Project TEEN M.O.M. REPORT
Project M.O.M. is a media production research project designed for pregnant teens & young mothers in a Montreal community setting.

Contact information
Sandra Weber, PhD
Concordia University

Leanne Levy, PhD
Concordia University
New York University

Mirrors Of Motherhood
PROJECT TEEN M.O.M.
(Mirrors of Motherhood)

Extended Report to Elizabeth House¹

Sandra Weber, Phd
Concordia University
Sandra.weber@education.concordia.ca

&

Leanne Levy, Phd
Concordia University
New York University
leanne@teenmom.ca

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REPORT ON PROJECT TEEN M.O.M. (MIRRORS OF MOTHERHOOD)

Sandra Weber and Leanne Levy

Funded by a grant awarded to Dr. Sandra Weber (Concordia University) by the Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada, Project TEEN M.O.M. was an arts-based media production research project designed by Dr. Sandra Weber and Dr. Leanne Levy in consultation with Linda Schachtler, Michele Bourdages, and the staff of Elizabeth House. The project was approved by the Board of Directors of Elizabeth House and cleared by the Ethics Committee of Concordia before being implemented. The purpose of the research was to examine how introducing a media production program in the context of a community organization can empower teenage girls in difficult circumstances to share their views, identify the challenges they face, and contribute to community or policy discussions that affect them. The project centred around a series of 13 group workshops held weekly over a period of four months, culminating in an exhibit at Elizabeth House (June 15, 2009) of the work produced by the project participants. Individual interviews and artwork sessions were another important component of the project.

Objectives

The objectives of the project were:

1) To assess the potential value of arts-based media programs offered to young women in a community center.
2) To identify and document key elements of best practices for viable arts-based media education in community settings.
3) To develop guidelines for the establishment of sustainable and useful arts-based media production for youth in community centers.
4) To examine arts-based media production as a method for personal and social inquiry.
5) To document and understand some of the experiences of teen mothers.

Rationale for the Project

Why media production for pregnant teenagers in a community setting? In an increasingly mediated world, it is essential to become media literate, that is, to develop the ability to critically read our social visual world, to develop the digital skills necessary to function in everyday life, to develop an informed voice, and to produce media as a means to disseminate information, to test ideas, to develop a personal aesthetic, and to explore and express identities, ideas, and creativity. Media production is a way for youth to negotiate mediated ideas, deconstruct cultural messages, and participate in both local and global discourses by authoring and distributing their own media (Levy, 2008, 2007a, 2007b). These are not “frill” skills; they are essential to life-long education. Unfortunately, large segments of the youth population fall through the cracks, getting little or no opportunity to acquire this kind of critical literacy or to access the opportunities that art-based media production skills can offer. Many of them, especially young women, suffer silently. It is this out-of-school population that we want to reach and research.
Arts-based activities are among the most effective vehicles for enabling young women to discuss their situations and express their feelings, for learning how to learn, and for gaining self-knowledge, and social awareness (Levy, 2008). Drawing on new media platforms to democratize and globalize girls’ voices, art teachers can be ideal facilitators to encourage self-study, critical thinking, the application of creative imagining to solve problems, and the development of individual and collective responsibility (Levy, 2007a). Although new media arts education programs within schools have been one way of responding to the challenges of interpreting and negotiating the daily flow of mediated representations, more often than not media education is still restricted to technical and knowledge-based activities. One way to fight the moral panics associated with media influence and to empower young women to define and solve their own problems is to teach them how to become critical consumers and media producers. This becomes especially important for the very girls who have the least access to this kind of education. Art-based media education within a community organization setting seems potentially more appropriate and effective.

**Theoretical Framework, Pedagogy, and Methodology**

Especially in a project where the researchers act also as facilitators, as is the case for Project Teen M.O.M., it is important to seek coherence between the pedagogical and methodological approaches used for the research. Like many other art educators interested in critical pedagogy, we have been inspired by the work of scholars such as Friere (1970), hooks (1989) and Kincheloe (2004) whose conceptions of teaching and learning are linked to consideration of the political and social contexts that intersect with all individual quests for knowledge. We see a logical and fruitful connection between this kind of pedagogy, which seeks to empower participants, and the visual research methodologies for self-study and social justice described by Weber & Mitchell (2004), Weber (2008), Mitchell (2006), and Pitthouse, Mitchell, and Weber (2009).

