering production or staging. However, the voluntary exposure of the girls to the public through online channel disclosures and their full visibility to others may result in the full possibility of their becoming the object of shaming. The sign of pregnancy itself, the broadening of the audience and the visibility through media works as secondary exposure to shame,

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZfHogPOaSM0>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pr6QPf03Cic>

experienced on a wider scale. Shame is one of the most important and visible terms associated with poverty and the underclass is an ongoing aspect that has persisted until nowadays. As summarised by Nathanson (1991), teenage pregnancy and childbearing are at the forefront of our collective-consciousness, with adolescent women and their sexuality being objects of national concern.

“Young people are spending more time playing and socialising online than watching television programmes, according to an annual survey tracking children's media behaviour in the UK. Staff at the research agency Childwise described it as a "landmark change". Among those watching TV, the Netflix on-demand service was more popular than any conventional television channel. There was also a surge in children's ownership of tablet computers, up by 50% compared with last year. The annual media monitoring report, based on a sample of more than 2,000 five to 16-year-olds, has been following children's viewing behaviour since the mid-1990s” (Coughlan, 2018). Interestingly enough, the increasing time spent by young people on online consumption of media is the cause of the recent reduction in teenage pregnancies, as the BBC reported on the study that proves that teenagers are becoming less likely to have sex, preferring to spend time with their families and having romantic relationships online (BBC News, 2018).

5. Reality TV and Reality Shows

One of the tasks of this paper is to explore and discuss how shame and stigmatisation is transmitted through the channels of the relatively new television genre of reality shows or reality TV, and discuss what are the tools and techniques used when displaying the phenomenon of teenage pregnancy.

The concentrated preoccupation with class in society, as described in the chapters above, can be recognised in the media representations of social class in a range of contemporary media portrayals which deal with the issue of teenage pregnancy; these include reality television, film, documentary, comedy sketch-shows and investigative journalism. Reality TV became the success story of television in the 1990s and 2000s (Hill, 2005:2) and it had been defined as a televisual form that blurs the traditional distinction between

information and entertainment, documentary and drama, public and private discourses (Kavka, 2012).

“If there is a simple definition of reality television then we might say that the term refers to unscripted shows with non-professional actors being observed by cameras in preconfigured environments. A more complex definition might seek to supplement the internal features of reality TV texts with information about the critical discourses and cultural economies in which they are embedded. In this view, reality television is associated with low production values, high emotions, cheap antics and questionable ethics because it is ‘an unabashedly commercial’ form that mixes serious traditions of documentary with the entertainment purpose of populist formats” (Kavka, 2012:5).

Another definition of the reality show format stresses the ordinary and ‘every man’ people engaged in daily life situations, being watched, observed and judged by an audience of the same nature. “The explosion of reality TV, confessional talk formats, docu-soaps and so-called reality-based game shows over the last decade has significantly enhanced television’s demand for ordinary people desiring ‘celebrification’. The expansion of both the demand and the supply side has occurred in symbiotic and accelerating cycle fuelled by the relatively sudden expansion of the global trade in TV formats” (Turner, 2010: 13).

The early predecessor of reality TV according to Kavka (2012) are the early attempts to capture televisual reality, programmes that both endeavoured to represent the observation of everyday life; examples are *Candid Camera* (1947-1970s), implementing the new technique of hidden camera, by Alan Funt, and the documentary series *An American Family* (1973). These programmes truly set the scene for the appearance of reality TV shows as we know them today. The first generation of this genre were crime and emergency shows that appeared on TV programmes in the 1990s in the US, followed five years later in the UK by docu-soaps (Kavka, 2012: 10). Along with this can be considered programme such as talk shows, how-to and advice programs and makeovers gradually making it into broadcasting prime time. However, as pointed out by Kavka (2012), for many the era of reality TV began only with the introduction of the pioneer reality TV

shows Big Brother in the 1990s and Survivor in the 2000s which brought in the sense of competition.

With the domination of reality TV throughout the beginning of this century, one may argue that reality TV or shows have very little in common with reality these days as they involve members of public or celebrities who are filmed in environments or contexts that are far away from reality. Yet, the format is still true to the minimalistic and functional definition of reality TV as described above; reality TV is unscripted compared to dramatic fiction shows.

The cast of these shows have to either undertake a specific challenge (e.g. Survivor), compete against other contestants in terms of skills (Pop Idol, Come Dine with Me), undergo 'makeover', thus putting themselves forward as a project (e.g. Queer Eye for the Straight Guy), undergo a transformation of lifestyle (e.g. The Biggest Loser) or the filming takes place in staged environment (e.g. Big Brother, Geordie Shore). As Wiseman (2018) puts it "Reality TV: an amorphous term that's always held itself in ironic quote marks. There is nothing real about these stories of destruction, transformation, sex in small spaces, beer".

To this extent Hay and Oulette (2008) perceive reality shows as cultural technology through which we can monitor, motivate, improve, and transform ourselves in the name of freedom, enterprise and personal responsibility.

Reality TV is generally associated with voyeur nature, artificial drama, emotions, bringing an almost tabloid aestheticism into everyday life, featuring oneself as a project and moreover, with non-professional actors, is a relatively low-cost production means of generating profit. Television channels, especially those owned privately, usually do not strive for higher values and the sole interest is nothing much more than to bring in the maximum profit, demonstrated in a well-known quote by former CEO of the Disney Corporation, Michal Eisner, "We have no obligation to make history; we have no obligation to make art; we have no obligation to make a statement; to make money is our only objective" (Hay and Ouellette, 2008: 34).

As much as the genre of reality shows is linked with the attributes mentioned above, it is also widely associated with qualities such as those of taste and morals, either of those who consume the traditionally low-brow entertainment as an audience, or those who actively participate in the content creation, again meaning touching the sphere of controversy, deviancy and moral panics. The situation over reality shows was described by Biltreyst (2018) “as if a new, scary medium had arrived which threatens middle-class norms and attracts children and young people with vulgarity and a new barbarism. Some reality show programmes even became the plaything of a spiralling debate among serious media journalists, fluent intellectuals, worried politicians, all sorts of moral guardians and wider public opinion, ultimately even leading to official action and concrete regulation”.

Therefore, the format of reality shows is also perceived as another societal platform, constructing entertainment around the lives of the folk devil and creating the deviant and exoticised others; such as in case of the teenage mother as a reality show protagonist. “In its most negative version, criticism of reality shows tends to portray it as a format with a special interest in harsh, controversial social issues, giving voice to deviant views, creating a platform for eccentric freaks (Biltreyst, 2018: 118). Despite the appalled voices, the popularity of reality shows is undoubtedly still prevalent in various digital media and they are enjoyed by many, delivering high sales and profits.

5.1 Reality Shows and Poverty Porn

In recent years, the TV industry has launched a number of reality programmes in partnership with private and public agencies that problematise and claim to deter early childbearing (Oulette, 2014). This thesis will focus mainly on the reality series concerning teenage pregnancy that were broadcast in the UK by various TV channels such as the: BBC Three *Underage and Pregnant* (2009-2011) and *Teen Mom UK* (2016-2017). It is also important to mention reality programmes that are not solely focused on underage parenthood, however very closely related, featuring this phenomenon as part of wider societal issue, such as *Benefits Street* (2014-2015) or *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole* (2014-2016). The genre of reality shows documenting the everyday life of those who are less fortunate even earned

itself a name, nowadays regularly used by media and the public: poverty or austerity porn e.g., Korte (2014), McKenzie (2015) or De Benedictis u. a. (2017). The term poverty porn is being used in context of critiquing the use of media representations that exploit poor people for the sake of entertainment. “The ‘poverty porn’ label has also been applied to documentary series focusing on lives of the people reliant upon government benefits, especially those, who live on British council estates” (Korte, 2014: 206).

As with all controversies, these series do have their supporters and critics. One camp may argue that the shows unethically thrive on the continuous stigmatisation of the poor or other contestants that take part in reality TV. “The most authoritarian interventions focus on real people cast as incorrigible, self-destructive and/or out of control. Here, television intervenes by dealing with so-called troubled populations who have chosen to exist “outside” society’s rules and norms (Hay and Oulette, 2008).

