

The storyscapes of teenage pregnancy. On morality, embodiment, and narrative agency.

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Abstract

Young women tell different stories about teenage pregnancies. Their stories are embedded in the storyscape of their environment, which offers a limited set of narratives. Normative discourses influence the stories young women tell about their pregnancies. Social norms and stigma play an important role in the construction of the meaning of teenage pregnancies. However, the embodiment of being pregnant constitutes meaning as well. This paper draws on findings from a qualitative study conducted in 2015 among 46 young Dutch women who got pregnant before their 20th birthday. Our study explores how young women navigate the moral arena when they are confronted with a teenage pregnancy and which role the embodiment of pregnancy plays in the construction of social meanings. The concept of storyscapes visualises how young women are constrained by their embeddedness in multiple storyscapes, defined by different and often contrasting audiences. Nevertheless, our study indicates that the momentum of pregnancy can offer agentic possibilities to take up another position towards their social environment and develop narrative agency.

Keywords: Teenage pregnancy, abortion, narratives, embodiment, agency

Introduction

Researchers and public health agencies have predominantly defined teenage pregnancy as a potential risk of sexual activity for girls and as a social problem linked to poverty (Robson and Berthoud 2003). Public health policies in Europe, the US and Australia are strongly influenced by neoliberal ideology, which conceptualises individuals as rational, entrepreneurial actors whose moral authority is determined by their capacity for autonomy and self-care (Brown 2003). Sexual health policies aim to encourage young people to take responsibility and control their sexuality in order to prevent adverse outcomes such as unintended pregnancies (Bay-Cheng 2015). However, there is a

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contradiction between the individualistic concept of (reproductive) choice and the societal imperative to prevent pregnancy during adolescence (Mann, Cardona, and Gómez 2015). In the discourse of being in control, unintended pregnancies are seen as 'natural, deserved consequences of careless behavior' (Bay-Cheng 2015, p. 285). The neoliberal ideology of individuals being an agent of their own success reinforces the idea that teenage pregnancies are shameful (Baker 2009). By creating negative representations of teenage pregnancy, sexual health policies contribute to its stigmatisation (Arai 2009; Cherrington and Breheny 2005; Yardley 2008). Moreover, not all pregnant teenagers experience their situation only in negative terms. Therefore, many scholars advocate a re-examination of the discourses surrounding teenage pregnancies and early motherhood (Arai 2009). Furthermore, it is important to consider the stories young women tell themselves to understand the meaning of pregnancy in their lives (Barcelos and Gubrium 2014; Mann, Cardona, and Gómez 2015). Our study wants to contribute to this re-examination of discourses by exploring how young women in the Netherlands negotiate the meaning of teenage pregnancy, motherhood and abortion in the contemporary normative landscape.

The process through which young women understand, reproduce and rework existing narratives on teenage pregnancy can be understood as strategic negotiations: the processes through which young women situate themselves, their families and their reproductive choices in a larger social context (Barcelos and Gubrium 2014). These negotiations move beyond individual interpretations of social reality to a deeper recognition of how social norms, policies, and relationships shape what people think about their (sexual) selves (Schalet 2010). In this process of storytelling, young women develop and express narrative agency, which can be defined as the capacity to 'weave out of those narratives and fragments of narratives a life story that makes sense for the individual selves' (Benhabib 1999, p. 344).

Studies on teenage motherhood show that discourses on teenage motherhood run the gamut from describing the positive meanings motherhood may have to focusing solely on the social and personal problems of young mothers (McDermott, Graham, and Hamilton 2004). Motherhood can be an important part of young women's construction of themselves as moral and responsible (Alldred and David 2010) and provide young women with a new identity and new directions in life (Coleman and Cater 2006). Scholars have pointed out that teenage mothers can overcome obstacles and derive psychological benefits from their pregnancy (Clarke 2015; Duncan, Alexander, and Edwards 2010). Teenage pregnancy can be a route to social inclusion, rather than exclusion (Graham and McDermott 2005). Their children stimulate young women to set new goals as they wish to be a role model for their children and because they have someone else for whom they are responsible (Clarke 2015). However, young mothers can also suffer from negative effects of stigmatisation (Yardley 2008), poverty and problems around education (Robson and Berthoud 2003)

and teenage motherhood is not always experienced as wholly positive (Hoggart 2012). Moreover, a one-sided presentation of young motherhood in terms of personal choice and individualised resilience runs the risk of thwarting the analysis of social inequalities and inequitable circumstances. McDermott and Graham (2005, p. 76) conclude:

Despite the young mothers reflexively constructing their own life narratives, they do this within the confines of very real structural inequalities and discursive limitations. (..) In these resource-poor spaces, human action may result from a more embedded reflexivity; young women's resilient mothering practices are the reflexive 'choice of the necessary'.

