

### Professor Anderson Responds

I have been invited by *Almanac* to respond to these letters regarding my work and the work of my colleague, Professor Kathryn Edin. I have stayed out of the recent public controversy related to these works but offer this response for reasons explained here. The dispute between Professor Edin and me, which has unexpectedly surfaced publicly in the last week, was settled a few months ago. When I saw a problem of acknowledgment and attribution of my work in her and Professor Maria Kefalas' book *Promises I Can Keep*, I did not impute malice or sinister motivation to them, but went to Professor Edin and suggested we discuss the matter and work it out as colleagues. With the help of a sociologist from another university who skillfully served as mediator, we settled the matter amicably. We reached an agreement last June, the terms of which are, as part of the agreement, confidential. I was satisfied by the agreement which I will continue to abide by.

Now there has been a new turn of events. Several respected minds in American sociology from outside Penn led by Professor Sara McLanahan have written a letter to the Penn community about this controversy. Their statement gives the impression that they think there is something unreasonable—"absurd" and "fundamental misreading"—about my concerns with their book. These are harsh words, and from my experience it is hard to get 17 social scientists to agree to anything, so this letter is an unusual occasion. I never imagined that I would be dismissed with such utter confidence by respected figures of the discipline I have devoted my scholarship and career to serving. I find their letter unconvincing and disturbing.

Professor McLanahan's intervention is probably a well meaning effort to defend Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas against charges, as they appeared in headlines of the *Daily Pennsylvanian*, of "plagiarism," a specific and loaded term which I have not used to characterize the dispute. However, McLanahan, et al.'s dismissal of the concerns aired in the *Daily Pennsylvanian* as "absurd"—and particularly their claim that "the arguments of the two books could not be more different"—have now been taken up by the popular press to suggest that the concerns which in the first place motivated me to approach Professor Edin are, as some critics said, "nonsense."

Many scholars who have been around for a while experience the sometimes uneasy feeling that he or she should have been cited in this or that work. We get used to ignoring it. In using words like "absurd," Professor McLanahan and co-signatories seem to view it that way. But they discuss the problem as if the similarities between the book and my work were a matter of topics addressed or ultimate conclusions drawn. I have never raised any questions about the topics being similar, and I never disputed that Edin and Kefalas made an original argument in suggesting that poor young women refuse to marry because they don't want to make promises they can't keep. (This is a claim I have never made.)

The problem is that in other respects, *Promises* owes a strong and almost entirely unacknowledged debt to *Code of the Street*, especially to the sequence of my chapters "The Mating Game," "The Decent Daddy," and "The Black Inner-City Grandmother in Transition" (142-236), as well as to earlier articles that led to those chapters, particularly "Sex Codes and Family Life Among Northton's Youth," in *Streetwise*. *Promises* follows *Code* in its themes and major issues; it makes many of the same findings and explanations and draws many of the same

conclusions; and it includes many specific repetitions of matter from *Code* and its source articles. At the same time, the University of California Press and the authors themselves make strong claims for the originality of the work in *Promises*.

Edin and Kefalas have made use of concepts and expressions in *Code* in a way that misleads readers into thinking that they are primarily responsible for those expressions and concepts and due the credit for them. They have engaged in a pattern of repeating the distinctive ideas, findings, explanations, or terms of *Code* without citing the source. These similarities have three notable qualities. First, the methods, ideas, or terms are sufficiently similar to those in *Code*, and the overlap is so extensive, that they constitute repetition of the original work. Second, the unacknowledged methods, ideas, or terms are sufficiently associated with *Code* that they should have been credited to it. And third, the writers knew the previous work. As scholars, we owe it to our sources and our readers to acknowledge whenever our contributions very specifically follow a pattern of previous contributions of others. This is what I chose to discuss with my colleague.

The following sections summarize the unacknowledged similarities, the acknowledged similarities (*Promises*' references to *Code*), and *Promises*' claims to originality, followed by a comparison of quoted portions from *Promises* and *Code* on 22 important subject areas.