On the other end of the spectrum are those who might see the shows as beneficial and argue they enhance compassion and sympathy towards the underprivileged and additionally open up public and political debate about the complex problem of economic inequality within the United Kingdom. One representative of this camp is for example, van Zoonen, who argues that the popular culture and entertaining shows create an active audience willing to participate in public life. “Television is indeed our prime source for learning about politics, and it provides the instruments for understanding, evaluating and appreciating it (Zoonen, 2005).

Reality shows featuring raw images of poverty and people who live long term without employment and who are making the ends meet by claiming benefits make the audience react in different ways. These programmes are bringing visibility to the culture of the underclass, often presented as a lifestyle choice for the characters, but omitting the hopelessness of economic and educational inequality. Jones also notes that the media space in the UK became populated by shows centred around poverty “Reality TV shows, sketch shows, talk shows, even films have emerged dedicated to ridiculing working-class Britain. ‘Chavtainment’ has reinforced the mainstream view of working-class individuals as

bigoted, slothful, aggressive people who cannot look after themselves let alone their children” (Jones, 2011: 122).

Comments and reactions left by the viewer of episodes of reality shows or the docu-soap *Benefits Britain: Life On The Dole*, reveal a wide range of emotions. The viewers share their feelings which range from being outraged, appalled, disgusted and upset with the protagonist or the system e.g. “lower than cockroaches”, to perceiving their own situation and life as much better e.g. “I love this show. It makes me feel so much better about myself” or “I love my job I don't ever wanna stop working just to be controlled by the government for a tiny little bit of money” and sympathising with the protagonists “I don't blame them at all. they're right try raising one child on today's wages. impossible”.

Other emotions induced by reality shows which portray the lives of people who claim benefits is anger and a sense of injustice at the social system security, enhanced by programmes provocatively showcasing big TVs, the latest iPhones, laptops, and benefits claimants chain-smoking cigarettes and ordering take-away food; or they have dogs they have to provide for on top of the above average number of children. These are often the alleged moral characteristics represented by these reality shows, further creating the mythological figures of the welfare scrounger and promoting the stereotypes. As Deery and Press (2017) point out, such portraits create the impression that these people are undeserving of support as they have chosen this lifestyle as opposed to work, moreover choosing to spend their welfare benefits on luxuries that are not necessary for bare survival. On the other hand, those who take the deserving poor viewpoint say that poverty is a consequence of unlucky circumstances, with people trapped in a dysfunctional circle of poverty and cast them as “victims deserving pity and charity” (Deery, Press, 2017:167).

As expressed by Price (2014) for *The Guardian* “Benefits Street is clearly premised on a fetishisation of class differences for popular consumption. The right, meanwhile, sees the show as indicting a failing welfare system and a “something for nothing” benefits culture.”

Constructing the hierarchy between the “hardworking families” and those living in poverty, disadvantaged people are depicted often in stereotypical ways. The depiction of

their lifestyle and the surroundings, the claimants of benefits live in are cast as something to be ashamed of and the characters are expected to be apologetic and shamed by the viewers. However, the production casts them as conforming to their life situation and taking a certain pride in ‘milking’ the system, as well as being unwilling to proactively make any change in their lifestyle.

Also, some argue that reality show democratised the content of TV by putting a marginalised group of citizens in the centre of attention, empowering them and giving them a voice, they otherwise would not have had. The term ‘demotic turn’ was coined by Turner (2010) describing the increasing visibility of the 'ordinary person' in the media today. “While the idea of the demotic turn emerges as a way of describing the increased participation of ordinary people in the media, it has a more widespread potential for helping us to better understand the cultural function of a commercial media system that is more focused on the distribution of entertainment and the production of cultural identities than ever before” (Turner, 2010: 6). This illustrates the fact that media’s mission is not only to generate profit and serve commercial purposes, but ultimately to function as instruments for social control and ideological reproduction (Biltreyst, 2018).

Coming back to the already discussed work of Cohen, clearly demonstrated that the media drew attention to or reflected on social problems, as well as intensifying fear of the audience around issues, in this case poverty, pathologic unemployment and dependency (e.g. welfare, substances...). Moral panics repeatedly spread through the reality shows making the ‘underclass’ the new Mods and Rockers and it is apparent and reflected in the way in which media (both print and television) work and willingly adopt the selected topic and sensationally dwell on it, reporting further and spiralling the debate with the characteristics of moral panic.

5.2 Reality Shows and Teenage Mothers

Reality shows portraying teenage pregnancy is a genre established as an entertainment education for contemporary society through the lens of pop culture, where elements of soap opera, drama, sensation, voyeurism and edutainment combine.

In 2009, *16 and Pregnant* premiered on MTV, closely followed by the spinoffs *Teen Mom* and *Teen Mom 2*. The shows received enormous ongoing media attention as the portrayals of the pregnant girls were massively controversial (Guglielmo, 2015). An example of this argument can be shown through the development of the characters in *Teen Mom* and *Teen Mom OG*, starring four girls and watched over 7 seasons, as the show continued to bring the cast popularity and financial advantage. The teens who appeared in these shows also appeared in magazines and other shows, where they talk about their babies, houses, holidays, upcoming weddings and about their families in general. These increasing glamorous lifestyles, replete with cosmetic surgery, travels and new houses end up contradicting the very message of lowered life chances they originally were meant to highlight as the result of unplanned pregnancy at an early age. Therefore, the connection between teen motherhood and poverty is erased; instead the blame is cast on the young women, who are demonised for being sexually loose and having gotten themselves into problems by making poor choices (Guglielmo, 2015: 209). Nevertheless, this does not mean that the mothers move upward in the mobility system, teen motherhood not deemed by the upper class particularly appropriate and desirable. As described, some argue that reality television shows that showcase teen parents are exploiting and glamorising the young girl's situation; on the contrary others claim that the programmes showing the emotional, financial and physical struggles of early childbearing; provide the audience with an option to observe and decide for themselves about getting pregnant early in life and undergoing struggles such as displayed on the TV screen. Moreover, it is claimed by some that the programmes reflecting the cost of getting pregnant early help the teenage audience to control their own sexuality and better plan their life trajectories and that the programmes serve as a cautionary tale for the peers (Ouellette, 2016).

“The move to highlight the issue of underage pregnancy on reality television came from Lauren Dolgen, senior vice president of series development at MTV, who wanted to draw on the success of the movie *Juno* and portray ‘real’ young women who were in a similar situation” (Guglielmo, 2015: 211). Also, it is apparent that launching reality shows following the life of underage girls or girls with young babies was an exciting opportunity to advance the number of viewers and build a successful business model and monetise this

intention as the teenage pregnancy rates in the UK and US were the highest in the western industrialised world.

6. Practical Part

6.1 Qualitative Methods of Research

When analysing the theoretical base for this thesis, the issue of historical and social framing of young mothers, further reflected by Reality TV, was established and a complex understanding is needed. I have carefully chosen the qualitative scientific method for this research as it reflects the diversity of meanings and values created in the media and this method strives to understand the many and complex relationships that exist within media and society (Brennen, 2017: 5), which is the core problem described in the introduction to the thesis. Moreover, the goal of qualitative research is fully aligned with the one of this thesis: understanding the myriad of meanings that people create, resulting in analysis and description of the common stereotypes represented and displayed in Reality TV programmes centred on teenage pregnancy and broadcast in the UK. Additionally, in the field of media studies, qualitative research seeks to understand aspects of the relationship between media and society and to interpret the multiplicity of meanings constructed in the media (Brennen, 2017: 23). Lastly, qualitative research is grounded on the idea that cognition is subjective and based on interpretation, therefore the framework of the social constructionism approach is the background in the process of designing the qualitative study.

Creswell (2017) points out that the procedures of qualitative research, or its methodology, are characterised as inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher's experience in collecting and analysing the data. The logic that qualitative research follows is from the ground up, rather than handed down entirely from a theory or from the perspective of the inquirer.