The research methodology elaborated for Project Teen MOM is based partly on photovoice, a photography-based method pioneered by Caroline Wang’s (1999) that we adapt to include video, collage, and drawing as well. Participants are invited, guided, and equipped to produce their own images, making visible their “voice” around a particular social issue that affects them directly. A carefully considered prompt or question is provided to encourage participants to explore, often through the lens of a digital camera, issues of concern. The images themselves contain elements of social critique, which is further interrogated through eliciting responses to the photographs, by displaying them in public venues and by showing them to specific community or policy groups. Participatory in nature, photovoice is often used in the context of community work or social activism to better understand what really matters to people. It follows the premise that, as Wang explains, “What experts think is important may not match what people at the grassroots think is important.” (http://www.photovoice.com/background/index.html, retrieved June 9, 2008).

We also draw on the earlier pioneering work of Jo Spence (1988). Starting with her book, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, Spence has inspired researchers who seek to use a critical, activist eye in producing images and working with photo albums. Of particular relevance to Project Teen MOM is Spence’s collaboration with Joan Solomon (1995) for their book *What Can a Woman do with a Camera?* That work draws together a fascinating collection of
essays describing visual projects based on still photography carried out by ordinary girls and women. Their projects visually take up the crucial questions of how can we as women tell stories that eradicate the disparity between how we are seen and what we think and feel, what we actually do? And how do we present who we really are in terms of images? These questions as well as the critical use of photography are central to our work with young people. Our use of digital photography is also informed by the significant work on photography and family albums done by other scholars including Faber (2003), Kuhn, (1995), Spence & Holland (1991), and Weiser (1993).

**Project Participants and Personnel**

In consultation with the Director and other staff, Michele Bourdages recruited a group of eight young women (ages 14 to 23) who volunteered to participate in Project MOM. At the time the project began, five of them each had a child between the ages of 9 and 23 months, one had three children each under the age of 3; the other two were expecting to and indeed did deliver in early summer. The group is very diverse, reflecting the racial, linguistic, ethnic, and cultural mix of a cosmopolitan Canadian city. Although they are all from low economic backgrounds, their circumstances and stories vary widely. Some of them have had to face challenges such as poverty, violence, abuse, growing up in foster care and group homes, depression and/or addiction. Four of the young women lived in residence at Elizabeth House when the project began. One of them left Elizabeth House about two thirds of the way through the project. The others who participated live either in assisted housing or out in the community with a family member or on their own. All of them receive or have received some sort of support services from Elizabeth House, and three of them were students at Elizabeth High, a program with daycare facilities for pregnant teens and young mothers.

*Staff members* who were on duty when the workshops often attended for three important reasons: 1) to help assess the impact of the project on their clients; 2) to acquire skills, information, and ideas that can carry over to their own work with the participants. 3) to lend their expertise and support the facilitators in any way they felt were appropriate. Staff members (including office staff) helped us carry out our work in many other ways.

*Volunteer babysitters:* This project would not have been possible without reliable babysitters to whom the participants could entrust their children while they attended the workshops. Volunteer babysitters provided the bulk of this essential service, although on three occasions, the project director, Sandra Weber, paid for trained personnel when the number of volunteers fell short of the need.

The *two researchers*, Dr. Sandra Weber and Dr. Leanne Levy, both of who are also certified teachers, did all the facilitating, teaching, curating, data collection, and reporting. Dr. Levy also interviewed each participant at length and provided them with individual guidance for their art work.

**Data Collection**

By the end of the project, the data collection consisted of:
- Digital photographs taken by the participants
- Digital photographs taken by the two researchers
• Video-taped interviews (over one hour each) of seven of the participants
• Photographs and scans of the participants’ other artwork (drawings, album covers, diva mom mannequins)
• Journal entries (process journaling) offered to us by some of the participants
• Video footage (documentation) of group workshops and one-on-one sessions.
• An open-ended questionnaire filled out by the Director and staff members of Elizabeth House.