The comforting discourse on the benefits of motherhood does not offer an alternative narrative for young women who have had an abortion. Although the Netherlands can be seen as a liberal country where abortion is legal, safe and easily available, there is a deep and manifest ambivalence about the morality of abortion in the media and in people's attitudes (Vanwesenbeeck, Bakker, and Gessell 2010). A recent survey amongst Dutch youth showed that 47% of young women who had had an abortion felt ashamed about it and 59% never spoke about it (De Graaf et al 2017). A review on abortion stigma indicates that women perceive stigma from friends, family, community and society as result of their decision to have an abortion (Hanschmidt et al 2016). Abortion stigma can be defined as 'a negative attribute ascribed to women who seek to terminate a pregnancy that marks them, internally or externally, as inferior to the ideals of womanhood' (Kumar, Hessini, and Mitchell 2009, p. 628). According to this definition, women who have abortions challenge social norms regarding female sexuality and maternity, and their doing so elicits stigmatising responses from their community (Hanschmidt et al. 2016; Smith et al. 2016). As a consequence, women keep their abortion secret from friends and family, which causes psychological distress, loneliness and suppression of emotions (Hanschmidt et al. 2016).

Obviously, being pregnant is not just a narrative, but also a bodily experience. Often scholars do not talk explicitly about the body but about embodiment, which refers to the experience of living in, perceiving, and experiencing the world from the physical and material place of our bodies (Tolman, Bowman, and Fahs, 2014). Bailey (2001) studied the embodiment of pregnancies by interviewing middle-class pregnant women in England. Her study showed that pregnant women changed their perceptions of their sexuality and the femininity of their bodies, and gained more physical and social space in public. However, Neiterman (2010) illuminated how the social position of teenage pregnant women restricts the agentic possibilities of the embodiment of their pregnancy. Being positioned at the bottom of the 'social ladder of motherhood' (Neiterman 2010), pregnant young women tried very hard to comply with prenatal regulations to perform pregnancy in a socially accepted way.

In conclusion, the strategic negotiations of young women to give meaning to their pregnancy, and subsequently to an abortion or to teenage motherhood, can be viewed as an ongoing process in interaction with social norms and discourses, opinions and moral judgements of family and friends, their sense of self and their ideas about their future, and the embodiment of being pregnant. In this article, we focus on the life stories of young women in the Netherlands who experienced unintended pregnancies. The Netherlands has a specific position when it comes to teenage pregnancies, as the teenage pregnancy rate in the Netherlands is one of the lowest in the world (Sedgh et al. 2015). Studies have suggested that this is related to comprehensive sexuality education at schools, availability of free birth control for young people, a supportive attitude among parents and a general liberal climate regarding sexually active youth (Brugman, Caron, and Rademakers 2010; Schalet 2010). As in other Western countries, Dutch sexual health policies reflect the neoliberal discourse, in which teenage pregnancies are presented as adverse outcomes and avoidable risks. Exploring the narrative and embodied agency of young women will contribute to the improvement of youth-friendly counselling practises and support, both during the decision-making process and afterwards. Moreover, the lived realities of young women dealing with teenage pregnancy should have implications for the revising of sexual health policies.

Method

This paper draws on findings from a qualitative study conducted in 2015 among young Dutch women who became pregnant before their 20th birthday. In this study, 46 open narrative interviews were conducted with participants aged 17 to 25. A criterion for inclusion was that their first pregnancy happened fewer than five years ago. The group of 46 participants included 16 young women who had had an abortion. The participants were recruited through purposive sampling (for example at social work locations and support groups for young mothers, and through a post on a website for online counselling for young women who had an abortion), through widely distributed flyers and links at websites for young people and through snowballing. As the aim of the study was to explore how young women navigated different discourses on teenage pregnancies, we wanted to recruit both young mothers and young women who had had an abortion. The last group, however, was not easy to recruit. Although statistics show that almost two thirds (62.6%) of teenage pregnancies in the Netherlands are terminated (Hehenkamp and Wijzen 2016), we experienced major difficulties in finding women who were willing to talk about their experience of abortion. One reason for this was that health professionals did not stay in contact with women after their abortion, whereas they did stay in contact with women who continued the pregnancy and gave birth. But another important factor was the abortion stigma the participants revealed. During the interviews women felt reluctant to talk about their abortion and told us they were afraid of moral judgements. They often did not talk about their

experiences with family and friends either, which resonates with the findings of Hanschmidt et al. (2016).

