While this book employs a single-case approach, it prompts a new set of research questions regarding the larger dynamics of social movement demobilization. As the author suggests in the conclusion, comparative studies of the survival and death of movement organizations can provide a fresh lens to assess the complex relationship between repression and social movements. One application of this approach could be a comparison of radical black power organizations that were under similar external pressure but with dissimilar internal characteristics. In turn, a comparison between a moderate civil rights organization and a radical black power organization with similar internal tensions could provide further support for the author’s arguments. In addition, a large-N quantitative analysis of the survival time of movement organizations could complement the case-study approach by providing a different method to test the author’s theoretical model. Finally, by exploring social movements that have unfolded in a less contentious time and space than the RNA, future studies can illuminate the interaction between non-repressive external factors (e.g., resource deprivation) and internal characteristics (e.g., lost commitment) that lead to the demobilization of social movements.

Davenport offers a theoretically insightful and empirically grounded analysis of the demise of a social movement. By addressing the question of how social movements die, this important book tackles the under-explored link between movement emergence and movement demobilization. This study contributes to our understanding of collective action, not only by providing new insights and findings on movement demobilization, but also by opening up a novel area of research necessary to fully understand the dynamics of social movements.

Although teen birth rates are declining, teen parenthood is widely considered an important social problem in U.S. society. Decades of multidisciplinary research has left us with a clear conclusion about its consequences: becoming a teen parent does not have a large effect on young people’s longer-term socio-economic, educational, and health outcomes. Instead, preexisting disadvantages both increase the likelihood of teen parenthood and drive later life outcomes. So what can new research contribute that we do not already know?

Mary Patrice Erdmans and Timothy Black succeed in addressing an important gap in knowledge with their book, *On Becoming a Teen Mom: Life before Pregnancy*. They sidestep the consequences of teen parenthood and instead focus on the relationship between preexisting disadvantages and teen motherhood. How do teen girls end up as mothers? And how do their experiences of disadvantage in terms of gender, class, and race shape this process? We know too little about the answers to these questions, and qualitative research is crucial for addressing them. The authors write, “Why have we written a book about teen mothers? We haven’t. We have written a book about child sexual abuse, gendered violence, structural violence in neighborhoods and institutions, racial and class inequality in education, and gender inequality in sexual relations” (pp. 217–218). These, more than early childbearing, are the factors that shape the lives of the young women they interviewed.

The authors argue convincingly that these phenomena, alone and in combination, structure teen girls’ lives in ways that make teen pregnancy likely. Their approach is unusual. Their data consist of individual life history interviews with 171 mothers...
who had given birth as teens, sampled from home visitation programs at 15 sites in Connecticut. But instead of following many earlier qualitative studies of teen mothers by staying close to the data in analyses that then become necessarily focused on the micro and meso levels, Erdmans and Black tie the mothers’ narratives to macro-level trends, policies, and debates in a wide-ranging overview of the social conditions that facilitate teen motherhood. For example, their chapter on education opens with the stories of teen mothers Monique and Tita, then transitions to a discussion linking school conditions and education policies to student disengagement and dropout. They emphasize that dropping out is a process rather than an event and point to an important catalyst for the disengagement and dropout process: the interplay between high levels of residential mobility among many poor students of color and schools’ unresponsiveness to their particular needs.

Related to this residential instability is a broader phenomenon that the authors term “life worlds of chaos.” This chaos comes from many sources, such as violence from families and partners, sexual and substance abuse, mental illness, and problems in school—and young mothers have often experienced many of these factors rather than a single one. About one-third of the teen mothers were described as coming from life worlds of chaos, with pervasive and overlapping experiences that, in their stories, make teen pregnancy seem part of a larger pattern of severe disadvantage. Identifying such patterns across many different life domains is a real strength of the authors’ qualitative life-history interview approach. Their strategy of conducting second interviews to increase rapport also led to fuller disclosure of sensitive events like abuse. The importance of this approach—grounding individual life stories in the societal-level phenomena that have led them to where they are—cannot be overstated. Many researchers agree on key factors, like the education system, that drive both teen parenthood and later life outcomes. But it is a challenge to draw links between them and the individual lives they shape when using qualitative data. The authors focus on one factor at a time to make these connections clearer to readers.

