

Book Reviews

Unfit Subjects: *Educational Policy and the Teen Mother*

Wanda Pillow.
New York: Routledge, 2004.

Reviewed by Lucy E. Bailey

Wanda Pillow's *Unfit Subjects: Educational Policy and the Teen Mother* turns a critical lens on a vital but rarely studied issue shaping young mother's experiences—that of educational policy. Asking “whether teen mothers fit in public schools and which teen mothers are fit for an education,” Pillow's potent, sophisticated text takes its place within a growing body of feminist scholarship that seeks to interrupt the demonization of pregnant and mothering teens and their symbolic use in debates about declining family values. Pillow, a Professor of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Illinois-Champaign, draws from ethnographic research in schools, policy, history, popular culture, and congressional hearings to trace the development and racialization of dominant cultural narratives about school-aged mothers, their expression in public policy, and their effects on women's experiences. This text is a substantive contribution to feminist scholarship and to understanding more fully the intricate ways young mothers' lives are shaped by larger political, cultural, and educational forces.

Pillow extends knowledge of pregnant/mothering teens in a number of ways. Most importantly, she explains that policies such as Title IX (American Educational Amendment Act of 1972) explicitly include pregnant/mothering students as a category of persons protected from sex discrimination in public schools. Despite such protection, Pillow catalogues practices in schools that testify to widespread noncompliance with policy, as well as significant discomfort with the idea of teen motherhood, practices as segregation, discrimination, inferior curriculum, and administrative negligence. Indeed, schools seem to

evade their mandated responsibilities, in part because working to accommodate the needs of young mothers may be misconstrued as affirming their sexual behaviour and reproductive labour.

Policy implementation, subject to the vagaries of local control rather than federal oversight, is inconsistent and contradictory. This pattern is intensified by the absence of case law on school-aged mothers as a basis for guiding or compelling services. Rather than working to provide equal opportunity, schools construct self-sufficiency and advancement as women's individual responsibility ("it's your mess, you deal with it") to avoid the presumed fate as a future "drain" on social and economic resources. Young mothers bear the burden of such beliefs with education unequal to that of their non-mothering peers.

Among the text's most powerful chapters is Pillow's analysis of contemporary abstinence-education initiatives (chapter 6) that not only dictate what constitutes legitimate sexual activity but provide the very backdrop for cultural narratives of teen mothers as deviant. In other chapters, Pillow exposes the intensely racialized/classed threads infusing narratives about pregnant/mothering teens as a "contaminating" force and "social problem," as well as schools' differential treatment of young women on the basis of race and class. Pillow ends the text with a vision of education *for* teen mothers, detailing ways schools can better serve students through providing "access to make up tests or work...the provision of appropriate seating" for pregnant women, "access to bathroom breaks," and more flexible scheduling (62). Pillow charges schools to acknowledge their role as a "front line service provider" (79) for these young women.

This informative, theoretically sophisticated text is a useful call to action for school workers committed to equitable schooling practices, for scholars interested in gender and education issues, and for advocates for the rights of young mothers to reach their full human potential.

It Could Happen to You: *Diary of a Pregnancy and Beyond*

Martha Brockenbrough.

Riverside, NJ: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2002.

Reviewed by Linda Liebenberg

It Could Happen to You is both entertaining and enlightening. Martha Brockenbrough, a young professional who worked for Microsoft, takes the reader through her personal journey as a mother, from its beginnings when she decided to have a baby through to her daughter Lucy's first birthday. Brockenbrough's diary does not offer a prescriptive, academic, or theoretical view of motherhood.