### **Unacknowledged Similarities**

Despite McLanahan, et al.'s claim that the arguments in the two books "could not be more different," it is not "absurd" to believe that *Promises* can reasonably be seen as a development and extension of the "Mating Game" chapter of *Code*. It addresses most of the same issues, develops many of the same themes, makes many of the same findings and explanations, and comes to many of the same conclusions. These general similarities alone would demand significant acknowledgement. But in addition, *Promises* includes many specific repetitions and echoes of *Code* without acknowledgment (quoted in the last section of this response). It would be impossible for someone who knew both works not to recognize both that *Promises* is indebted to *Code* and that the debt is one that by standards of ethical scholarship should be acknowledged. Worse yet, someone who reads *Promises* but does not already know *Code* will be doubly misled. Not only does *Promises* take sole credit for work it repeats, but it gives a reader no reason to look back to *Code* to see the genesis of the work *Promises* pursues.

### **Acknowledged Similarities**

*Promises* does acknowledge *Code* in three footnotes, two of which are listed in the index.

The first reference occurs on page 54. The note acknowledges two pre-*Code* articles: "Elijah Anderson's work (1989; 1991) offers a perspective on these young families in inner-city Philadelphia" (253, n2). It does not acknowledge that framing story of Mahkiya and Mike is anticipated almost point-for-point in *Code* (see below, items 6, 7, 8, 11, and 20).

The second is on page 160, acknowledging its discussion of "decent" families (261, n20).

The third recalls the first. It is located in the conclusion (190). The footnoted lines in the text read as follows:

We gathered our data in the kitchens and front rooms, the sidewalks and front stoops of those declining neighborhoods where the growth in single motherhood has been most pronounced.

What we learned—and the stories we tell—challenge what most Americans believe about

unwed motherhood and its causes. This on-the-ground approach creates a portrait of poor single mothers that goes beyond the statistics that are so often used to describe them.<sup>1</sup>

The footnote reads as follows:

<sup>1</sup>Elijah Anderson's similar approach reveals a great deal about the sexual and romantic relationships of very young, inner-city African-Americans in Philadelphia, many of whom are not yet parents. See Anderson (1990, 1990).

In this context, what is most notable about this footnote is how little it actually acknowledges. Edin and Kefalas grant that I also used an "on-the-ground approach," but do not acknowledge any similarity or debt to the specifics of my approach, themes, issues or conclusions. The rest of the footnote credits me with "reveal[ing] a great deal"; but not only does it fail to acknowledge the similarity between those revelations and their work, it also misleadingly emphasizes the differences between their subjects and my "very young" subjects who are "not yet parents." (It should be noted that the discussion of these issues in *Code* is by no means limited to the "very young.") A skeptic might conclude that the effect of these footnotes is to deflect readers from considering the actual similarities between *Promises* and *Code*.

### **Claims to Originality in Promises**

The unacknowledged similarities between *Promises* and *Code* must be judged in light of how *Promises* presents itself to readers and positions itself in relation to prior scholarship.

The dust jacket mentions the originality of *Promises* three times, in the front-inside summary and in two of the four blurbs on the back, the last of which reads: "*Promises I Can Keep* is the best kind of exploration: honest, incisive, and ever-so-original."

Edin and Kefalas do not mention *Code* or other work by me anywhere in their "Introduction," where scholars traditionally set out the relationship between their work and that of their predecessors. They introduce their approach in contrast to previous studies: "Since these trends [to unwed motherhood] first became apparent, some of the best scholars in America have sought answers, using the best survey data social science has at its disposal" (4). They do not make any reference here to the use of ethnographic methodology by leading scholars, thus implying that it is their work which stands as a unique corrective. They continue that the previous answers are inadequate and "the reasons remain a mystery" (5). The problem, they suggest, lies in the nature of a survey-based methodology, and they claim that with their ethnographic method they provide "new" ideas and a "unique" point of view:

What is striking about the body of social science evidence is how little of it is based on the perspectives and life experiences of the women who are its subjects. . . . We provide *new* ideas about the forces that may be driving the trend by looking at the problems of family formation through the eyes of 162 low-income single mothers living in eight economically marginal neighborhoods across Philadelphia and its poorest industrial suburb, Camden, New Jersey. Their stories offer *a unique point of view* on the troubling questions of why low-income, poorly educated young women have children they can't afford and why they don't marry. (5) (Emphasis added)

In such contexts, the standards of scholarly citation call for scholars to acknowledge those whose work has preceded them. When Edin and Kefalas position their work as standing in contrast to "the body of social science research" on the problem of unwed motherhood and do not mention the

obvious precedent of the approach in *Code* and the articles that led up to it, they can only be taken to obscure any significant similarity to that work. When they claim that their approach offers “a unique point of view” and do not mention the many similarities between what they find and what *Code* showed before them using a similar methodology, they again can only be taken to obscure any significant similarity to that work. In other published work and talks, Edin and Kefalas have taken this practice even further—not citing my work at all. (See Contexts 4:2:16-22)

Should the field accept McLanahan, et al.’s claims to the originality of Edin and Kefalas’ book, these scholars will have succeeded at seriously obscuring indebtedness to previous scholarship. *Promises* exhibits enough unacknowledged similarity to *Code* that it constitutes an unfair use of another’s scholarship.