**Data Analysis**

Project Teen M.O.M. has generated important data that seem likely to contribute to research, teaching and policy concerns on several levels. The ongoing analysis is:

1) Identifying useful components for a flexible and sustainable model for youth media production (education) that could be adapted in other community settings
2) Identifying and exploring methodological and pedagogical issues related to teaching art-based media production in community settings
3) Documenting and reflecting on the contributions that art and media education can make to expecting or recent teenage mothers.
4) Raising ethical and practical questions for researchers who use visual methodologies in projects such as this. Issues of privacy, safety, and empowerment took on urgency in this setting. Navigating the multiple layers of bureaucracy (the granting agency’s, the university’s, the institution’s) to successfully negotiate access, respect everyone’s rights, and ensure that everyone benefits from the project was a feat in itself, with lessons learned.
5) Challenging some of the notions people have about adolescents in general and pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers in particular.
6) Examining the potential of arts-based projects to facilitate critical reflection, and to inform policy makers and educators.

**Project Activities (Curriculum)**

Participants committed to a series of twelve two-hour workshops, one or two-video taped private interviews (approximately one hour each), and one-on-one tutorial or production meetings with the researcher/teachers as needed. The original plan had called for ten workshops, but two additional workshops became necessary in order to give the participants the time they needed to complete their work and to choose what they wanted to show in the exhibit. Presentation of their work to each other, and later, to a broader audience was a crucial part of the project. We tried to ensure that participants were prepared to go public and gave them repeated opportunities to change their mind about images they selected for display and to re-edit their written material. Most of the participants also kept a mixed media process journal for their own purposes. The use of photography and art in the activities combines study of self with social critique in the interest not only of better understanding one’s own situation, but also of helping others in similar circumstances. In order to identify and document key elements of best practice for viable arts-based media education in community settings, almost all of the activities were video taped so that the researchers could reflect more accurately on what took place.
Activity 1 Viewing and reflecting on media images and documentary films
In the context of group discussions, the participants critiqued media representations of teenage pregnancy (e.g. the movie Juno; celebrity teenage pregnancy) in the light of their own experience. Secondly, by viewing “activist” productions made by other teenagers in difficult circumstances, the group was stimulated to engage in discussion of serious issues that affect them and aspire to getting their own message out to others.

Activity 2 Diva Mom Art (two workshops)
Made of cardboard and mounted on small 8 ½ by 10 inch canvasses, and incorporating paint, collage, cardboard cutout, drawing, and writing, the Diva MOM activity was designed as a way for the participants to reflect on their new or impending state of motherhood - 'what being a mom means to me.' The collage work aspect is based on a parody or critique of the kinds of popular magazines often looked at by adolescent girls. Another central feature of this activity, a letter to my child for the future, is hidden on the back, glued to the inside of the canvas. The discussion around the table as the participants worked on their divas is a noteworthy part of the process that provides valuable data about how the artistic production relates to their thinking processes and their life experience. The Diva Moms were not only part of the art exhibit that culminated the project, they were scanned or photographed so that they can be incorporated into short video productions or posted on a project website.

Activity 3 Photography and Curated Photo Albums (five workshops)
After a workshop devoted to pointers about taking photographs with a digital camera, in a subsequent series of workshops, the participants had the difficult task of choosing for their photo album only 9 of the hundreds of pictures they had taken with the cameras provided to them by the project. They wrote captions or accompanying text for each picture. Part of the challenge of this activity is in recognizing the potential significance of individual photographs as well as the links between them. Choosing which photographs to include from among the many taken is no easy matter. It forces the artists to consider and examine how they represent their lived experience. Presenting their work to each other during one of the final workshops, and then displaying these images taken from their lives at the exhibit at Elizabeth House is a way of “going public,” that encouraged them to articulate and take ownership of their images and ideas. Not only were they able to see how others react to their work, they were also compelled to step back and almost literally look at themselves. The combination of photos and words within the confines of a small album allows them to express or represent their views in a powerful way. There is an intimacy to their albums that draws the reader/viewer close.