6.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

Media content analysis is a systematic method to study mass media that was introduced by Harold Lasswell in 1927, originally to study propaganda. The qualitative method of media

content analysis became increasingly popular as a research methodology during the 1920s and 1930s for investigating the rapidly expanding communication content of films. In the 1950s, media content analysis proliferated as a research methodology in mass communication studies and social sciences with the arrival of television (Macnamara, 2004). Also, as argued by Macnamara (2004), it was media content analysis that has been a major research method for studying portrayals of violence, racism and women in television programming as well as in films. Also, as defined by Mayring (2000), “content analysis is a family of systematic, rule-guided techniques used to analyse the informational contents of textual data”.

Qualitative research, as characterised by Lindolf and Taylor (2017), is a covering term for scholarship that values systematic study, conducted in natural settings, of the empirical features and lived experiences of situated interaction. More specifically, it values those elements as opportunities for researchers to practice participation, reflection, description and interpretation.

Content analysis was selected as a method to determine, analyse and describe the stereotypes associated with teenage mothers portrayed through Reality TV, when trying to discover the answer to the research question and subpoints. As proven by previous analyses examining media portraits of teenage mothers (e.g. Oulette), content analysis as a technique is suitable for the purposes of the research and allows better understanding and interpretation of the reality show depiction of the teen mothers, especially in the social context described in the theoretical part of this thesis.

Qualitative content analysis is frequently employed “to answer questions such as what, why and how, and the common patterns in the data are searched for” by using a consistent set of codes to organise text with similar content (Heikkilä & Ekman, 2003, p. 138).

Once leads are defined in the data, the initial research question will be followed, helping to analyse the data gathered through observation of the language TV shows present to the audience and through the analysis of aspects of the TV language (audio-visual text).

To narrow the research, it is important to define what aspects of television programme language and production will be the primary aspects observed. For the purposes of this research I have established mise-en-scene and sound as the key indicators of the transmission of the teenage mother portraits throughout the story. Mise-en-scene is an aspect of film production and according to Butler (2014), mise-en-scene is the staging of the action for the camera. Mise-en-scene consists of all of the physical objects in front of the camera and the arrangement of those objects as constructed by the director. Another aspects of mise-en-scene is the organisation of the setting itself, costume, lighting, and actor movement. The focus of the examination will be on the physical objects in front of the camera and the costumes, as these aspects frame the episodes and convey immense symbolic value that needs to be decoded. Sound is a crucial component of a TV programme's style as it affects the viewer and conveys meaning that the image is not able to convey. Also, the meaning transmitted by visuals would be lost or would be given different meanings without sound. The primary focus will be on the speech components, as the main characters' narration maintains the continuity of the story, and in combination with the mise-en-scene will help me uncover the means of evaluating the girls and their families in terms of their social status as presented throughout the show.

Once the research question is carefully established and examination samples are selected, the process of gathering data starts. The method that will help the researcher to analyse the data gathered is the method of coding. According to Chamraz (2014) coding means naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorises, summarises, and accounts for each piece of data. A summary of the research findings and description of the categories discovered is provided.

Corbin and Strauss describe three types of qualitative coding: open, axial and selective. As the coding method used to conduct this research is closest to open coding, it is essential to describe the technique more closely. "In open coding, events/actions/interactions are compared with others for similarities and differences. They are also given conceptual labels. In this way, conceptually similar events/actions/interactions are grouped together to form categories and subcategories" (Corbin, Strauss, 1990). Once the identification is made, the categories and subcategories form the basis for the theoretical grounds. Open

coding stimulates further questions and evokes sensitivity to new issues. During the coding process, the combination of codes, their relation or divergence should be carefully observed and described. “Open coding and the use it makes of questioning and constant comparisons enables investigators to break through subjectivity and bias. Fracturing the data forces preconceived notions and ideas to be examined against the data themselves. A researcher may inadvertently place data in a category where they do not analytically belong, but by means of systematic comparisons, the errors will eventually be located and the data and concepts arranged in appropriate classifications” (Corbin, Strauss, 1990).

One risk that could make the outcome of the research less reliable is the influence of the researcher’s own perspective. However, according to Lindolf and Taylor (2017) our own perspectives and experiences are beneficial. “In qualitative research, we try to understand the communication of people who are actively engaged in trying to understand their own – and each other’s – communication. We seek to develop useful stories, while accounting for the influence of our own values and beliefs on this process” (Lindolf and Taylor, 2017: 115). Also, Strauss and Corbin (2008) mention that the researcher is as much a part of the research process as the participants and the data they provide.

The desired impact of the literature studied on the broad issue of teenage pregnancy will influence the interpretation of the collected data as well.

6.3 Research Question

In order to achieve the research goal, the main research question as well as subpoints were formulated to determine the direction of the research itself.

How the audio-visual text of Reality TV evaluates the social standing of the young mothers and their families?

Subpoint 1: Do the assessments of teenage mothers have the form of stereotypes?

Subpoint 2: What are the most common stereotypes?

Subpoint 3: Are there negative assessments which are not presented in the form of stereotypes?

The main research question complies with the requirements stated by Brennen (2017): that the research question should be clearly stated, specific and researchable and also fulfil the criteria of wider focus that will be gradually narrowed throughout the research process.

In other words, the question says that the analysis will be conducted using audio-visual text;. In particular mise-en-scene (visual and symbolic elements) and verbal content (produced by the narrator, main character and its family, and the one conducted by social interaction) will be investigated. To discover recurring themes, the young mothers and their families depicted through the scenes when speaking on the camera, engaging with their families, peers, public or the narrator, will be carefully observed. “The analysis of audio-visual expression constitutes a particular approach to the processing of audio and visual information from our audio-visual text. In this approach, the focus of attention is still the text’s “semantic content” and the meaning it conveys, but now the analysis deals with the visual and sound representations of this meaning and on the technical processes which facilitate this representation” (Stockinger, 2013: 52).

Evaluation of social standing is grounded on the concept of class as defined by Goldthorpe (1987); employment relations and education, knowledge, economic status and ‘general desirability’. Furthermore, in order to align on understanding of the notions used in the research question and subpoints, the terms need to be clearly defined, such as stereotype and stereotypical and non-stereotypical negative assessment.

Stereotype

Drawing on Stangor’s work (2000), stereotypes can be thought of as the characteristics that are mentally associated with a social category label in long-term, semantic memory. As we learn about groups, stereotypes become a part of our memory, just like any other concept or category that we learn. Also, according to Blum (2004) “stereotypes are false or misleading generalisations about groups held in a manner that renders them largely, though not entirely, immune to counterevidence. In doing so, stereotypes powerfully shape the stereotyper’s perception of stereotyped groups, seeing the stereotypic characteristics when they are not present, failing to see the contrary of those characteristics when they are, and generally homogenising the group”.

Stereotypical assessment

By stereotypical assessment is meant general negative rating of the individual representing the whole; the critique is conveyed through the individual and applied to the teenage mothers and their families as a social group. These repeating ratings create exaggerated beliefs or emphasise the underlying prejudices leading to routine schematic portrayals of the studied objects. The stereotypical assessment is the one confirming the inadequate grounds already held with significant certainty by many people.

Non-stereotypical negative assessment

Non-stereotypical assessment in terms of this research stands for the negative rating of the object, but directed towards the object only and not extending towards the social group as a whole, so emphasising the negative features of the individual rather than negative features of the group.

6.4 Research Sample

Before we focus on the analyses and definition of stereotypes, it is necessary to describe and introduce the specific series *Underage and Pregnant* and *Teen Mom UK*.

The study object selected are the young British mothers and their families portrayed through the two selected reality shows that vary in number of series, number of episodes, length of episodes and in years when the show was aired: *Underage and Pregnant* (3 series with 22 episodes, aired by BBC 3 from 2009-2011), *Teen Mom UK* (3 series with 24 episodes, aired by MTV 2016-2017). The examined episodes, three episodes from the series *Teen Mom UK* and three episodes from the series *Underage and Pregnant*, were randomly selected. Random selection provides a better chance to capture any variances caused by the time difference and gives an overview of whether the tone of the portrayal changes within the timeframes the series were broadcast. Having said that, if the stereotypes are fully established by the reality TV shows centred on teenage pregnancy, the broadcast date should not have any significant impact on the misrepresentation of the stereotypes.