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Women who became pregnant before age of 20 (N = 46)				
	Age at time of first pregnancy			
Ethnicity	12-15	16-17	18-19	Total
White Dutch	4	13	11	28
Surinamese or Antillean	3	3	6	12
Other: Ghanaian, Somalian, Indonesian, Philippine	0	4	2	6
Total	7	20	19	46

Table 2. Decisions of participants regarding their first pregnancies.

	Age at time of first pregnancy			
	12-15 years	16-17	18-19	Total
Abortion	3	5	8	16
Giving birth	4	15	11	30
Total	7	20	19	46

Extra effort was also put into recruiting participants with diverse ethnic backgrounds, as the study wanted to be illustrative of women from a variety of backgrounds. Ethnic background influences the sexual discourses that women are exposed to (Cense 2014) and could affect the meaning of teenage pregnancy. Twelve out of 46 girls were from Suriname or the Dutch Caribbean originally; six girls had another non-Western background. The majority of participants (40 out of 46) came from economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, which reflects higher rates of teenage pregnancies among groups with a low level of education in the Netherlands (De Graaf, Vanwesenbeeck, and Meijer 2015). Their life stories revealed that two thirds of

the participants had experienced unsettling and unhappy family experiences, which in some cases had led them to leave their family homes as teenagers.

Life history approach and the concept of storyscape

This study uses a life history approach to investigate the construction of the meaning of teenage pregnancy in the context of young women's lives. Life histories are an effective method for eliciting details about subjective experience (Plummer 2001). Young women construct their own life story, grounded in 'historically evolving communities of memory, structured through class, age, race, gender and sexual preference' (Plummer 1995, p 23). The concept of 'storyscape' offers a lens to analyse the stories young women can draw on. A 'storyscape' can be seen as the surrounding landscape of interconnected stories with which we inevitably interact (Ganzevoort 2017). The term 'storyscaping' has been used in fields like marketing, transmedial communication, and social change advocacy to describe the purposeful activity of creating a meaningful and multidimensional 'landscape' of meanings that invite the audience to envision themselves as inhabiting that landscape. It is connected to the notion of worldmaking in Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative (1984) which has been applied to both cinema and religion (Lyytikäinen 2012; Plate 2008). The concept of storyscape thus refers to the combination of the narrative repertoires and normativity provided by the social and cultural context and the narrative audience to which the narrator responds. It is not limited to specific contents within a person's narratives but asks which narrative world is presented to an individual and how she or he constructs a life narrative to respond to that world. In that sense, the narrator is always negotiating possible meanings with her or his narrative context. This negotiation is the necessary corollary of the storyscape. Two stages can be distinguished in the negotiation (Ganzevoort 2017).

First, against the backdrop of the storyscape, individuals develop a life story by reflecting on their embodied experiences and the perceived 'reality' around them ('emplotment'). In this 'referential negotiation' people turn material reality into narrative. The next negotiation is the 'performative negotiation', in which people turn narrative into material and behavioural reality and facilitate new experiences and changes in reality, interacting with their narrative audience ('enactment'). Both negotiations are relevant when studying the agentic manoeuvres of young pregnant women. Referential negotiation is present in how they tell the story of their pregnancy within their life story and in the normative discourses that mark their stories. Performative negotiations show how young women navigate the interaction with their social environment. The women are embedded in multiple storyscapes defined by different and often contrasting audiences. They use their narratives to shape, maintain or change their relationships with different audiences (parents, boyfriends, and friends).