Activity 4 Writing on the Body: Performance and Photography
During one of the workshops, the participants wrote on each other’s bodies and on their own in order to take photographs that would express their feelings in a different way. Some of them wrote on their children’s bodies and took pictures of that too. Writing on body parts is so different from writing on paper. Words written on a body take on an additional layer of meaning. The combination of words and body can make powerful and poetic statements we might otherwise not make. Embodying and photographing handwritten words calls attention to ideas and thoughts in a creative manner that makes us take notice. Examples of the
Activity 5 Object “Pocket” Portraits
Pocket portraits ask the question “what do the objects we carry say about us” and involve arranging and photographing a “collage” of one’s personal objects, usually the contents of pockets, purses, backpacks, or any other bag one happens to be carrying. The presentation of these objects reveals things about one’s lifestyle, needs, priority, sense of organization, aesthetic, external image, use of technology, brand allegiance, economic status, attachments, and more. In displaying and photographing their objects (sometimes including themselves or an image of themselves), the participants see themselves via an unusual angle and learn to use a more abstract visual language to represent themselves and their ideas.

Activity 6 Sharing work and preparing and art exhibit (two workshops)
The final two workshops were devoted to presenting their work to each other, to selecting the work they wanted to exhibit, and to approving the material produced by the facilitators for exhibit. As the group worked on their curated photo albums, they sought each others’ advice and help and offered encouragement and support in a way that educators cannot.

Activity 7 Exhibit of Art and Media Production at Elizabeth House
The project culminated in a vernissage for the large exhibition of the project work at Elizabeth House. Attendees included friends, family, community representatives, administration, staff, volunteers, and board members.
The exhibit included
- Blow ups of the specific photographs selected for exhibition by the participants
- Messages to their peers and other statements by the artists
- Photo albums combining images and words were curated by the participants
- Panels displaying their body word photographs
- Diva MOM artwork: Letters to their children
- A film edited by Leanne Levy based on the art, photographs, and interviews.

Overall Assessment of the Project
Through their fairly regular attendance (especially given their circumstances), their evident enthusiasm, their gestures of thanks and appreciation, but most of all, through the work they produced, the teen participants indicated that they valued what they achieved through the project. For some of them, the satisfaction of finishing something worthwhile was an accomplishment. For all of them, seeing that their work was meaningful to others was a deep source of satisfaction. Being labeled an artist or photographer gave them an additional source of pride and a different way of viewing themselves (a positive identity). The conversations around the table as they worked on their art revealed a growing ability to articulate and comment intelligently on their circumstances and on their hopes and plans. The participants developed their skills at taking good photographs, choosing interesting subjects, and using images as metaphors. They also learned some of the vocabulary...
associated with art and media production and learned what is involved in mounting an exhibit. In the questionnaires submitted at the end of the project, the staff rated the project as very good or excellent and noted that they had observed first hand concrete benefits to their clients. The overwhelmingly positive response to the final exhibit of clients and their families, and members of the staff, board and community who attended the vernissage is another important indicator of Project MOM’s success. Evidence of what the project and the teen moms achieved can be found on the new project website: http://teenmom.ca

‘Note: by ‘regular’ we mean that they attended more than half, and in some cases most or all of the workshops: no easy feat for a mum who is also working or in school and has homework and parenting responsibilities in addition to appointments with doctors, therapists, social workers, and so forth.

Preliminary Findings

Findings about pedagogy and process

1) *Motivations for joining and staying in the project* included: the pleasure of doing art, taking photographs, and getting a free camera, the idea of participating in an project that would get their message out to others, the hope of helping other teenagers in similar situations, the fun of hanging out with other teens associated with Elizabeth House while knowing their children were safe and being cared for.

2) *Media mix and blended genres. The incorporation of painting, drawing, and collage into digital production* engaged the participants and proved to be a source of relaxation that enabled them to “let go” in a way that not only allowed their creativity to surface but also encouraged them to become more reflexive in their art. Their desire to mix media, and blend genres, seems to reflect their preferred, almost ‘natural’ way of expressing themselves.