The two networks BBC 3 and MTV that aired the reality shows are also very different in terms of content type produced, genres and formats covered, targeted audience, ownership

structures, origin of the network and correspondingly, politics, aesthetics, tradition and history, which is convenient for this research as the representation of two different networks enables less distortion and biased illustration. The BBC 3 TV channel (available online only since 2016) is part of the BBC corporation. The British Broadcasting Corporation is a public service broadcaster delivering sophisticated and comprehensive broadcast television, radio and interactive website services to UK citizens (Orlebar, 2013). The key characteristics of the BBC service are high quality, up-to-date and contemporary content. The BBC's mission is "to enrich people's lives with programmes and services that inform, educate and entertain" (BBC, 2018). BBC 3 is a channel targeting a young audience. The channel develops its own entertainment programmes such as comedies, sitcoms or reality shows as well as broadcasting foreign shows. The content focus is on education and entertainment. As highlighted in the BBC Three Service Licence: "The remit of BBC Three is to bring younger audiences to high quality public service broadcasting through a mixed-genre schedule of innovative UK content featuring new UK talent. The channel should use the full range of digital platforms to deliver its content and to build an interactive relationship with its audience. The channel's target audience is 16-34 year olds" (BBC, 2018).

MTV is an American channel, broadcasting since 1981 and pioneering in airing music only. The channel became global and is widely associated with a heavy focus on entertainment, youth, globalisation, commercialisation and celebrity culture. MTV differentiates itself rather as a brand than solely a TV station, as stated in TV's boilerplate: "MTV is the world's premier youth entertainment brand. With a global reach of more than a half-billion households, MTV is the cultural home of the millennial generation, music fans and artists, and a pioneer in creating innovative programming for young people. MTV reflects and creates pop culture with its Emmy®, Grammy® and Peabody® award-winning content built around compelling storytelling, music discovery and activism across TV, online and mobile (MTV, 2018).

Underage and Pregnant defines itself on the BBC 3's show homepage as a "series which goes behind the sensational headlines to discover what it is really like to be underage and pregnant". The description of the show also claims to display the real stories of life as a pregnant schoolgirl and teenage mother. Each 30-minute-long episode typically follows two

girls in the last month of their pregnancy and the episode closes with the main protagonists giving birth. The storyline is narrated by an omniscient narrator. Teen Mom UK monitors the lives of five girls, mothers or mothers-to-be over longer period of time, portraying everyday situations, struggles, dramatic family tensions and, especially intense relationships with the baby's father. The protagonists remain the same throughout the series and their story is narrated through their own voices. Teen Mom UK is a spin-off of the American franchise Teen Mom.

6.5 Scene Capture Tool

Taking into consideration the volume and diversity of the data gathered during the research, a tool providing a clear overview of the data captured was essential. Therefore, for the purpose of this specific research, I have designed a well-arranged Excel table that served to gather the data as well as capture the scenes and verbal content. The record table clearly indicates the name of the examined reality show, series and episode, together with the timing when the scene/sound occurred and was captured, enabling other stakeholders to trace the research path. The detailed description of the observation captured is shown in the third column, followed by the code and assessment that characterises the quote/description for smoother analysis, also by the classification of the character involved or referred to. Once the type of text is classified in the sixth column, the category of the stereotype observed is finally assigned.

Scene Capture Tool

Reality show series/episode	Time	Quote/Description	Code/Assessment	Portrayed/Assessed character	Type of Audiovisual text	Category of Stereotype
Underage and Pregnant S01E04	6:13	Toni, Toni's mother and sister, sitting on the sofa and both smoking inside the house (living room), the mother wearing worn out t-shirt, no make-up (rough look), and has visibly missing teeth	Unhealthy habits, lack of self-care, looks, not taking care of appearances	Mother and sister of Toni	Mise-en-scene	Lifestyle
Underage and Pregnant S01E04	6:37	Toni is wearing tracksuits to the doctor's office for her first baby scan	Lack of self-care, appearance, questionable taste (wearing leisure wear for an appointment with an official authority)	Toni	Mise-en-scene	Lifestyle

6.6 Interpretation of the Analysis (categories)

During the collection and compilation of the data as well as throughout the coding and categorisation of the data with help of the scene capture tool, specific categories of stereotypes portrayed were gradually coming up. Throughout the process of carefully observing the established criteria, bearing in mind the research question and subpoints, detailed notes were taken. These notes proved useful and beneficial for the analysis when coding and categorising the codes. Once the process of coding was done and the data was compiled and consolidated, I created 6 basic categories and sub categories related to different aspects of the stereotypes and related to the social standing of the teenage girls and their families that I analysed further. The analysis is complemented with specific examples illustrating the category of the stereotype.

Below are described the four basic categories of discovered stereotypes that were prevalent throughout the sampled episodes of Reality TV shows, defined in detail. It is important to mention that the categories of stereotypes (with positive or negative connotations) include

the most frequent situations and depiction of the girls that was discovered during the coding process and the analysis itself. The repetitive occurrences of the portrayals, as described below is exactly the notion that creates the basis for stereotypes transmitted through Reality TV text.

6.6.1 Economic Insecurity Stereotypes

While conducting the research, many situations of visual and sound assessments reinforcing the set of beliefs came up. Between the depicted stereotypes that were classified as stereotypes related to the economic situation of the teenage mother and her family, was the portrayal of financial struggles and dependency, either by relying on the support of the family or the support of the government in form of benefits. The prime example encountered several times is highlighting the exact amount the girl receives from the government as e.g.: *"Toni receives one off 500 Pounds maternity grant, she spends it on room paint"*³. In this case, the narrator takes it further and reports on the particular area where the money is going to be spent, leaving the viewer to assess whether the teen girl deserves to spend the taxpayer's 500 Pounds on room paint. Reliance on state support for funding is shown, when despite qualifying for housing allowance, a relatively small deposit may be unreachable, which highlights the economic insecurity *"Natasha is eligible for housing benefits and the council will pay towards the rent, but she will have to come up with 400 Pounds as a deposit"*⁴. The girl is captured in an office applying for the housing benefits and it is further indicated that she does not have the deposit money in order to receive the housing benefits.

Another example of raising questions over whether the underage parents are deserving of the money is Sassi, who whilst not in full time work or education is on the lookout for new furniture when moving in with her boyfriend and daughter to a new house, stating: *"We are finally moving into a house and it is a good excuse to go shopping and spend some of the hard earned money. So I am gonna enjoy every single minute of buying new things for our new home, I just can't wait"*⁵.

³ Underage and Pregnant - S01E04

⁴ Underage and Pregnant - S03E06

⁵ Teen Mom UK - S04E05

A classic illustration of demonstrating the lack of financial means is the straight forward self-assessment by the character when admitting the fact to the camera: *"I can't afford to move out"*⁶.

Also, many points out on the standards of living and housing of the teen mothers are made. The camera observes Natasha as she is taking baby clothes out of a small travel bag when she moved in with her sister, another former teen mother, to a small unfurnished two-bedroom house. She is clearly storing the baby clothes in the bag: *"These are all Levi's clothes because I do not have anywhere else to put them"*⁷. This visual is indicating that the assessed is not able to secure appropriate furniture and living conditions, lacking space for herself and the child. The narrator continues to deepen the image of limited living space further stating the conditions of living: *"Her sister stays on sofa bed"*⁸

*"With 8 people living in three bedrooms social services deem the house as crowded"*⁹

The setting of indoors premises where the filming takes place, the houses or the flats the teenage girls live in with their families or without them and the decoration of the rooms is another opportunity to observe the social standing and evaluate the social situation on the basis of room decoration, refurbishment, quality of the furniture or general tidiness of the space. In a significant number of episodes, the camera focuses on messy, dirty, untidy spaces often with clothes placed all over the place¹⁰. Moreover, the depiction of the repeatedly messy¹¹, chaotic and dirty environment the families occupy in some cases, is not only considered as an issue of lack of means, but the more complicated and trickier category of judgment of class representation in the broader terms of aesthetic, taste and culture.