Interviews and drawing of lifelines

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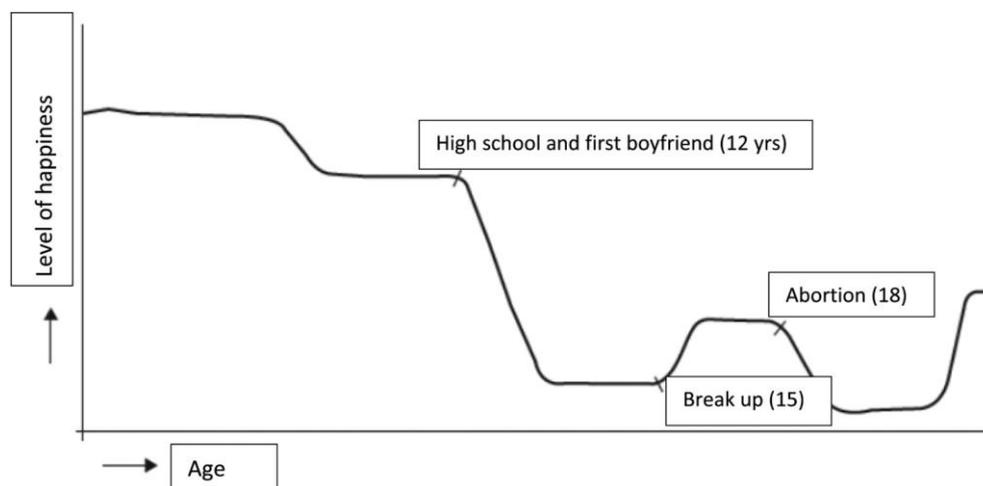
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An interview can be seen as an occasion of more systematic reflection and storytelling about the world (Plummer 1995). Our interviews were a meeting between a female interviewer who was present as a professional, and a young woman who was talking about her personal life. These different positions affected the content of the story she told, as some stories can be told in a specific context while others cannot. As the participant was selected for the interview because she had experienced an unintended pregnancy, she might feel judged or held responsible for the course her life has taken. Both interviewer and participant were aware of the social framing of teenage pregnancies as an adverse outcome. The interviewer introduced herself as working for the Dutch nongovernmental organisation Rutgers. This positioned the interviewer as taking a liberal stance towards sexually active young people and towards sexual and reproductive rights, including abortion.

During the interviews participants were invited to draw their 'lifeline', with their age on the horizontal axis and the 'level of happiness' on the vertical one (see figure 1). The lifeline is a narrative technique for marking and validating life events as a starting point for exploring the meaning of experiences. Drawing a visual, chronological representation of their life helps the participant to recall events from the past and helps the interviewer to ask the appropriate questions. Sensitive topics can be discussed as part of the broader story of the respondents, which prevents their entire life from being interpreted according to one particular theme or problem (Wilson et al. 2007). Interviews lasted around one and a half hour. All names in this article are pseudonyms.

Figure 1. Lifeline of a participant



Analysis

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. All interviews were coded using a thematic narrative technique that focuses on the kinds of stories produced in the data (Riessman 1993). Narratives of personal experience are stories that

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people tell that allow them to make sense of events, create order, contain emotions and establish connections with others, particularly when narrating difficult times in their lives (Mann et al. 2015). We looked for normative discourses that were present in the stories, how participants navigated these discourses, and the meaning they gave to their pregnancy and the choice they made. The lifelines illuminated which events were seen as meaningful by the participants, and what emotional value was attached to them. Secondly, we analysed the overarching storyscapes that enable the stories of the participants. In our analysis we focussed on how young women negotiated discourses on getting pregnant and on making the 'right' choice, how the embodiment of the pregnancy played a role in their negotiation and how they developed narrative agency by stepping out of the storyscapes of their parents and boyfriends, to ground their choices in their own morality.

Negotiating the meaning of getting pregnant

It was a bad period, I felt so embarrassed, such a fool, getting pregnant as young as this... But when she was born it was all right, I could proudly walk through the town and did not feel I had to hide anymore. (Chantal, 20, White Dutch, non-religious, first pregnant at 17, gave birth twice)

This account expresses two opposite positions connected to different discourses on teenage pregnancies: her shame relates to the failure of not being in control, while her pride relates to obtaining a new social position. The life stories of the participants show that in most cases their pregnancy did not occur as an isolated event, but was preceded by problems, such as parental neglect or domestic violence, parents' problematic substance use or psychiatric problems, sexual abuse, migration or loss of family. As a reaction to a lack of safety, love and belonging at home, many participants started having boyfriends or hanging out with boys on the street at an early age. Moreover, many participants expressed that their relationships with boyfriends were characterised by inequality, sometimes accompanied by violence. This social context of a teenage pregnancy influences the meaning of getting pregnant. Three dominant discourses are present in their stories: the discourse of being young and ignorant, the discourse of individual responsibility and failure, and the discourse of destiny. The discourse of being young and ignorant is often connected to narratives about the romance of first love and losing control.

We were both young and each other's first love, so it just happens. Of course we were both responsible, not thinking about the consequences. Which is a pity, but I am over that. I am 27 now, my daughter is 11. It just made me who I am now. (Soerin, 25, Surinamese, Hindu, first pregnant at 15, gave birth to three children)

The discourse of responsibility is expressed in narratives such as being foolish, feeling ashamed and guilty, like Chantal expressed. The discourse of destiny was the third discourse present in stories, expressing the role of fate. Felicity

was 21 at the time of the interview and reflected on two unintended pregnancies. At the age of 14 she became pregnant and had an abortion. At the age of 19 she was pregnant again and gave birth to a twin.