3) Although we don’t have a recipe, it does seem that *providing one-on-one support in addition to the group workshops is a key factor* to the success of the project, allowing researchers to establish trust and to provide individualized technical and creative advice along with a non-judgmental and attentive ear. Many of the participants seemed to value the attention, respect, and time given to them by the facilitators. Because Leanne Levy also met with them individually, she developed an especially close relationship with some of them, and encouraged them to think positively about their lives and their prospects. Sandra Weber also did some individual coaching, and we sometimes divided the group into smaller units so that we could each work more closely and intensively on their art with a few workshop participants.

4) *The group dynamics* contributed positively to the functioning of the workshops. A reciprocal level of trust developed quickly. We speculate that this positive outcome may be partly due to the fact that the facilitators were friendly outsiders—from “outside” of both the community center and school. We are thus not associated with any negative views
participants might hold of these institutions and we are less likely to be perceived as enforcers or authority figures.

5) **Support and active help** from Director Linda Schachtler, Michele Bourdages, staff, and volunteers was a vital part of the project’s success. This help came in many forms: recruiting appropriate participants, ensuring the participants well-being, organizing or providing baby sitting services, booking rooms and coordinating schedules, encouraging and supporting the participants in a variety of ways, both during the workshops and in between workshops, providing relevant feedback and information to the facilitators, assisting in collecting and safeguarding consent forms, being flexible when schedules had to change suddenly for a variety of reasons, encouraging everyone with positive attitudes and showing in a variety of other ways that they cared about the clients and the project.

6) **For the participants, sharing and critiquing each other’s work was empowering and led to insights and new ways to frame their situations.** In what was probably the most powerful workshop of the series, each participant stood or sat at the head of a long conference table and shared her album, page by page, reading aloud all the captions and statements she had written. This was followed by questions and comments from the rest of the group. It was striking to note that even though they had been sitting side by side in previous workshops while working on these albums, and indeed had helped each other choose pictures and captions, this activity of actually sitting and listening and looking at the presentation of the full album by each participant proved to be a revealing, meaningful and deeply moving experience. Their support and compassion for each other was very evident in their comments and reactions to each other’s presentation. Some of them said they now saw each other in a different light. *The act of showing and presenting aloud was also significant for the participants, acting as a mirror of sorts that reflected their situations and their lives back to them.*

7) The presence on the team of **different generations** and facilitators with different experience and training may have played a significant role in creating a safe space for critical art to emerge. The age range of people in the room during the workshops ranged from 14 to 62 years. In some ways, Sandra Weber may have been perceived as a grandmother or mother figure, while Leanne Levy may have seemed in some ways like an older sister. The participants too varied in age and developed a sisterhood that embraced their age differences. *Cross-generation dialogue* within the workshops seemed to engage everyone in sharing experiences and exchanging differing opinions.

8) **Offering art-based media education outside of the school system is likely another key factor to the project’s success.** We did not have to grade or judge or act as authority figures. We were perhaps not perceived as “part of the system.” *Freed from the constraints of a one size fits all mandated school curriculum, we had the latitude to adapt our teaching to suit the situation, usually by demonstrating a technique or making a suggestion and then getting out of the way and letting the participants do their thing.*

9) **Going Public: A crucial component.** The exhibit that culminated the workshops was highly effective in many ways. Seeing your work framed and on display is not the same as sharing it in workshops is. It was a source of pride and achievement for the participants.
Some of them dressed up for the event indicating it was special to them. Some of them excitedly escorted their invited guests (usually family) around, and even though they had already seen the film and each others’ work, most of them attended the screenings (some sat through it twice) and looked at all the exhibit. Most of all, this was an occasion when their views and their voices were heard, not only by staff members but by members of the board, the community, and in some cases their families. Even those who know the participants well felt they gained new insight. The sister of one of the participants, for example, wrote in the guest book that she now understood why her sister needed to live at Elizabeth House. The exhibition quite eloquently expresses the artist/photographers’ hopes, fear, joy, depression, pride, determination to succeed, and love for their children.
Findings related specifically to pregnant teens and teen mothers