⁶ Underage and Pregnant - S02E02

⁷ Underage and Pregnant - S03E06

⁸ Underage and Pregnant - S03E06

⁹ Underage and Pregnant - S03E06

¹⁰ Underage and Pregnant - S02E02, Teen Mom UK - S02E01, Underage and pregnant - S03E06, Underage and Pregnant - S03E06

¹¹ Underage and Pregnant - S03E06, S01E04

To close the series, *Underage and Pregnant* often portrays the girls as economically dependent, either on their families or the government. In contrast, MTV's *Teen Mom* showcases nice and refurbished flats or houses where the girls and their families live, portraying one of the girls moving into a new house and buying new decorations and furniture. The reason for this difference in the display of the economic situation is the one mentioned above: both TV channels have a different audience and program focus.

MTV is notoriously known for presenting glamorous lifestyles e.g. Grossberg, Inalcik, (1993) or Orlebar (2013), therefore the environment the girls live in in MTVs' show is very unlike in terms of desirability, quality and fashion to the BBC's portrait of the conditions of living of the teen mothers.

Graph 1 The inner structure of the Economic Insecurity Stereotype



6.6.2 Lifestyle, Taste Stereotypes

As briefly mentioned above, taste is a broad and complicated term covering a vast range of fields: sociology, aesthetics, art, economy and last but not least, gastronomy. For the purpose of the analyses, taste will be approached as cultural capital, defined by Bourdieu as Habitus and connected to lifestyle. “In fashion, the antimony is overcome on a daily basis: fashion is based on private and subjective preferences of individual taste and yet it forms a socially binding standard of conduct” (Gronow, 2002). The depictions tackled in the way Reality TV communicates social standing associated to taste and lifestyle are those of clothing (fashion), physical appearance, decoration of interior, leisure time activities, beautifying, habits and food.

The young mothers are often displayed in the same clothing or in clothing designed for leisure, even when in contact with public official authorities, such as attending appointments at a health care centre, hospital or maternity department e.g.: Kacey is wearing the same pyjamas as in previous scenes during the episode, once at home and once when in the hospital expecting the delivery¹². Charlotte's mother is depicted sitting in the same pyjama bottoms on the sofa throughout the episode¹³. Amber's boyfriend Ste wears tracksuit bottoms and tracksuit jacket and baseball cap exclusively, and also has shiny earrings¹⁴.

Another feature that does not go unnoticed is the grooming and body decoration and general appearance. e.g. Kacey's boyfriend wears gold chains and shiny earrings throughout the episode and has visible tattoos¹⁵. The liking for tattoos is quite common and visible on the girls themselves as well as on the members of their families or their boyfriends.¹⁶

The teen mother protagonists are often shown applying make-up, wearing fake eyelashes, fake tan and long sparkling nails (especially those featured in Teen Mom UK). The

¹² Underage and Pregnant - S01E04

¹³ Underage and Pregnant - S03E06

¹⁴ Teen Mom UK - S04E05, S02E01, S03E03

¹⁵ Underage and PREGNANT - S01E04

¹⁶ Teen Mom UK - S04E05, S02E01, S03E03, Underage and Pregnant - S02E02, S01E04

preoccupation with looks demonstrated by the main protagonists of Teen Mom might be deemed as vanity and pretension. Moreover, it creates the impression of not very adequate parenting; the amount of time spent on beautifying could be spent as quality time with the children or be dedicated to the household instead.

Megan's sister, making an appearance in one of the episodes of Teen Mom UK, is the embodiment of all of the above; she has tattoos, wearing heavy make-up, fake tan, fake eyelashes, and has her hair dyed in a bright purple colour¹⁷.

Moreover, the physical appearance of some protagonists is clearly non-conventional in terms of the social norms of health or hygiene, especially when it is displayed as rough and somehow unappealing, transmitting the message from lack of self-care, interest in appearance, unhealthy lifestyle, or simply a lack of means or motivation to maintain health. Examples of this imagery is Toni's mother who is significantly overweight, dressed in baggy, worn-out T-shirts,¹⁸ or Amber's ex-boyfriend Ste, who is missing a front tooth¹⁹, all under the close display of the camera. Toni, her mother and sister are shot sitting on the sofa, her mother and sister are both smoking inside living room, the mother being dressed in worn-out T-shirt, with no make-up, and visibly missing teeth.²⁰

The understanding of leisure activities depicted by the shows also contributes to the assessment. Darrell, Natasha's boyfriend of a couple of weeks, describes how he likes to treat her: "*I like usually taking her to KFC, she is crazy over chicken*"²¹. Again, a date in a popular fast food restaurant offering fried chicken implies unhealthy eating habits and choices, moreover it highlights the questionable taste of the couple. Likewise, Amber and her boyfriend Ste are captured eating take-away pizza on a date in Amber's living room²². On the other hand, Sassi and her boyfriend Darren are watched leaving in taxi to a fancy restaurant as their first date after their daughter was born.²³

¹⁷ Teen Mom UK - S02E01

¹⁸ Underage and Pregnant - S01E04

¹⁹ Teen Mom UK - S04E05, S02E01, S03E03

²⁰ Underage and Pregnant - S01E04

²¹ Underage and Pregnant - S03E06

²² Teen Mom UK - S04E05

²³ Teen Mom UK - S02E01

The boyfriends and families are also shown engaging in passive entertainment such as watching TV or playing PlayStation games (especially Chloe's boyfriend) "*Jordan, you not helping at all you playing your stupid games*"²⁴. Kacey and her boyfriend are playing PlayStation together.²⁵

By the contrast, Shannon's boyfriend is in trouble because he prefers to spend his free time in the gym instead of taking care of their son. "*I will only be in the gym only for like half an hour now and I will come back in a bit and I will be doing whatever you want me doing*"²⁶

The protagonists of Teen Mum UK are displayed enjoying activities associated with teenagers, such as partying in a club, drinking alcohol with their friends more often than the girls in Underage and Pregnant.

However, we can find examples of alcohol abuse portraits in the Underage and Pregnant samples as well. Keysie's boyfriend: "*I am not quite sure, I was probably quite drunk when I said that*", followed by nervous laughter (reaction to Keysie's comment that her boyfriend might move in to her parents house permanently).²⁷

Toni talking about her activities before the pregnancy: "*I used to be out every weekend, drinking with my mates.*"²⁸

Active entertainment is displayed in the shows too. However, while the shooting of Underage and Pregnant happens before the children are born, Teen Mums UK are followed with their toddlers, therefore active leisure activities involving children are depicted more often. The active entertainment includes e.g. Chloe being with the children in a leisure centre while chatting and complaining about their boyfriends and struggles with a co-teen

²⁴ Teen Mom UK - S04E05

²⁵ Underage and Pregnant - S01E04

²⁶ Teen Mom UK - S04E05

²⁷ Underage and Pregnant - S01E04

²⁸ Underage and Pregnant - S01E04

mother²⁹. Ste and Amber taking their child into the Animal farm “*It is a first time me and Ste done something like this*”³⁰. Megan is taken for a trip to the seaside on the way to the caravan where they temporarily live³¹; Mia takes her daughter to a swimming class³², Amber takes a taxi for a date to go ice skating;³³ Amber reads a tabloid newspaper³⁴. Toni walks the dog in a park³⁵; Sassi’s boyfriend travels for his birthday weekend to Amsterdam with his friends.

Also, the decoration or tidiness or untidiness of mise-en-scene of the houses may acquire stereotypical negative assessment.

For example, the mise-en-scene of Keysie’s room; hand writing on the wall and on the bed, very childlike decoration with a big stuffed teddy bear in the background. Also, Molly shows to the camera what the writing on the pink wall in her room means. These depictions of the girls’ rooms remind us that these girls are far from adulthood in terms of their ideas of decor and backgrounds.

²⁹ Teen Mom UK - S04E05

³⁰ Teen Mom UK - S02E01

³¹ Teen Mom UK - S02E01

³² Teen Mom UK - S02E01

³³ Teen Mom UK - S02E01

³⁴ Teen Mom UK - S02E01

³⁵ Underage and Pregnant - S01E04

Graph 2 The inner structure of the Lifestyle and Taste Stereotype



6.6.3 Education, Career and Aspiration Stereotypes

Another category that was formed while conducting the research due its frequency of occurrence is the one classified as stereotypes related to the education, career and aspiration of the young girls and their families, prevalent mainly in the BBC series *Underage* and *Pregnant*.