I urge anyone interested in this matter to carefully read the comparisons of verbatim quotes covering 22 subject areas, in the next section,\* with the criticism and easy dismissal of me by McLanahan, et al. in mind: Is “absurd” an appropriate characterization, and is there justification for their conclusion that the works “could not be more different”? Would they or any reasonable academic tell their students that they need not footnote or acknowledge in these circumstances? Ultimately, these unfortunate events highlight an important issue: What standards for acknowledging the prior work of other scholars will Professor McLanahan, et al.—and the academy generally—stand by?

### **Unacknowledged Overlap and Repetition Quoted Verbatim**

All quotations are from Edin and Kefalas’ *Promises I Can Keep* (“E/K”) and Anderson’s *Code of the Street* (“A”) unless otherwise indicated.

#### **1. The belief in fate.**

E/K: “Some, like Abby, begin to take chances [not use birth control] on purpose and leave the outcome to fate.” (39)

“Even if children seem to just ‘happen,’ most believe they were meant to be. Jasmine . . . tells us, ‘I never used anything [when] I got pregnant. *God* is in control. And [my kids] was *meant to be* . . . . I feel like, if it happens, it happens.’” (41-42)

“When the pregnancy is confirmed, most take a fatalistic view that it is meant to be, just as Antonia Rodriguez did.” (43)

“Few say their children are the result of *either* an overt plan *or* a contraceptive failure. Rather, the large majority are *neither* fully planned *nor* actively avoided.” (46-47)

A: “Although an overwhelming number may not be actively trying to have babies, many are not actively trying to prevent having them. One of the reasons for this may be

the strong fundamentalist religious orientation of many poor blacks, which emphasizes the role of fate in life. If something *happens, it happens*; if something was *meant to be*, then let it be, and ‘God will find a way.’” (147)

## 2. The sense of future among inner-city youth.

E/K: “Jen and the other mothers we came to know are coming of age in an America that is profoundly unequal—where the gap between rich and poor continues to grow. This economic reality has convinced them that they have little *to lose* and, perhaps, *something to gain* by a seemingly ‘ill-timed’ birth.” (“Unmarried with Children,” *Contexts*, p. 22)

A: “Their outlook on sex and pregnancy, like their outlook on violence, is strongly affected by their perceived options in life . . . Such perceptions are formed by the fortunes of immediate peers, family, and others with whom the youths identify. Among teenagers one of the most important factors working against pregnancy is their belief that they have *something to lose* by becoming parents at an early age; many believe they have *something to gain*.” (142)

## 3. The contrast with the sense of future of middle-class youth.

E/K: “For lack of compelling alternatives, poor youth like Antonia and Emilio often begin to eagerly anticipate children and the social role of parents at a remarkably tender age. While middle-class teens and twenty-somethings anticipate completing college and embarking on careers, their lower-class counterparts can only dream of such glories. Though some do aspire to these goals, the practical steps necessary to reach them are often a mystery.” (31-32)

“The centrality of children in this lower-class worldview of what is important and meaningful in life stands in striking contrast to their low priority in the view of more affluent teens and twenty-something youth, who may want children at some point in the future, but only after educational, career, and other life goals have been achieved. Putting motherhood first makes sense in a social context where the achievements that middle-class youth see as their birthright are little more than pipe dreams: Children offer a tangible source of meaning, while other avenues for gaining social esteem and personal satisfaction appear vague and tenuous.” (49)

A: “Sexual relations, exploitative and otherwise, are common among middle-class teenagers as well, but middle-class youth take a strong interest in their future and know what a pregnancy can do to derail that future. In contrast, the ghetto adolescent sees no future to derail, no hope for a tomorrow very different from today, hence, little to lose by having an out-of-wedlock child.” (“Sex Codes and Family Life,” *Annals of the American Academy*, p. 77)