Although we cannot, of course, be sure that what this group had to say represents all pregnant teens and teen mothers, because the age, background, and situations vary so much within the group, their stories and views can offer important insights that is very likely to be of interest and help to others. Our analysis of the data leads us to speculate that:

1) Pregnant teenagers and recent teen mothers do not differ from other teenagers as drastically as media lead people to believe. Knowledge of popular culture and exposure to at least some digital technology in school seems to bridge some of the divides. The interests and views expressed by the participants are typical in many ways of most teenagers their age. Fashion, hairstyles, popular culture, lifestyle choices, friendship, relationships, sex, money, desire for independence, school, and jobs were the topics of many a discussion. They were not always talking about parenting and child rearing, although they certainly did talk about that too.

2) Through their art and their conversations, the participants made it clear that they are aware of the negative judgments that adults or other teens make of them because they have or are expecting a child. They have a message for adults and policy makers. Here are some of their comments:

   People look at us and don’t even know what we have been through. For you to judge us, it’s not right... if you see us on the bus with our strollers, give us your seat, you know, help us. Don’t have that negative attitude like, “Oh my gosh, what is she doing she’s only 14 and she has a kid.”

   Society sees young parents in a bad way. When I say a bad way, I mean that they see us as irresponsible kids that have kids. I don’t think people should see us that way because, take me, for example—I am a single mother raising my son alone, I am going to school, I am living on my own, I have to pay my rent, I have to go do groceries, buy clothes, I have to do dishes every night, clean every night—those are all things that you need to be strong for, and I don’t think people should put you down for doing those things. They should see you in a really positive way and support you, encourage you, and let you know. People should show us more respect.

3) The participants are also critical of how the media deal with teen pregnancy. One of them for example, said:

   I think movies need to be more realistic. Like the movie Juno, for example, it doesn’t really show how the girl took care of her baby and went through the stresses of life. She was just being irresponsible, got pregnant, and then decided “Ok, I am going to carry this baby and then give it away.” That offends me, because I am doing everything I have to do—I take care of my son and wake up every morning, getting him ready and getting myself ready.
4) The participants appreciate the support given to them by community agencies, especially Elizabeth House and Elizabeth High. Most, if not all, of the participants are both aware and appreciative of the help they are receiving from Elizabeth House, CLSC’s and elsewhere. Indeed the single most common message they want to send to other teens in similar circumstances is There is help available if you want it and know where to look. You do not have to go through it alone. You are not the only one, there are other teens like you. These kinds of comments came up spontaneously and frequently when they were writing messages to accompany their artwork. Here is how one of the participants put it:

I just would like people to know from my experience that they can turn to someone for help. Even if it’s the CLSC, they don’t have to know your name, they have an SOS line if you’re going through violence in relationships. They have a lot if things that can help, so if anyone is going through problems, you have someone you can turn to. That’s why I am partially over my depression, although I still sometimes get depressing thoughts. I know I am not alone and I want other people to know they are not alone.

5) Advice to and from their peers is important to them. The participants demonstrated considerable insight into their own situations and emphasize how important it is for teens to help other teens: For example, one of them said:

Girls my age don’t know what to expect when they are having a baby, and you can’t hear it from any adult, because an adult doesn’t know what we go through, but if you hear about the experience of being a teen mom from somebody that is in the same spot as you, like another teen mom, you can understand and feel more comfortable. No girl should have to feel that they are alone in this world.

Just because you are a teen mom it’s not over for you, you have the rest of your life ahead of you. You can do anything that you want to do. Don’t let a child stop you and don’t let anyone tell you that your life is over—because it’s not.

I think it’s important for other teens to see the reality of being a teen mom. For those girls who want to have a child to keep a boyfriend or to keep a child to get their parents’ pissed, it’s not what it seems. Babies are not dolls that you can put aside when you are tired and then come back to them in a week. They are not cute little children that you can just push around in a stroller and say “Look he’s wearing the brand name clothes.”