The heroines of the *Underage* and *Pregnant* series dropped out of school during their pregnancy, whereas *Teen Mom UK* episodes capture themes related to education, less often, and, some of the girls hold a part-time job that does not require qualifications e.g. Amber works in a coffee house and Chloe is pursuing a drivers' licence and working in a shop selling baby clothes. Pregnancy is being presented as the obstacle to gaining education and compromising the career options and goals of the girls. "*Toni does not have*

the support of her friends, after getting pregnant, she had to leave the school"³⁶ Toni also has her own plans for the future career of her unborn son: "*He is going to be a footballer*".³⁷

As stated by the narrator, despite having good grades in college and the aspiration of being police officer, Charlotte stopped going to college. However, she is still aiming to continue in order to avoid the example of her mother who has 6 children and has been out of work for a long time.

*"I do what I do is because I don't want to turn out like my mum, she does not have a job for whatever reason but I want to try to get one because I know that it was a pain in the bum to watch mum sitting around the house whole day."*³⁸ Her mother is also depicted most of the time sitting in her pyjamas bottoms on the sofa. She sums up her employment status and adds: "*I don't work, so it gives me the opportunity to provide that support for Charlotte*"³⁹

Her mother also indicates that the pregnancy is the only reason for Charlotte dropping out of school "*If she really wanted to do what she said she wanted to do she would have to only get up a bit earlier and not fuss about the hair and the make-up*"⁴⁰.

Carly also postponed her education goals because of being pregnant. "*Carly decided she was too far through her pregnancy, to continue school and will finish her GCSEs after the baby is born.*"⁴¹

Molly's case demonstrates two categories of the stereotypes: lack of aspiration/education and behavioural issues. Molly is not in education and the top of this, she has unspecified behavioural problems. She did not drop out voluntarily as she was excluded from school. "*Molly was excluded from school because of her behaviour, and sent to a pupil referral*

³⁶ Underage and Pregnant - S01E04

³⁷ Underage and Pregnant - S01E04

³⁸ Underage and Pregnant - S03E06

³⁹ Underage and Pregnant - S02E02

⁴⁰ Underage and Pregnant - S02E02

⁴¹ Underage and Pregnant - S02E02

*unit, we had years of problems with her in school behaviour wise, not listening to teachers, walking out of the rooms, it was not violent, but behaviourally she was sort of out of scale*⁴².

Molly is compared to her sister, who is contrastingly portrayed as 'clever', the aspiring and achieving one, who describes herself as “posh”. *“My friends don’t have sisters who get pregnant at 15, personally I find it quite embarrassing, I know it sounds really stuck up, but I am actually quite posh”*.⁴³

Also, the lack of education or general knowledge is portrayed. One example of this phenomenon is the shot of Toni’s boyfriend not being able to say word “hormonal” *“She was getting lot of ...homo...how do you say that word...homondle, just crying all the time and wanting to be with me (attempting to say hormonal)”*.⁴⁴

A further example is Natasha mistaking a duck for a seagull: *“Over there it is something like duck”* (Natasha followed by shot of a seagull). Darell: *“No it is a seagull”*.⁴⁵

Molly’s attitude towards the contraceptive pill: *“I just kept forgetting to take the pill and it was really like confusing, I just forgot it like every day.”*⁴⁶

The predominantly negative assessment and messaging of the series regarding the teenage mothers’ education and career is that by being pregnant, the chances for educational and professional achievements are limited, and therefore contribution by the state will be expected at some point.

⁴² Underage and Pregnant - S02E02

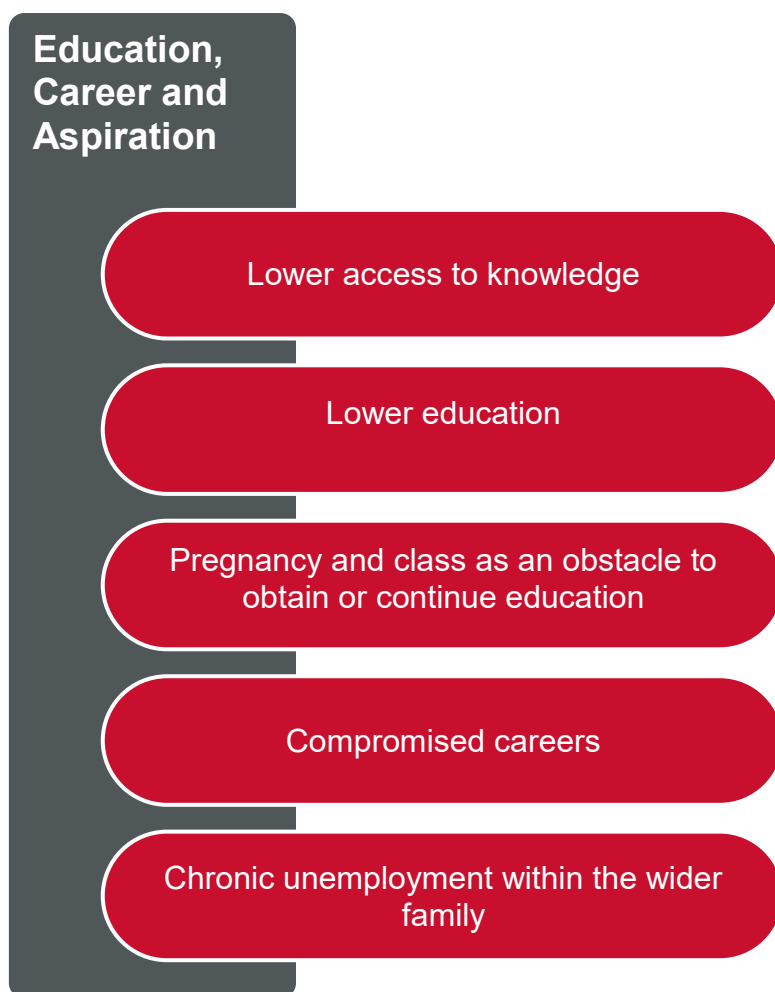
⁴³ Underage and Pregnant - S02E02

⁴⁴ Underage and Pregnant - S01E04

⁴⁵ Underage and Pregnant - S03E06

⁴⁶ Underage and Pregnant - S02E02

Graph 3 The inner structure of the Education, Career and Aspiration Stereotype



6.6.4 Behavioural Stereotypes

Stereotypes related to the behaviour of the pregnant adolescents and their close families is the last category of the most frequent types of stereotypes displayed in the examined sample.

The tendencies of portraying the girls and families as lazy and therefore undeserving are one pattern. As already mentioned in the category of Economic Insecurity stereotypes, the mise-en-scene of the houses, flats and especially the rooms the teenagers occupy, are often depicted as cluttered, messy, untidy and in need of re-decoration e.g. a close-up shot of a

pile of clothes which need ironing⁴⁷ or Toni being filmed in her room cramed with objects all over the place⁴⁸, Carly and her family are filmed in cluttered living room⁴⁹. This is mainly a feature in the Underage and Pregnant samples. The set-up as such conveys the message of the girls and families being lazy, apathetic, and even irresponsible.

Molly reveals: *“I never tidy my room, my mum will tidy my room when the baby comes”* (camera in close up shot of Molly's messy room with clothes cluttered everywhere).⁵⁰ Moreover, Molly's mother reveals to the camera that she provides Molly with special services, showing that Molly is the victim of her spoiled manners covered up by her pregnancy. The statement also reveals further the disrespect Molly holds towards her mother and wider family.