“The prize baby is not usually the prize of first choice for many of these girls. For an undetermined number, the real prize is upward mobility, the good life, having a

family on the middle-class model they avidly follow in the soap operas. The wish for many is to go to college or land a job downtown. But sooner or later they make do with what they have at their disposal. In effect, they may settle for babies because there is 'nothing else to do.' This poverty of outlook is far different from that of their 'decent' counterparts, to whom they usually defer during encounters, thus recognizing such people as their 'betters' in the neighborhood's social order." ("Neighborhood Effects on Teenage Pregnancy," in *The Urban Underclass*, p. 392)

**4. The view of a baby as a "gift," the general receptivity of the poor to children, and the concomitant negative view of abortion.**

E/K: "The heady significance of the declaration 'I want to have a baby by you' is also fueled by the extraordinarily high social value the poor place on children. For a lack of compelling alternatives, poor youth like Antonia and Emilio often begin to eagerly anticipate children and the social role of parents at a remarkably tender age." (31)

"Children, whether planned or not, are nearly always viewed as a gift, not a liability—a source of both joy and fulfillment whenever they happen upon the scene. They bring a new sense of hope and a chance to start fresh. Thus, most women want the baby very much once the pregnancy occurs. . . . As sociologist Kristin Luker shows, many middle-class women view abortion as a personal choice arising from a woman's right to control her body and her life. Yet most mothers who live in the Philadelphia area's bleak core typically share a radically different view. Though most concede there are circumstances desperate enough to warrant an abortion, most still view the termination of a pregnancy as a tragedy—perhaps unavoidable but still deeply regrettable. Virtually no woman we spoke with believed it was acceptable to have an abortion merely to advance an educational trajectory." (43-44)

A: "[W]elfare and persistent poverty have affected the norms of the ghetto culture, such as the high value placed on children." (166)

"Many women in the underclass black culture emerge from a fundamentalist religious orientation and practice a pro-life philosophy. Abortion is therefore not usually an option. New life is sometimes characterized as a 'heavenly gift,' an infant is very sacred to the young women, and the extended inner-city family appears always able to make do somehow with another baby. In the community, a birth is usually met with great praise, regardless of its circumstances, and the child is genuinely valued. Such ready social approval works against many efforts to avoid an out-of-wedlock birth." (*Annals* piece, 76)

**5. The expectation of having children at a young age.**

E/K: "Conception without planning is most common among the young, yet even the very young . . . usually say they got pregnant only a year or two before they'd hoped." (40)

A: “[I]t is not always a question of whether the young girl is going to have children, but when.” (69)

## 6. **Pregnancy as a transformative event.**

E/K: “For poor youth like Antonia Rodriguez, Emilio, Mahkiya, and Mike, the news of the pregnancy can dramatically transform the relational dynamic. Two young people who have only been ‘kicking it’ for a short period of time—often less than a year—suddenly realize they’ve ignited a time bomb. Most young women respond as Mahkiya and Antonia did—they attempt to get serious about life for the sake of the baby. Some of the young men do likewise . . . Many young men, however, react on some level as Mike does [“he’d call and say, ‘It ain’t my child. Don’t put my name on the birth certificate.” (p. 52)], attempting to deny the new reality. . . . Only their girlfriends and sometimes their kin chide them to grow up, get serious, and begin taking care of their responsibilities. Their male peers, on the other hand, may well be encouraging them to celebrate their freedom while they can. . . . The advent of pregnancy quickly divides the committed from the fickle . . .” (53-54)

A: “Up to the point of pregnancy, given the norms of his peer group, the young man could simply be said to be messing around. Pregnancy suddenly introduces an element of reality into the relationship. Life-altering events have occurred, and the situation is usually perceived as serious. The girl is pregnant, and he could be held legally responsible for the child’s long-term financial support. If the couple were unclear about their intentions before, things may now crystallize. She now considers him seriously as a mate. Priorities begin to emerge in the boy’s mind. He has to decide whether to claim the child as his or to shun the woman who has been the object of his supposed affections. To own up to a pregnancy is to go against the peer-group ethic of hit and run. Other street values at risk of being flouted include the subordination of women and freedom from formal conjugal ties, and some young men are not interested in ‘taking care of somebody else’ when it means having less for themselves.” (156)

