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Embodying the Problem

The Persuasive Power of the Teen Mother

JENNA VINSON

“Embodying the Problem presents a refreshing and original argument that provides analysis of the language and visual rhetoric of public campaigns framing teenage motherhood as a problem and provides, in dramatic response, the unexplored concerns and resistant voices of teenage mothers themselves.”

—Barbara Tomlinson, author of *Feminism and Affect at the Scene of Argument*

“This myth-busting work rejects stigmatizing statistics and narratives about young motherhood that depict the young pregnant or parenting body as always only a problem. Young and young-of-color mothers emerge as fierce advocates for themselves and their children. Vinson includes voices and visions from within to tell new stories and to reveal new needs and possibilities for reproductive justice.”

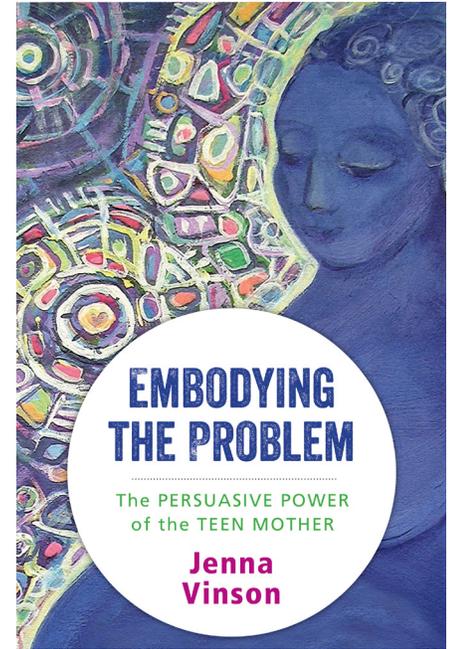
— Adela C. Licona, Director of the Institute for LGBT Studies, University of Arizona

The dominant narrative of teen pregnancy persuades many people to believe that a teenage pregnancy always leads to devastating consequences for a young woman, her child, and the nation in which they reside. Jenna Vinson draws on feminist and rhetorical theory to explore how pregnant and mothering teens are represented as problems in U.S. newspapers, political discourses, and teenage pregnancy prevention campaigns since the 1970s.

Vinson shows that these representations prevent a focus on the underlying structures of inequality and poverty, perpetuate harmful discourses about women, and sustain racialized gender ideologies that construct women's bodies as sites of national intervention and control.

Embodying the Problem also explores how young mothers resist this narrative. Analyzing fifty narratives written by young mothers, the recent #NoTeenShame social media campaign, and her interviews with thirty-three young women, Vinson argues that while the stigmatization of teenage pregnancy and motherhood does dehumanize young pregnant and mothering women, it is at the same time a means for these women to secure an audience for their own messages.

JENNA VINSON is an assistant professor of English at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell.



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