*“This is Molly's breakfast. She just rung up from upstairs deciding that she is hungry and so I am gonna take it up to her and hopefully she will eat it. Molly does what she wants. Molly would not get up if she does not want to. She will not come down for dinner if she does not want to.”*⁵¹

Another example of portrayed laziness and irresponsibility is one from Teen Mum UK, when Chloe's boyfriend sleeps in after a night out instead of taking care of the child *“Jorde, wake up then, I am going to work, you need to get up. I would like to stay in bed, but I cannot.”*⁵² Chloe's conversation with her mother, when she comes back in the afternoon proving that Jordan stayed in bed all day: *“Where is Jordan?” “Bed, all day.” “Are you joking”?*⁵³

Charlotte is not willing to get up to catch a bus to school; *“She does not like mornings at all.”*⁵⁴

⁴⁷ Underage and Pregnant - S03E06

⁴⁸ Underage and Pregnant - S01E04

⁴⁹ Underage and Pregnant - S02E02

⁵⁰ Underage and Pregnant - S02E02

⁵¹ Underage and Pregnant - S02E02

⁵² Teen Mom UK - S03E03

⁵³ Teen Mom UK - S03E03

⁵⁴ Underage and Pregnant - S03E06

Irresponsibility and the impression of bad parenting is also shown when the camera shoots a scene depicting a baby picking up food from a dog's food bowl and eating it while the mother is preparing something in the kitchen⁵⁵. Later on, the same baby is filmed crawling on the carpet, picking up crumbs of food from the floor and eating it.⁵⁶

Another significant component related to the trait of behaviour is the one of promiscuity and loose morals. This pattern is apparent in both series. In Teen Mum, Amber is going out for dates with three other boys within the three sampled episodes, while her boyfriend is dating another girl. It is also revealed that her boyfriend was cheating on Amber two months away from her giving birth to their child.⁵⁷The father of Mia's child and her boyfriend is in a relationship with another girl, Erin. *"I have explained to him so many times the last two years about how I feel about him being around Erin, and he has just done the ultimate thing he could have done."*⁵⁸

Sassi also had an affair while she was separated from her boyfriend.⁵⁹

Natasha gets engaged to her new boyfriend, who is not the father of her baby after 3 weeks of the relationship, after the boyfriend asks for permission to marry her from her father through a Facebook message.⁶⁰

Parents of the girls think aloud about their children's risky sexual behaviour leading to the pregnancy. Toni's mother *"I took Joanne to the doctor to go on the pill but with not Tony I did not because I did not think she was actually going to do anything with anybody"*⁶¹

Charlotte's mother refers to her daughter's relationship with the boy who got her pregnant: *"Best bit was she already told me her and her boyfriend was not having sex because he was a virgin". So I used to rip them and say don't go swimming without your socks on and everything now since Charlie said ooo I am not popping his cherry."*⁶²

⁵⁵ Underage and Pregnant - S03E06

⁵⁶ Underage and Pregnant - S03E06

⁵⁷ Teen Mom UK - S02E01

⁵⁸ Teen Mom UK - S03E03

⁵⁹ Teen Mom UK - S04E05

⁶⁰ Underage and Pregnant - S03E06

⁶¹ Underage and Pregnant - S01E04

⁶² Underage and Pregnant - S03E06

Unconventional relationships are also eye-catching because of the explicit content. Carly's 14 year old brother suffered from behaviour issues and the mother refers to the issues as being started by Carly's pregnancy: *He (the brother) called her very nasty names, he calls her a slut*"⁶³. Charlotte's mother, referring to Charlotte when talking to her other daughter: *"I thought she was my best friend."*⁶⁴

Teen pregnancy occurs as generational issue: Carly's grandmother was pregnant at a young age too and she had a stillbirth before giving birth to Carly's mother. Carly's mother was pregnant herself at 14 and had a miscarriage, then she got pregnant with her second boyfriend like Carly. ⁶⁵

The teen mothers engage in activities normative for adults, but sanctioned when practiced underage (alcohol, smoking or sexual activity), in order to enhance their maturity and speed up their entry to adulthood. Carly: *"It is probably why I have turned out to be pregnant as well, I am not saying it your fault, it is obviously because I wanted to be more grown up."*⁶⁶

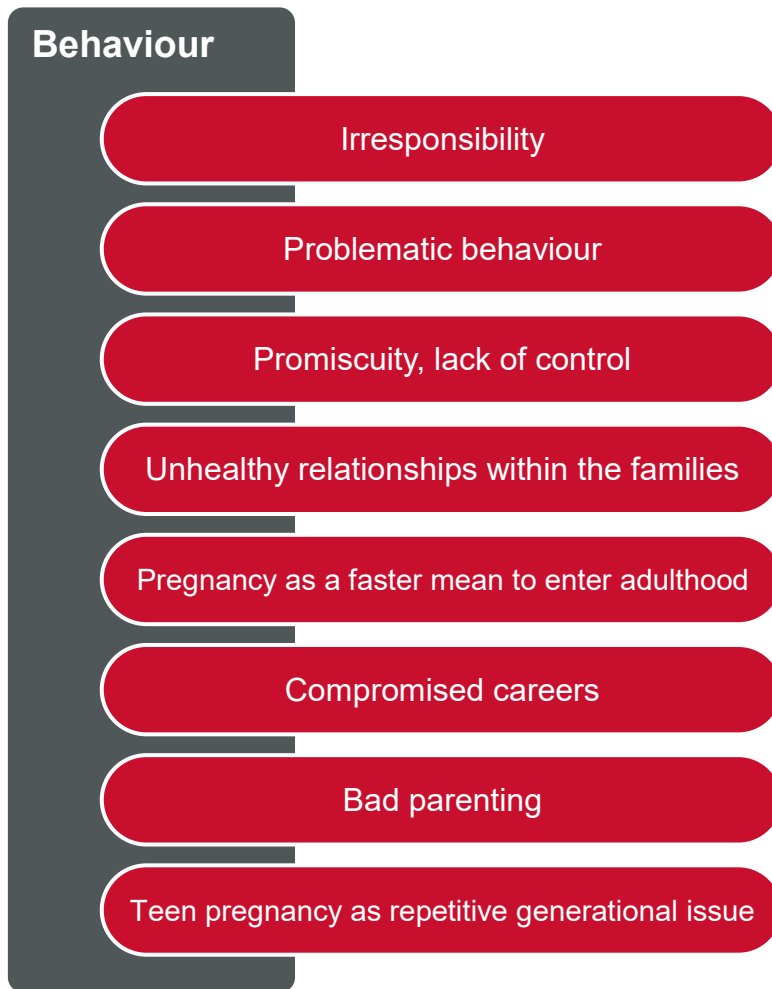
⁶³ Underage and Pregnant - S02E02

⁶⁴ Underage and Pregnant - S02E02

⁶⁵ Underage and Pregnant - S02E02

⁶⁶ Underage and Pregnant - S02E02

Graph 4 The inner structure of the Behaviour Stereotype



Conclusion

The primary objective of the analysis was to explore and determine whether the audio-visual text of Reality TV evaluates the social standing of young mother and their families and how it is done. Using the method of qualitative content analysis and the technique of open coding, six randomly selected episodes of two different reality shows were researched.

The research question and subpoints were defined as follows:

How does the audio-visual text of Reality TV evaluate the social standing of the young mothers and their families?

Subpoint 1: Do the assessments of teenage mothers have the form of stereotypes?

Subpoint 2: What are the most common stereotypes?

Subpoint 3: Are there negative assessments which are not presented in the form of stereotypes?

The research showed that the audio-visual text of Reality TV does evaluate the social standing of the young mothers and their families by various techniques and that teenage mothers are depicted in a stereotypical way. The main techniques that frequently convey negative assessments are mise-en-scene (visual and symbolic elements) and sound (narrator, subjects narrating themselves or interacting with the public). These two elements, often combined, do evaluate the social standing of the girls and their families.

Being able to put the codes into the categories of prevalent stereotypes depicted throughout the research, gives us the straightforward answer to one of the subpoints defined to determine and direct the research: “Do the assessments of teenage mothers have the form of stereotypes?” The subpoints helped to guide the research as well as keep the research question relevant and open enough. As the analysis has shown, the assessment of teenage mothers, as well, the portrayals do take form of stereotypes that are often repetitive and confirm each other as described in the defined categories of stereotypes. The most common stereotypes found throughout the analysis were divided into four categories and described. The most frequently reoccurring categories of stereotypes are: economic insecurity stereotypes, lifestyle and taste stereotypes, education, career and aspiration stereotypes and behavioural stereotypes. The most reoccurring negative assessment themes that were found are: financial struggles and dependency on family or the state, questions over whether the families are deserving of support, poor housing, clothing (fashion), physical appearance, decoration of interiors, leisure time activities, beautifying, habits and food. Pregnancy is often portrayed as the obstacle that leads to the compromising prospects of education and career resulting in unemployment which often spreads throughout the family. The teenage girls are portrayed with a variety of behavioural issues and the families as being lazy, apathetic, and even irresponsible.