## 7. **Promiscuity and denial.**

E/K: “Despite the dreams of shared children that young couples so often indulge in before conception, men are as likely to respond with shock and trepidation—or even outrage and denial—as with pleasure. Like Mahkiya’s boyfriend Mike, some immediately attempt to deny the child is theirs and accuse their mystified girlfriends of being ‘cheaters’ or ‘whores.’ Others try to force the expectant mother to have an abortion, threatening to break up with her and have nothing to do with the child unless she complies. Still others simply abandon their pregnant girlfriends when they hear the news. . . . Though young women usually claim their boyfriends’ accusations are completely groundless, youth in these neighborhoods do move quickly from one relationship to another, and the rapid onset of sex means that there is sometimes legitimate reason for doubt.” (54-55)

“Infidelity is so common among couples in these neighborhoods that over time, some come to question any man’s ability to remain sexually faithful . . .” (93)

A: “[T]he fact that there is a fair amount of promiscuity among the young men and women creates doubts about paternity and socially complicates many relationships. In self-defense the young men often choose to deny fatherhood; few are willing to own up to a pregnancy they can reasonably question. Among their street-oriented peers, the young men gain ready support for this position; a man who is “tagged” with fatherhood has been caught in the ‘trick bag.’ The boy’s first desire, though he may know better, is to attribute the pregnancy to someone else.” (157)

“Another important attitude of the male peer group is that most girls are whores: ‘If she was fucking you, then she was fucking everybody else.’” ( *Annals* piece, 66)

#### **8. Motherhood as a response to blocked opportunity that imparts alternative meaning to life.**

E/K: “[W]e believe that the stronger preference for children among the poor can be seen in the propensity of the women we interviewed to put children, rather than marriage, education, or career, at the center of their meaning-making activity. Presumably, people of all social classes share a deep psychological need to make meaning. Over the last half-century, new opportunities to gain esteem and validation have opened for American women. But these new alternatives—the rewarding careers and professional identities—aren’t equally available. While middle-class women are now reaching new heights of self-actualization, poor women are relegated to unstable, poorly paid, often mind-stultifying jobs with little room for advancement. Thus, for the poor, childbearing often rises to the top of the list of potential meaning-making activities from mere lack of competition.” (206)

“Through the tales of mothers like Millie we paint a portrait of the lives of these young women before pregnancy, a portrait that details the extreme loneliness, the struggles with parents and peers, the wild behavior, the depression and despair, the school failure, the drugs, and the general sense that life has spun completely out of control. Into this void comes a pregnancy and then a baby, bringing the purpose, the validation, the companionship, and the order that young women feel have been so sorely lacking. In some profound sense, these young women believe, a baby has the power to solve everything.” (10)

“In choosing to bring a pregnancy to term, a young woman can capitalize on an important and rare opportunity to demonstrate her capabilities to her kin and community. Her willingness and ability to react to an unplanned pregnancy by rising to the challenge of the most serious and consequential of all adult roles is clear evidence that she is no longer a ‘trifling’ teenager.” (45)

“Becoming a mother has transformed Jen’s point of view on just about everything. For example, she says, ‘I thought hanging on the corner, drinking, getting high—I



thought that was a good life, and I thought I could live that way for eternity, like sitting out with my friends. But it's not as fun once you have your own kid . . . I think it changes [you].” (195-96)

A: Teenage pregnancy “is a mean adaptation to blocked opportunities and profound lack, a grotesque form of coping by young people constantly undermined by a social system that historically has limited their social options and, until recently, rejected their claims to full citizenship. . . . [T]he ‘fast’ adolescent street orientation presents early sexual experience and promiscuity as a virtue. But when the girls submit, they often end up pregnant and abandoned. However, for many such girls who have few other perceivable options, motherhood, accidental or otherwise, becomes a rite of passage to adulthood. . . . Becoming a mother can be a strong play for authority, maturity, and respect . . .” (147-48)

“The young mothers who form such baby clubs develop an ideology counter to that of more conventional society, one that not only approves of but enhances their position. In effect, they work to create value and status by inverting that of the girls who do not become pregnant. The teenage mother derives status from her baby; hence her preoccupation with the impression that the baby makes and her willingness to spend inordinately large sums toward that end.” (165)

“[A] girl tends to achieve a new, if provisional, status in her mother’s eyes once she becomes an unwed mother. At the same time, through the trials and tribulations of motherhood, such girls often gain a new appreciation of their mother, as well as of themselves. Moreover, the community is prepared to make a conceptual distinction between a biological and a ‘real’ mother. A common neighborhood saying goes that any woman can have a baby, but it takes caring, love, and ‘mother wit’ to be a real mother. . . . Accordingly, a profound female bonding takes place as the mother begins to pass her wisdom and experience down to the daughter. At social gatherings neighbors, relatives, and friends often augment this knowledge with their own fond remembrances and tales of maternity, attempting effectively to socialize the new mother into the preferred role of real mother.” (209-10)