You can never control your own life. You can put some effort into making it the way you want it, but you can't determine it. I don't feel that would be right either. Everything happens for a reason. Like the twins: I first had an abortion and then I become pregnant again and get twins. That is just...not a coincidence... (Felicity, 21, Surinamese, non-religious, first pregnant at 14, abortion and gave birth twice)

These three moral discourses form a storyscape in which the protagonist's naivety implies that she cannot take full responsibility and is therefore less able to develop agency but instead is subjected to the forces of fate. These narratives can be viewed as counter-narratives, expressing resistance to the responsibility deriving from liberal agentic ideals.

Negotiating the right choice

Reflecting on their choice to terminate or continue their pregnancy, the narratives of the young women again expressed different normative discourses. The first moral discourse is about viewing pregnancy and having children as a gift. For some participants terminating the pregnancy was not an option, as they considered abortion immoral. For some but not all of them this was connected to cultural or religious beliefs (Christian, Muslim or Hindu). Like the Christian young woman Jasmin:

I have always said, 'I will never have an abortion.' I just couldn't. I think it is murder. I would not want to do that. (Jasmin, 20, White Dutch, Christian, first pregnant at 17, gave birth)

Others expressed other narratives about pregnancy as a gift. They objected to terminating the pregnancy because they feared they might never become pregnant again or because there are many people who cannot have a baby. A second strong moral framework that is present in many stories regards the rights of a child to grow up in good circumstances. Participants expressed they needed a place to live, a completed education, and a job before being able to raise a child. Sometimes they also expressed the view that a child needs a father and stated that the quality of the relationship with the boy involved was not good enough to last. These concerns were often connected to a more general feeling of being too young.

For half a year, I kept thinking, 'what did I do?' I was thinking about how old the child would have been, if I had kept it. But now I think, well, I finished my exams. And our relationship broke up. It would not have worked. I can see that now. And I am glad to know now, looking back,

that it was the right thing to do. (Robijn, 19, White Dutch, non-religious, first pregnant at 17, abortion)

Thirdly, in line with this notion of not being able to look after a child, the participants shared narratives about not (even) being able to look after oneself and the effects of having a baby on their own wellbeing and that of the child. As in the account of Berber, who had been placed in foster care at the age of ten because of domestic violence and child abuse:

I found out I was eight weeks pregnant. I said: I am not going to keep it. No way. I can hardly look after myself. I never felt guilty about it. Because it was the best choice. The alternative was that I had a baby that would be raised somewhere else. I could not cope with that idea. Because they would have taken it away, I am sure. (Berber, 24, White Dutch, non-religious, first pregnant at 18, abortion and gave birth)

The three moral discourses discussed here together build a storyscape of responsibility in which the key question is how one can responsibly cope with the situation. The examples show how the balance may shift towards accepting the gift of life or towards the decision that one is not able to care for the child (or oneself), but in all cases responsibility is stressed.

The impact of the embodiment of being pregnant on making the right choice

The feeling you get, it's just...abnormal. It really made me have second thoughts. I felt it, I reconsidered, turning things over and over...that it felt so good and how beautiful it could be. I just felt so happy! That made it very difficult to decide. But well, that's how you feel, and I knew it would not work. I knew I had to have an abortion. So I blocked my feelings. (Robijn, 19, White Dutch, non-religious, first pregnant at 17, abortion)

In Robijn's account, the bodily experience of her pregnancy made it harder to decide to have an abortion. For some participants, these bodily experiences, sometimes intensified by healthcare interventions such as hearing the heartbeat or seeing the ultrasound of the foetus, changed their decision from having an abortion to continuing the pregnancy.

I did not want it [the baby] at first. I said to my boyfriend, 'I won't have it.' I'd just started my life. But when I felt it growing and kicking, well, then I could not even think about getting rid of her. (Olga, 19, White Dutch, non-religious, first pregnant at 16, gave birth)

In none of the interviews the other story was told: how the bodily experience of being pregnant changed their decision from continuing to terminating the pregnancy.

For some women the bodily experience of being pregnant, having an abortion or giving birth was connected to earlier intrusive bodily experiences like sexual assault. Quite a lot of participants had been subjected to sexual violence at some point in their lives. Although the pregnancies they talked about were not caused by rape, their earlier experiences interfered with the embodiment of being pregnant or having an abortion. As in the story of Monique about her abortion.