Negative assessments not presented in the form of a stereotype were detected in the research sample as well. These negative attributes associated with the individual girls and not teenage mothers as a social group could be categorized under education and resulting intellectual intelligence. The portrayed girls were on different education level, those who were portrayed as not as intellectually educated and those who could be viewed as being educated. The assessment did not testify towards the adolescent mothers as a group possessing lower or higher education levels, and resulting intellectual intelligence. Similarly, some of the behavioural traits such as moodiness, defiance or resignation were linked to usual teenage behaviour or to the character of the girls rather than generic association with the pregnancy itself. The assessment that teenage girls got pregnant on purpose is possibly the one with stereotypical potential. These were very individual cases where it was indicated that the pregnancy was planned and intentional. However, the reasoning for pregnancy itself varied and was highly individual, therefore 'getting pregnant on purpose' is negative assessment not in form of stereotype.

During the research two significant differences between the Reality TV shows arose. The focus given to the lives of the mothers in both programmes is on family relationships and lifestyle. Whilst negative situations are present for the protagonists of Teen Mom UK, they are relatively normal situations for all family units, such as arguing with their partners or their parents, being comforted by their parents, and getting into fights with their ex-boyfriend. The negatives are offset however, by highlighting positive results, such as making up with them again, being surrounded by luxury and regularly throwing big ostentatious parties which may not be present or be out of reach for typical low-income, struggling families. The less appealing images of young parenthood are not displayed as often as the dramatic relationships. The babies are cute and well behaved and, in some instances the girls are positively portrayed as trying to be good mothers to their children (e.g. taking the children to swimming lessons, having big birthday parties organised for them). The main differences are in the cast selection and their background. The Teen Mom UK protagonists are shown as living in nicer houses and are more likely to be from more privileged backgrounds (teenage pregnancy is not portrayed as the issue of the poor). This gives an idea they do not need additional help and there is no ambition or expectation of providing a current and future contribution to a productive society. Their lives, as framed

by the audio-visual content reminds one of a soap opera with young motherhood adding many benefits to the lifestyle image, rather than the content highlighting struggles and negative situations.

By contrast, the BBC's *Underage and Pregnant* shows very different portraits and stereotypes associated with the families of pregnant teenagers. The image of disadvantages in terms of economic aspirations and the depiction of a low-culture lifestyle, combined with the portrayals of economic dependency, raw living conditions, low educational and professional aspirations creates bleaker and more stereotypical portraits of the families, providing the answer to the original questions of the research and the subpoints more accurately. The parents and families are extremely reliant on aid in the form of state benefits which are often complained about as not sufficient, whilst being spent on frivolous luxuries with no real effort being made to change their circumstance. The result of this type of portrayal is that the life situation they are in is a negative one, with the propensity of young motherhood over several generations of the family being a cause of socio-economic deprivation.

Summary

This study of stereotypes within the phenomenon of teenage pregnancies in the wider historical and cultural context, gradually narrowed down to the media portrayal of teenage mothers. The theoretical research brought a better understanding of this issue of such broad complexity. In the first chapter, the theoretical basis was established and the problematics of the figure of the teenage mother was described, arguing that society constructed the character of the teenage mother as shown by the theory of social constructionism. People interact in a social system that produces concepts and representations of actions that become adapted within the relations of the society members and the meaning of these actions becomes embedded in wider society.

The following chapter defined and explored the term of class through the lenses of classic sociological theories from Marx, Weber and the contemporary sociologist Goldthorpe. This helped to establish solid foundations for the further analysis of class stratification in

Britain and the importance and meaning of class in British society. This also helped us understand the status of teenage mothers, who are often considered as members of the so-called underclass, defined by severe socio-economic disadvantage and perceived by the majority as societal outcasts. It was discussed as another phenomenon that contributes to societal prejudice when it comes to teenage pregnancy and has a significant emphasis on social stratification and social class. British society has traditionally been distinctively stratified by its classes and the British have always been obsessed by class and labelling people by their appropriate social status, and this continues to influence and play a key role in everyday life. This was shown with the example of moral panics over the media created folk devil of the underclass and chavs, set within context of traditional British class sensitivity.

Some of the findings emerging from the class specifications relate exactly to the historical framing of the problem. This was described within the subchapters focused on chronological development of the past concepts of young women judged as deviant for various reasons, such as having children out of wedlock, not being able to control sexual desires or simply deemed as rebelling against patriarchal control over the female body and reproduction. The examples from the past are repetitive and similar to those displayed throughout time, proving that the stigmatisation and stereotyping is continual and historically present in public discourse.

To support the continuum of this theory, the work of Stanley Cohen from 1972, sheds a new light on the way the popular media report on those who are different and supposedly deviant in 'normalised' society and artificially create moral panics through excessive and exaggerated reporting. These subcultures involving people with different lifestyles who are the centre of the media interest Cohen defines as 'Folk Devils'. The reaction of the public caused by the media messaging is deemed as 'Moral Panics'. Thus, we have demonstrated the complexity of the societal anomaly of teenage childbearing which has historically been surrounded by cultural myths and various beliefs related to virtues, behavioural problems and low morals.

Once the phenomenon of teenage mothers was grounded in its historical frame, this combination of findings provided support to tackle the issue in the wider social and cultural context of the United Kingdom, where we were looking for the evidence of youth pregnancy rates and further explanations about why adolescent parenting is widely recognised and associated with poor health and social exclusion the society in the UK. Furthermore, it was shown that the demonisation of young and unemployed mothers, the negative impact on wider society and the resulting moral panic was again placed at the centre of political rhetoric. Consecutive governments, including the Conservatives under Margaret Thatcher and John Major and Labour under Tony Blair identified teenage motherhood as a major issue for the electorate and the topic was included in government manifestos confirming it as an important social-economic issue for the country.

The subsequent section of the thesis challenged the contribution of the media towards the normalisation of the former taboo, demonstrated through the gradual establishment of the topic of teenage motherhood in the reporting of popular media, including TV, tabloids, magazines and new media. The examples highlighted in were in the commercially successful and publicly acclaimed blockbusters centred around teenage pregnancy e.g. *Juno* (2008) and *Precious* (2010). With the hyped celebrity cult, the media extensively reported on the teenage pregnancies of the well-known public figures, Bristol Palin and Jamie Lynn Spears. Their pregnancies were at the forefront of mainstream media reports, contributing towards a celebrity angle taken by the media which portrayed glamour and made the issue less taboo. Also, it was necessary to report on the observation of the girls, who voluntarily expose, exploit and monetarise their pregnancy through the internet and its online platforms (e.g. YouTube), where the content uploaded by adolescent girls is almost unlimited and is accessible to a wide audience. This phenomenon is described through the theory of many-to-many.

Putting glamorous, successful young girls into the centre continually add to the de-tabooing of the topic, most notably through the format of Reality TV and reality shows. The third chapter tackles this occurrence and gives examples of the way stereotypes are created and transmitted through entertainment, illustrating that the media plays a major role in the construction of teenage mothers and their representation.

The following chapter explores the term ‘poverty porn’ in connection with Reality TV. Having framed the issue with theoretical findings, the basis for the practical part and the research itself was established.

The theoretical findings were used to ground the research and practical parts of the thesis. The objective of the research itself was to understand how Reality TV depicts the teenage mothers and their families in terms of class evaluation. The research used qualitative content analysis and the technique of open coding in order to provide answers to the research question and established subpoints. The selected method allowed us to explore the audio-visual text of reality shows featuring teenage mothers, especially in the broader social context described in the theoretical part of this thesis. The outcome of the research was the classification and definition of stereotypical assessments that were prevalent in the randomly selected samples of the particular Reality TV shows, broadcast in the UK and featuring underage mothers and their families.

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