## 9. **The role of the boy’s mother.**

E/K: “[N]ews of the pregnancy soon reached Mike’s mother, who initiated a campaign of her own to convince Mike it was immoral to ‘force someone to get rid of their baby.’ This tactic apparently worked.” (51)

A: “On learning of the pregnancy, the mother might react with anything from disbelief that her son could be responsible to certainty, even before seeing the child, that he is indeed the father. . . . She may even go so far as to engage in playful collusion against her son, a man, to get him to do right by the girl.” (169)

E/K: “But other would-be ‘mothers-in-law’ join their son’s campaign to pressure the young woman to have an abortion, or wholeheartedly back their son’s efforts to deny

paternity, sometimes even planting the initial doubt of her fidelity in his mind. Sons and their mothers are very much afraid of becoming saddled with the responsibility of children who are not their biological offspring.” (68)

A: “The mother may feel constrained, at least initially, because she is unsure her son actually fathered the child. She may be careful about showing her doubt, however, thinking that when the baby arrives she will be able to tell in a minute if her son is the father. Thus, during the pregnancy, she nervously waits, wondering whether her son will be blamed for a pregnancy not of his doing or whether she will really be a grandmother.” (170)

#### **10. The role of the girl’s mother and grandmother.**

E/K: “The African American grandmother has always played a powerful social and symbolic role in the lives of her grandchildren. But in the impoverished white and Latino neighborhoods we studied, where help from a child’s own father is often in short supply, the mother’s own mother is often an integral part of the parenting team as well. Poor single mothers across the racial and ethnic spectrum rely on their own mothers and grandmothers for much more than free babysitting or child-rearing advice.” (66)

A: “From slavery onward, in the most trying of circumstances, the mother – and by extension, the black grandmother – has been an extremely important source of support for the black family.” (206)

“Because the role of grandmother has such communal support—even public acknowledgement and expectation—unmarried teenage mothers of fifteen and sixteen easily turn to their own mothers for help, which is generally forthcoming. In this social context depending on the age of maturity of the new mother, the experienced grandmother may take over the care of the newborn . . .” (209)

#### **11. The change in the girl’s status as her pregnancy advances.**

E/K: Mike’s occasional bouts of ‘wild’ behavior, which became more frequent during the pregnancy, also caused tensions in his relationship with Mahkiya. Prior to pregnancy, she says she might have joined Mike in some of the fun. But the practical realities of pregnancy meant that her behaviors were suddenly constrained in a way that Mike’s were not. Like so many others, Mahkiya spent the last trimester of her pregnancy on the couch at home, bored and lonely, while Mike was out partying, clubbing, and ‘ripping and running the streets.’” (52)

A: The young pregnant woman “looks forward to the day when she is ‘straight’ again—when she has given birth to the baby and has regained her figure. Her comments to girls who are not pregnant tend to center wistfully on better days. If her boyfriend stops seeing her regularly, she may attribute this to the family’s negative remarks about him, but also to her pregnancy, saying time and time again, ‘When I get straight, he’ll be sorry; he’ll be jealous then.’ She knows that her pregnant state is devalued by her family

as well as by her single peers, who are free to date and otherwise consort with men, and she may long for the day when she can do so again.” (168)

## **12. The lack of trust within relationships in the inner city.**

E/K: “Trust among residents of poor communities is astonishingly low—so low that most mothers we spoke with said they have no close friends, and many even distrust close kin. The social isolation that is the common experience of those who live in poverty is heightened for adolescents, whose relationships with parents are strained by the developmental need to forge an independent identity. The ‘relational poverty’ that ensues can create a compelling desire to give and receive love.” (34)

“Christine, a thirty-seven-year-old African American mother of a fifteen-year-old daughter and a two-year-old son voices the ambivalence of many poor women toward the men in their lives in her simple statement, ‘Truthfully, most men . . . now are not trustworthy.’ Brehanna, just sixteen, an African American mother of a one-year-old, offers this assessment of the problem with marriage in her community: ‘Guys . . . really make me sick. You just can’t trust them anymore, you can’t get a decent man you can really, really trust.’ Mistrust seems to permeate the very air in these neighborhoods. Some of it is born of harsh childhood circumstances. But the hard times that often come with a pregnancy and birth can transform hopeful naivete into cynicism.” (125-26)