I will never forget how it felt to be pregnant. The people in the clinic did not respond to that. They just checked if I wanted the abortion. But who really wants an abortion? I knew it had to happen, but somewhere, deep down, I felt I had to protect something. That it did not make sense to get rid of it. It was in a way like the experience of unwanted sex with my first boyfriend. It was both intrusive and not my initiative. It was the same feeling that I had no choice. It just had to happen. I was not in control. But I blamed myself for that, for not being in control. I thought it was entirely my fault. But now I feel I couldn't have acted differently, not then, not in that context. (Monique, 24, White Dutch, non-religious, first pregnant at 18, abortion)

Monique's narrative describes her inner struggle. She compared the abortion to her experience of forced sex, as both experiences were physically intrusive and crossed her boundaries. The embodiment of pregnancy produces diverse experiences, such as happiness, confusion, discomfort and protectiveness, that interfere with the rational and moral agency of young women and complicate their choices. The bodily experience of abortion and childbirth can also trigger memories of other physically intrusive experiences, such as sexual abuse. In that sense the body tells a story of its own.

Developing narrative agency

Unintended pregnancy is a turning point in the life stories of young women. Adolescent girls are instantly confronted with major 'adult' responsibilities. Most participants were confronted with strong judgments of their parents and boyfriends regarding the right choice. Sometimes participants felt this was indeed the right path to take. Their life stories corresponded with the storyscapes of their parents or other significant others, which corresponds with Hoggart (2012), who found that decision-making is relatively straightforward and non-ambivalent in the absence of conflicting values. However, many participants described conflicts. Sometimes girls consciously conformed to the expectations of their environment, as they felt they could not raise a child without their support or did not want to cope with the consequences of choosing a divergent path. Others described their pregnancy as a breakthrough, a turning point that made it possible to adopt a different position in relation to their parents and boyfriends. In this section we will illustrate the agentic possibilities of the momentum of pregnancy with two life stories. Although each individual life story is unique, the two life stories we describe in this section reveal patterns of negotiations and struggles that were present in the stories of

many participants. The storyscapes that were present in different episodes in their lives form the background against which they can play their part and negotiate their path.

Stepping out of the storyscape of female vulnerability and dependency

Michelle is 25 at the time of the interview. She grew up as the youngest daughter in a family in which several members had mental health problems. Her mother, who had experienced child abuse, was often depressed. She was demanding and overprotective towards Michelle during her youth. During puberty Michelle tried to free herself from her mother's constant claims. When she had her first experiences of love and sex at the age of twelve, she was sexually abused by a sixteen-year-old boy, which was the first of more negative encounters.

I did not really feel self-confident when I was a teenager. I had a very negative self-image. When I turned eighteen I wanted to be an adult very badly. So I wanted to be with a real man, the tallest, most rugged, toughest man I could find. That was my boss at work. We fell in love immediately. He was nine years older. Sexually he was dominant too. Because of my bad first sexual experience I did not want to have sex, it was very painful. But he pushed me. I felt very small in this relationship. A lot of fears all the time.

During her youth her mother's storyscape was dominant in Michelle's life. It is a storyscape characterised by vulnerability, dependency and fears, linked to being a girl. When she tried to free herself from this narrow storyscape by exploring the adventurous world outside, Michelle was sexually abused, which confirmed the storyscape of her mother and intensified her fears and low self-esteem. Eventually, at the age of eighteen, she wanted to make a big leap forward into adulthood but stayed within the same storyscape of female vulnerability and subordination embodied by her dominant boyfriend.

When I found out that I was pregnant I freaked out. I remember thinking 'why does all this have to happen to me?'. I was totally lost in life and then this happened and I thought 'my life is ruined'. I had all these fears, I had therapy and then all of a sudden I was pregnant. It was way too much. I felt I would never get a normal life. I would always be dependent on others.

Her pregnancy fitted neatly in the female vulnerability storyscape as another disaster happening to her. At the same time, this narrative also illuminates her resistance towards this position as she expresses a desire to become less dependent upon others.

My boyfriend and my parents pushed me to terminate the pregnancy, so I did. Although I do agree that I would have made a terrible mum in that period, I disagree with the way they put pressure on me. They were

so angry at me, they shouted that I had to have an abortion. I blame them for that. Of course I know now that I could have prevented it [her pregnancy]. But at that time, I just didn't think about anything. So I felt, I didn't do it on purpose, you know what I mean? They blamed me for it.

Although Michelle did not really object to the abortion, she strongly felt she was victimised by being blamed for the pregnancy. The resistance and anger she felt towards the way her parents and boyfriend treated her fuelled her next step into another storyscape.