6) Teenagers are more caring and responsible mothers than portrayals of them by media and adults suggest. Teenage pregnancy can be a more positive and beneficial experience than adults and agencies want to acknowledge. One of the participants expressed it this way:

Even though I am a teen, having a kid makes you more mature—it brings you to another level. Yes, I am a teen, but I am also a parent. People should respect that. Now that I am a parent, I feel I should give my son what my parents’ gave me, have my own home and raise my son by myself. Raising my son under my parents’ roof doesn’t
seem right to me. I just feel I need my independence. Since I took that step in life (becoming a mom), I must take everything that comes with it.

7) From discussion and from their artwork it is clear that being a pregnant teenager or young mother involves having to negotiate and participate in multiple roles. Two of them spoke and drew articulately about being caught between two worlds that they inhabit simultaneously: childhood and parenthood; adolescent and adult. They have to assume various roles, some of them at once: At various times they may be called upon or treated as adolescent, student, child, adult, parent, romantic partner, friend, client of social and health institutions and professional services, sexual object, victim, loser. What was most interesting to note was the level of awareness some of the participants have of their predicament and the frustration some of them experience in trying to be or to be seen as successful and independent.

Sustainability and Outreach
There seems to have been some welcome ripple effect:

Impact on Elizabeth House programs
One of the unexpected but very welcome outcomes was the interest shown by many staff members in the activities we designed. This interest has already spilled over into their programming plans for some of Elizabeth House’s clients.

Publicity and information
Some staff members expressed their desire to keep the exhibit up for a longer period to welcome, inform, and encourage the teens and the people who work at EH. The film that the project produced can be used for fund raising activities as well a means to share the results with others in the community.

New links with other organizations
After viewing the exhibit, a worker from a black community organization approached us to say she was very impressed with the work being done at EH and with how beautifully this mixed group of teens (including two from Montreal’s black communities, one First Nation) got along. She wants to explore ways that her organization can support EH in its work.

Project Teen Mom Website (http://teenmom.ca)
Through the development of a website at http://teenmom.ca, the messages, stories, as well as the art and media work of Project Teen M.O.M. participants are being disseminated to a much broader audience. In addition to project description and reports, most of the website content consists of the art, photography, and text that the participants produced, organized, and chose themselves for the exhibit that was held at Elizabeth House. The purpose of the website is twofold: 1) to inspire, inform, or guide teachers, community agencies, and researchers who wish to do similar projects or who are interested in the topic or our art-based activist methodology 2) to provide girls and young women with information, encouragement, and insight that may be useful in their own lives. To this end, in addition to information directly connected to the project, we have a 4Teens button at the top of the
Homepage that leads to useful links and information sources for girls and young women internationally.

**Advice to Others Undertaking Similar Projects**

**Adapting to clientele's needs:**
It is easy to forget that participants in community projects such as this one have different schedules, that many of them have a lot of stress in their lives, and have responsibilities such as taking care of children or other family members. Some of them are dealing with horrendous, even dangerous situations. Projects like this one are voluntary activities that are supposed to be pleasurable and help, not further stress, the participants. It is thus naïve and counterproductive to demand perfect attendance or expect everyone to show up on time.

We found the participants were more liable to show up and to produce good work if we were flexible and accommodated their needs in terms of start time (some of them had to finish school and go pick up their babies and take public transportation to the center to attend our workshops) and in terms of scheduling the individual meetings. Providing snacks would have been good too—the timing of the workshops was just before dinner time, and they often arrived ravenous.

**Respecting and negotiating institutional requirements:**
Elizabeth House does a lot within a very small space and is where some of the clients and their children reside. The influx of two educators and a group of teens not living in the House, and the storage of art equipment and so forth puts an extra stress on the staff. Safety issues are always a concern too, especially when there are babies around!

**Concluding Remarks**
Projects such as Project Teen M.O.M. provide fruitful and meaningful ways of combining research, critical pedagogy, media and art education, and community activism. This project provided space for a multiplicity of voices, generations, and perspectives, bringing attention to the needs and viewpoints of community organizations and of girls and young women who are too often marginalized or silenced. The process and the ongoing dissemination of the project invite dialogue and provoke conversation and reflection in the public arenas of the community, the schools, and the internet.

**References**


