

Teens Might Benefit from ‘Baby Borrowers’

June 24, 2008

Did the 17 pregnant teenage girls from Gloucester, Mass., really have a pregnancy pact? Yesterday, Carolyn Kirk, the mayor of Gloucester, said she couldn't confirm that these girls really intended to get pregnant. Watch the video:

One of the pregnant high school students, Lindsey Oliver, was on ABC's "Good Morning America" today and said that "there definitely was no pact." She said the girls banded together to help each other after they found out each was expecting.

My question is: Does it really matter?



Everyone agrees that 17 pregnancies in one high school is 17 too many, regardless of whether a pact contributed or whether it was due to the "glamorization of pregnancy in the media" as the mayor suggested.

After I blogged about this last week, I received over 100 comments from readers expressing their opinions and proposing solutions for the teenage pregnancy problem. Several folks suggested that these teens watch a new NBC reality show called *Baby Borrowers*, which premieres tomorrow night.

The show puts five young couples ages 18 to 20 who are contemplating marriage and children on the "fast-track to adulthood" by giving them a three-week taste of what it's like to be a working parent.

The show sets each couple up in a home, in jobs, and as caregivers first to babies, then toddlers, pre-teens, and teenagers for a few days each. (They also get a dose of caring for their "aging parents" for a few days.) They experience the realities of working to earn enough for diapers and baby food and dealing with drop-in visits from know-it-all in-laws.

I talked to the show's creator, Richard McKerrow. He told me *Baby Borrowers* already has a large following among British teenagers; it's been airing in Britain for two seasons.

"I'm a great believer in education by stealth," he tells me, "which is why I wanted to create an entertaining show rather than an educational video. But it does send the message that

teens shouldn't grow up too fast, that they need to think about the consequences of having sex."

About 35 percent of British high schools, he says, use the show as a launching point to have discussions with teens about relationships and parenting.

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy has already developed discussion guides for parents and teens to go along with the U.S. version of the show, and they're organizing viewing parties so that teens will watch together and talk among themselves.

The organization also works with hundreds of TV shows, including *Gray's Anatomy* and *One Life to Live*, to help them accurately portray pregnant teenagers in story lines, according to Amy Kramer, assistant director of entertainment media and audience strategy at the National Campaign.

"We don't want them to romanticize teen pregnancy," she explains. "Teens tell us in polls that the shows they watch really form their perceptions about relationships; they care about the characters to the point that they become role models or super-peers."

I ask her what she thinks about the movie *Juno* portraying a hilariously witty teen who finds adoptive parents for the baby she's carrying. (I'd received a slew of blog comments blaming the movie for the Gloucester High School fiasco.) "I loved it, but I'm afraid it's going to be like a god-awful fashion in a movie that catches on, even if it's hideous," she says. "It was totally unrealistic showing extremely supportive parents and a boyfriend who stays with her." She points out that in the real world, 8 of 10 teenage fathers don't marry the mothers of their babies.

The part about *Juno* choosing the adoptive parents and forming a relationship with them also would never happen, she says. "Only 5 percent of teen mothers end up making an adoption plan for their kids when they're pregnant, and open adoption just doesn't work that way. Unfortunately, this is a movie girls see dozens of times."

Let's just pray that *Baby Borrowers* gets the same nod from teens.