When, at the age of twenty-one, I unexpectedly became pregnant by the same boyfriend, they told me again I should have an abortion. But this time I opposed them. I suddenly thought, 'I can be a good mother!' But everybody told me that I couldn't. My boyfriend left me. Even my best friend told me that I couldn't be a good mother. It really was hell. They all told me that you have to raise a child with two parents, so if he refused, I had no other option. And if you have had an abortion already, you can have another one. Then I thought, 'this is not who I want to be'. Somehow I collected the willpower to stand up against them. I just wanted to prove to them that I could be a good mother. (Michelle, 22, White Dutch, non-religious, first pregnant at 18, abortion and gave birth)

In the next episode, Michelle stepped out of the storyscape of her mother and her boyfriend who pressured her to have another abortion. Instead, she continued the pregnancy. The frustrations about the first pregnancy and the momentum of the second pregnancy empowered her to take control instead of being stuck in the storyscape of dependency and vulnerability. Michelle's lifeline showed a clear increase in happiness after her decision to resist the pressure to have a second abortion. Our study wants to contribute to this re-examination of discourses by exploring how young women negotiate the meaning of teenage pregnancy, motherhood and abortion in the contemporary normative landscape.

Creating a moral storyscape of one's own

Deborah was 25 at the time of the interview. She was raised in a Christian family and became pregnant at 18.

Sex before marriage is not done. So you don't talk about sex at home, because if you're not married it doesn't exist. When I was eighteen I fell in love. Of course I always dreamt of having my first sex after marriage, but when somebody persuades you... I didn't know any better and I didn't want to disappoint him. I really regret that now. But well, I still feel I couldn't have said no. Because he was my first love and you do everything for that person. He didn't want to use condoms. When I think

about that now, I feel embarrassed that I went along with that. He used drugs and I was totally impressed by him. I never had a boyfriend before that, nothing. Just one kiss. So I was ignorant. Everything was new. My parents always have had a huge influence on me and my choices. Whenever I wanted to do something, I was wondering if they would agree or not. So there were a lot of things I wanted but didn't do, because of these considerations. It made me lonely and sad sometimes.

The first episode of Deborah's life story offers a story of ignorance and silence, basically explaining there were no narrative structures available for her first explorations of romance, love, and sex. She was very much aware that this lack of language meant that sex was a no-go area. She intended to live within the boundaries of her parents' moral storscape. But her boyfriend persuaded her to cross those boundaries and enter a new world.

Well, when I discovered that I was pregnant, I realised that I had to look beyond his wishes. I had to think about what I wanted. He couldn't cope with that and left me. Never heard of him again. So that was a hard period, being pregnant and alone all of a sudden. Although my parents were there. They were upset at first but after a while they accepted it. But I was very angry and not pleased to be pregnant at all. I wanted to finish school and just get on with my life. At some point my mother said, 'Well, it is just as it is, you can't change it. We will go on.' But I couldn't accept it. My mother said, 'If you feel negative and down like this, the baby will feel it, it will feel it is unwanted.' So I tried to change, but I kept my pregnancy hidden from everybody.

The second episode speaks about the clash between these two conflicting narrative worlds, again starting from the embodied reality of her pregnancy. Her parents accommodated the new reality and provided a space for her. But clearly this was not – or at least not yet – her own story. It was her mother who told her she had to accept the new situation and integrate it into her life story, thereby changing its direction.

After my daughter was born, I felt happy. It was easy, my mother looked after her when I went to school. After a year I had another boyfriend. I became pregnant again. I was shocked, as the relationship had not been going on for a long time and I immediately felt, 'how am I going to confront my parents with this? I do not want to experience all this again.' I was busy with my education and I really felt, 'I can't handle this.' My boyfriend said, 'why not? It happened so we will have to.'... But I was fed up with this whole period. I really could not go on with it. Although I love my [first] child, I am happy I have her, but no, not again this whole situation. I went through a very difficult period. So although my boyfriend did not agree, I had an abortion. My parents still do not know. They would find it horrible if they ever found out. My boyfriend and I had a lot of conflicts over it, but well, in the end it was me who had to

choose as it was in my body. It was a hard decision to make, as I am a Christian myself. To tell you the truth I felt I did not have the right... And I was afraid I would regret it later. But when I look back now, I feel sorry but I also feel it was the right thing to do for me then. (Deborah, 25, White Dutch, Christian, first pregnant at 18, gave birth and abortion)

