

Black Teenage Mothers: Pregnancy and Child Rearing from Their Perspective (Book).

By: Mark A. Fine

[Fine, M. A.](#) (1991). *Black teenage mothers: Pregnancy and child rearing from their perspective* by C. W. Williams. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 53(4), 1114.

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Abstract:

Black Teenage Mothers: Pregnancy and Child Rearing from Their Perspective. Constance Willard Williams. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1991. 208 pp. \$24.95.

This book describes the results of an ethnographic, interview study of 30 black teenage mothers in the Boston area. The author's primary goal was to understand the meaning of births to black adolescent mothers in the context of their cultural and personal circumstances. The book successfully makes two interrelated contributions to the literature: (a) it explores what teenage mothers themselves (and not others) think and feel about their experiences, and (b) it takes an adaptive perspective on adolescent pregnancy and childrearing that does not assume that such behavior represents maladaptive or acting-out behavior.

Keywords: book reviews | family | teenage motherhood | African American teenagers | African American mothers | parenting | motherhood

Article:

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The book is divided into three distinct parts. The first part provides the context for understanding the experiences of black teenage mothers. This information includes material related to the 1965

Moynihan report that gave a very negative portrayal of black family life; a number of statistics related to sexual behavior, teenage pregnancy, childbearing, and childrearing; and theoretical perspectives on the causes of these behaviors. While this material is helpful, it is somewhat unfocused and lacks a clear purpose. Most of the references are books rather than journal articles.

The second section presents the results of the interview study and is clearly the highlight of the book. The author carefully reviewed the transcriptions of the interviews and identified several themes, including socialization to motherhood, relations with fathers, responsibility, and interactions with institutions outside the family. In each of these thematic areas, Williams vividly presents what appears to be a balanced and representative view of the experiences of a range of adolescents. For example, in the chapter on responsibility, she describes the cases of adolescents who have very little conception of how to care for an infant and those who have a mature approach to child care. Throughout, the actual statements from the teenagers are used to highlight the relevant points. Some of the author's statements regarding the causes of various behaviors are highly speculative, although these may be regarded as hypotheses deserving of future exploration. In addition, each of the 30 teenagers completed a self-esteem inventory and the results are described in depth. While interesting, this material does not fit in well with the qualitative material. Further, given the lack of normative information on this scale, the author's conclusion that the mean self-esteem of the sample is "relatively high" is questionable.

The final chapter summarizes the results and makes research and policy recommendations. Although some interesting points are made, it is difficult to see how the results led to some of the recommendations.

This well-written book is recommended primarily because of its value in providing adolescent mothers' perspectives on their experiences. The material in the case narratives, and the sensitive and engaging way in which it is presented, makes an important contribution to the literature.