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Essay 2

## **Glamorizing Teen Moms**

*What makes teen motherhood seem so glamorous these days?*

By Shannon Walsh

Amber Portwood was caught by the paparazzi coming out of the medical clinic in her hometown of Anderson, Indiana. Is she pregnant again? It was reported that she tested positive on over three home pregnancy tests but according to her, after going to the doctor it turns out she is not pregnant. What was her excuse for leaving the medical clinic? She was picking up birth control. MTV's Teen Mom star Amber has been featured on tabloids and gossiping websites not just because of her nude photos leaked on the internet or her restraining order between her and ex fiancé Gary, but because she could potentially be pregnant again. Why do we care? She had an unexpected pregnancy, auditioned to be on a reality show featuring teen moms, and she is rewarded with stardom. What about her daughter, baby Lea? How will Amber's little girl react when she grows up to find out her mother became famous due to her unplanned pregnancy and embarrassing display of her dysfunctional life.

Teenagers by nature are self centered, moody and dramatic. It makes perfect sense why the girls on teen mom are okay with having their lives documented but its concerning how this will affect the babies on the show years from now. What is going to happen when the children of these teen moms grow up and learn that their moms displayed their personal lives for America to see? Teen pregnancy is not something to be made public and these family's lives go beyond the hour long episodes once a week. These girls are parents and the fact that the show focuses so much on the drama of their situations rather than them being good mothers or attempting to be good mothers is troubling. Not only will this show have consequences for the children, but also

for the young viewers of the show or readers of tabloids. The Parents Television Council's Director of Communications and Public Education, Melissa Henson, talks about why this is an issue by stating that, "It is sending the message to girls that if you get pregnant as a result of being sexually active; you could end up on TV or a magazine cover". Nowadays we are seeing more and more unwed mothers. Are mothers in Hollywood making single motherhood seem like an okay thing to do? Perhaps they can manage it themselves because of their wealth and abundance of assistance but we need to take in consideration the effects it has on the children involved.

Teenage girls today confuse the difference between real celebrities and people who are famous for being famous. In Neal Gabler's article "Our Celebrities Ourselves", he references Daniel Boorstin's definition of a celebrity as, "someone who is known for being well known". The teen moms on television are famous because they became pregnant at age sixteen and put themselves in the public eye. They have not accomplished anything of importance; therefore putting them on the same level as genuine celebrities is a problem. In, Tina Fey's article, "Confessions of a Juggler" featured in The New Yorker, she talks about the fact that she is a working mother and can sometimes be torn between whether she should make another movie or two, have a second child or both. The Teen Moms had their babies as teenagers, are now famous, and expect to be on the same level of celebrity as Angelina Jolie. This is where tabloids confuse young readers because one week Jennifer Garner is a cover story and the next it's Farrah Abraham from Teen Mom. Not only are the genuine celebrities on a different level than the teen moms because of how they got their fame but also because of financial reasons. The teen moms from the show are normal people living in suburban parts of America trying to get by with their new lives as mothers. Movie and television stars are famous because of their careers and had

their children as part of their adult relationships. In tabloids, Paparazzi photograph celebrities with their children but they are not famous because of their children. When the teen moms are photographed in tabloids, there really isn't a reason and the point is that they are only famous because of their unplanned, teen pregnancy. These teen moms used their pregnancy as an entry into fame and continue to use their children for attention. When young readers see the teen moms and celebrities photographed next to each other, it makes it seem like they are on the same level. What the teen moms did was skip a level on the road to being celeb status and they do not deserve fame. More importantly, their children didn't ask for the fame, attention or embarrassment.

Celebrity children are coming off as objects and symbols of status. When talking about children in the world of celebrities, Tina Fey mentions how in Hollywood, having the most children is an opportunity both to show off how much money they have and to have an excuse to name their children after kings or types of fruit. She says, "All over Manhattan, large families have become status symbol". Having a baby or two on your hip while sporting your new Ray Bans and latest Marc Jacobs handbag is a fashion statement. These celebrity mothers look great and make motherhood seem like a sinch. They are caught by the paparazzi and placed all over the covers of tabloids with their adorable toddlers. The image of Bristol Palin on the cover of People Magazine, dressed to perfection and holding her beautiful baby, sends the message that being a young mother is a trend. Babies and young children are becoming the most fashionable accessory. Giving attention to celebrity babies adds to the allure of motherhood. When you hear Katie Holmes, cute baby Suri comes to mind, and we have all seen the abundance of photos from Jolie-Pitt family outings. Forbes magazine even had a poll for "Hottest Tots". Suri Holmes, Zahara Pitt and other children of celebrities are very popular in magazines and tabloids and like

Lacey Rose and Lauren Streib from Forbes Magazine mention, “Beyond the precious images they provide, these children very often make their ultra-famous parents more relatable--and, in some cases, more likable”. The teen moms from the show need to understand that even though their pregnancies brought them fame, their children will not. The starts of Teen Mom are not the same as celebrities and will never be.

Teen Mom is not the only influence on teens concerning teen motherhood. The witty film about a fifteen year old girl’s unplanned pregnancy, *Juno*, was released in 2007 and was a hit. In *Juno*, we can see the struggles of what it means to be pregnant at age fifteen but after ninety six minutes of film, we see a happy ending. This portrayal of teen pregnancy makes it seem like a manageable situation for today’s American teens. *Juno*’s situation is not ideal but it is drama free. On the other hand, Teen Mom shows the real problems that come with having a baby in high school. Linda Feldmann writes in her article “Bristol Palin and other Teen Moms: New Trendsetters?” for the Christian Science Monitor, that, “Celebrity culture has also been sending messages that unwed parenthood is no big deal. In the movie "Juno," an unwed teen gives birth, gives the baby up for adoption, and resumes her life – end of story”. Sarah Brown, the director of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy hopes that *Sixteen and Pregnant* and *Teen Mom* shows have an effect on teens because of the harsh reality.

There is a lot of controversy concerning the latest shows on MTV: *Teen Mom* and *Sixteen and Pregnant*. Some say that the reality of *Teen Mom* goes against the laid back feel of what *Juno* portrays and sends the message that having a baby as a teenager is not easy. At the same time, the show has made these mothers into celebrities while ignoring the babies in the show. Rob Shuter from gossip site PopEater mentioned that, “young ladies are so eager to be on reality TV that they are actually getting pregnant just to score an audition”. There are teens out

there that are so thirsty for stardom that they are trying to get pregnant in order to audition for these reality shows, not realizing that they have to raise a child for the next eighteen years or more. We see the stars of Teen Mom in magazine articles, on the news and even displayed on covers of tabloids. What kind of message are these shows sending to today's teenagers? What better way to become famous than to get pregnant and invite America in to watch their dysfunctional lives play out? Like Hollie McKay from Fox News mentions, "Forget leaking sex tapes, getting multiple plastic surgeries, and fist pumping. The latest way to get on the cover of a tabloid these days? Get pregnant and have a baby when you're a teenager and do it on TV". The thing is that these shows are a form of entertainment and they make money. I am guilty of watching it every week, but why? What is it that draws in so many viewers? It's the drama of a real life situation that makes it so appealing and it is unfortunate that the topic is centered on the serious issue of teen pregnancy. The teen moms are famous for being famous due to their unplanned pregnancies. Their fifteen minutes of fame will soon be over and the consequences will hit them eighteen years down the road when they have to deal with their children's interrogation about the show. Amber Portwood, whether she is pregnant again or not, is just an example of a teen mother setting a poor example of what motherhood is about. Next time she comes out of a clinic or a fast food restaurant and it's featured in People, ask yourself, why should you care?

## Works Cited

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