The third episode starts with her continuing to live in her parents' storyscape, which happened to be rather convenient. But again she found herself in the impossible position of having to account for her decisions to the two moral audiences she was engaged with; her parents and her boyfriend. She then chose a direction that neither her boyfriend nor her parents would approve of and had an abortion. In fact, she described how she could not justify it herself because of her identity as a Christian, thus embedding her story in the wider canonical narratives of her religious tradition. Interestingly, even though she had come to terms with her choice, the abortion had not received a place in the storyscape she shared with her parents. Mirroring her youth, she now had created her own narrative no-go area where her parents were met with silence and taboo. In so doing, she entered a new storyscape in which she took responsibility and claimed it was the right thing to do. Here her narrative agency had matured and she could withstand the moral and social pressure of her boyfriend, her parents, and her tradition.

Discussion

Young women tell different stories about teenage pregnancies. Their stories are embedded in the storyscape of their environment, which offers a limited set of narratives. Social norms and stigma play an important role in the construction of the meaning of teenage pregnancies. In the strategic negotiation of the meaning of their pregnancy and the decision-making process, young women have to navigate the strong opinions of their family and (boy)friends and social discourses that problematise teenage pregnancy, abortion, and teenage motherhood. The narratives of young women on becoming pregnant unintentionally reflect not only the discourse of responsibility, risk, and control that is dominant in neoliberal policies, but also discourses on youth and ignorance and on destiny. Young women draw on different concepts of responsibility in their narratives about their decision, both when they choose to continue and when they choose to terminate their pregnancy. In their reflections on making the right choice, three moral discourses can be distinguished: the conviction that children are a gift (and therefore abortion is immoral), the conviction that children have the right to grow up in good conditions (and therefore parenthood is in some cases immoral), and the conviction that one must be able to look after oneself before becoming a parent. When their moral compass points towards abortion, the embodiment of being pregnant sometimes complicates this path and interferes with their moral convictions about making the right choice.

The concept of storyscapes shows how young women are constrained by their embeddedness in multiple storyscapes, defined by different and often contrasting audiences. The storyscapes that are present set the stage within which they negotiate their path. The two extensive life stories in this article illuminate how young women wrestle with the limitations of the storyscapes of their parents and boyfriends to develop their own narrative agency. One of the tasks for young women is to negotiate storyscapes of subordination of women, female vulnerability, and dependency as well as storyscapes of responsibility and individual agency. Another constraining storyscape is the taboo, the silencing of sexuality that disempowers young women in their relationships. The momentum of teenage pregnancy can offer agentic possibilities to young women as this time it is up to them to decide. Women who choose to give birth have more possibilities to frame their pregnancy as a breakthrough, as motherhood delivers social status and a new beginning. But for women who choose to have an abortion, the sole fact that this is their personal choice can also be a turning point in their lives. By resisting dominant people and storyscapes around them, some young women manage to adopt a different position in life. Although the narrative emphasis placed by young women on resilience and individual growth can be seen as manifestations of neo-liberal regulation (Baker 2009; McDermott and Graham 2005), their stories can also be interpreted as resisting discourses of female vulnerability and social stigma on abortion and teenage motherhood.

This study yields novel, contextualised insights into the strategic negotiations of young women confronted with an unintended pregnancy. However, some limitations of our study are worth noting. The recruitment of women who experienced abortion was more difficult than we expected beforehand. Our announcement on websites did not yield enough participants, so we turned to professionals who might know people who wanted to participate. Because we worked with these intermediaries, most of the women with experience of abortion who were included experienced mental health problems and received professional support for them. Among these participants, we encountered no stories of young women who had an abortion and just went on with their lives without any problems. Fortunately, some of the participants who had given birth had also undergone an abortion at some point in their lives and had experienced no inner struggle after it. As for ethnic and religious diversity, we succeeded in including participants with different ethnic backgrounds but not many with strong religious affiliations.

Conclusion

Clearly, the individualistic concept of reproductive choice does not represent the complex and contextualised way young women continuously negotiate the meaning of their pregnancy. Moreover, the life stories of young women show that their pregnancies were often preceded by social problems, such as parental neglect, maltreatment or abuse, which undermined their agentic positioning in relationships with boyfriends. Therefore, teenage pregnancies should not be

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considered as merely individual failure or irresponsible behaviour, but as a consequence of disempowering circumstances, deriving from structural inequalities. Our results add to the discussion on the limitations of (neo)liberal sexual health policies, started by Arai (2009) and Bay-Cheng (2015). The individual focus of Dutch prevention policies turns a blind eye to social and gender inequalities. Policies should acknowledge and address these inequalities and avoid discourses of shame, blame and failure.

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