Most chapters start with extensive first-person summaries of one or two mothers’ life histories. Aspects of these narratives then feed into a more macro-level analysis of different drivers of teen motherhood (such as child sexual abuse or violence against women). Examples and statistics from secondary sources (like school dropout rates among teen mothers) support this part of each chapter. Counts of interviewees’ experiences reported in tables also provide information about the prevalence of different experiences. Grounding the broader discussions in concrete cases is a compelling strategy. It would have been helpful to have more quotes from other participants integrated into the macro-level analysis to provide additional connections to the data.

At its heart, this book focuses on systems of inequality based on gender, class, and race that manifest themselves in many ways that matter for teen girls’ lives. For example, gender oppression results in high levels of violence against girls, through childhood physical and sexual abuse and later through intimate partner violence. In the data, girls who experience the former often transition into the latter when they become teens. This violence permeates the power dynamics of their intimate relationships, affecting sexual decision-making and contraceptive use and ultimately increasing the likelihood of early pregnancy. Many teen mothers are at the nexus of racial, class-based, and gender disadvantage, and the authors attend to intersections among them. White teen mothers, for example, can often rely on intergenerational assets from grandparents who were able to take advantage of favorable economic conditions for white working-class families in the first few decades after World War II. This accumulation of wealth is highly raced, so teen mothers of color rarely have access to even a modest financial safety net. Teen parenthood, the authors argue, is an inevitable by-product of the highly unequal societal structures that are in place in the United States. It is surprising, they note, that teen birth rates are falling, given the rising levels of inequality on many fronts.

The authors make great strides in detailing the social conditions that ultimately produce teen motherhood. I hope this will spur further research that integrates the particular,
stigmatized experience of teen motherhood with young women’s experiences of these social conditions. The authors’ statement that they have not written a book about teen mothers is, in a way, true, because the experience of teen motherhood is not an important part of the narratives. But other research tells us that motherhood does change young women profoundly, inside themselves, in their life circumstances, and in their relationships with others. I would have liked to hear more about this in the context of the mothers’ broader life histories. Learning more about how teen motherhood interacts with earlier life conditions will be an important next step in analyzing young mothers’ stories.

On Becoming a Teen Mom should be of interest to a broad scholarly audience, including not only those interested in adolescence, families, or fertility, but people who study inequalities more generally. Either the entire book or individual chapters could be assigned in undergraduate or graduate courses. But the book is also written to be accessible to general audiences, and its impact could be just as important in that realm. Although researchers have largely reached consensus about the importance of social disadvantages underlying both teen parenthood and its consequences, this news has not reached popular discourse. Situating teen mothers’ stories in the broader societal inequalities that have shaped them has the potential to reframe heated societal debates around teen sexuality, pregnancy, and childbearing.


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Take a look at cable television, our best-selling books, and the rise of celebrity chefs and know that western society is obsessed with restaurants. Joanne Finkelstein’s Fashioning Appetite: Restaurants and the Making of Modern Identity tracks and explains this obsession—from its roots in medieval banquets to its development in eighteenth-century coffee houses to its maturation in modern, themed restaurants such as The Hard Rock Café and Steven Spielberg’s now-defunct Dive! Finkelstein’s book is a fascinating read for foodies and scholars alike. I would not assign it to my freshman seminar students because it is heavy on theory and light on illustrations; but for those looking for a sustained analysis of the role of restaurants in western culture, this is the book for you.

Finkelstein’s multifaceted argument is built around the basic premise that “restaurants provide a prismatic perspective on contemporary social habits and, in particular, the way we see ourselves as social actors” (p. viii). Restaurants, argues Finkelstein, are a way that we can better understand how humans negotiate between the public and the private. By putting our eating on display, we speak volumes about our personal acceptance of social values and manners. For the author, the restaurant is both a “place where gastronomic tastes and innovations in food presentations and style are displayed” but also a “public stage for self-display and a laboratory in social experimentation” (p. xix). Not only are restaurants places to learn and to display our knowledge of social conventions, but also they are symbols of modernity, incarnations of urban culture, centers for global consumerism, and sites of cultural exchange.

Though sometimes repetitive and often chronologically jumpy, this book is most impressive in its remarkable synthesis of existing literature on the subjects of manners, food, consumption, globalization, tourism, socioeconomic class, self-presentation, and urbanization. Hence, it has something for everyone. Finkelstein mixes historical and contemporary sources, often a difficult task. For example, she uses old-school sociologists such as Thorstein Veblen and Georg Simmel in their historical context (western society at the turn of the century) and then also uses their theories to explain enduring phenomena such as urbanization and consumerism. She weaves together primary sources like diaries and guidebooks with art, movies, and television. Her masterful use of academic literature provides a primer for scholars from across disciplines.