A: “When a person can take something from another and then flaunt it, he gains a certain regard by being the owner, or the controller, of that thing. But this display of ownership can then provoke a challenge from other people. This game of who controls what is thus constantly being played out on inner-city streets. . . In this often violent give-and-take, raising oneself up largely depends on putting someone else down. The level of jealousy and envy underscores the alienation that permeates the inner city.” (75)

“Much of the lack of support for marriage is due to poor employment prospects, but it may also have to do with general distrust of women to whom the men are not related by blood.” (173)

“The economic noose restricting ghetto life encourages men and women alike to try to extract maximum personal benefit from sexual relationships. . . . Girls as well as boys scramble to take what they can from each other, trusting only their own ability to trick the other into giving them something that will establish their version of the good life—the best life they can put together in their environment.” (176)

## **13. The significance of the baby’s looks.**

E/K: “Aleena, whose boyfriend denied responsibility for the pregnancy, tells how he changed his attitude when the child was born. ‘All of a sudden, he believes that my son is his. My son looks just like his father, the olive skin, and everything, the dark eyes, all of it, same birthmark and everything. There is no way he can deny that baby.’” (60-61)

A: "If the child clearly resembles the alleged father physically, there may be strong pressure for the boy to claim the child and assume his responsibilities. . . . As one informant said, 'If the baby look just like him, he should admit to himself that that's his. Some guys have to wait till the baby grow up a little to see if the baby gon' look like him 'fore they finally realize that was his'n. Because yours should look like you, you know, should have your features and image.'" (171)

**14. The baby's appearance as a mark of the mother's status.**

E/K: "The well-dressed child transforms the shabbily dressed mother. A child swathed in layers of warm clothing, even in a spring thaw, is testimony that an aimless teen is now a caring, competent, and responsible adult. The almost obsessive concern she has with her newborn's cleanliness, however, exposes the fragility of her new claim to respectability. According to Keisha, ' . . . People talk about you when—like if your child is dirty and stuff. So that's why I try to keep my clild clean and buy for Cheresa before I buy for myself. I don't have no clothes, she has everything.' . . . This is why, though most mothers try to deemphasize material possessions, many still occasionally bypass the K-Mart on Broad Street for the designer discount chain across the street where Hilfiger and Polo abound, or even the Gap down on South Street. Having at least one 'name brand' outfit for the baby is important to a young mother's quest for validation. . . . A well-cared-for child is the tangible evidence of a young mother's importance. *She* is the one raising the happy, healthy, carefully dressed child." (177-78)

A: "The girls give one another social support, praising each other's babies. But they also use their babies to compete, on the premise that the baby is an extension of the mother and reflects directly on her. . . . First the baby's features are noted, usually along the lines of 'spoiledness,' texture of hair, skin color, and grooming and dress, as well as general 'cuteness.' To enhance her chances at such competitions, and status games, the young mother often feels the need to dress her baby in the latest and most expensive clothes that fit (rather than in a size larger, which the baby can grow into): a fifty-dollar sweater for a three-month-old or forty-dollar Reebok sneakers for a six month-old. . . . 'Looking good' negates the generalized notion that a teenage mother has messed up her life, and amid this deprivation nothing is more important than to show others you are doing all right." (163-65)

**15. The precariousness of the legitimate job and the easy shift into drug dealing with its devastating consequences.**

E/K: "Over time . . . a chronically unemployed father proves too much for most mothers to bear. Yolanda, a twenty-six-year-old Puerto Rican mother of two children, ages three and four, from East Camden, had been a stay-at-home mother because her children's father had a steady and well-paid factory job. A year ago, however, the plant closed down as the company's operations moved overseas. The economic strain on the family . . . has been tremendous. Though she says she knows that in some sense he is the victim of circumstances, she can't help feeling angry and resentful that this steady breadwinner has turned into nothing more than an economic drain. A few months before

we interviewed her, she kicked him out. . . . Conflicts over money do not usually erupt simply because the man cannot find a job or because he doesn't earn as much as someone with better skills or more education. Money usually becomes an issue because he seems unwilling to keep at a job for any length of time, usually because of issues related to respect. Some of the jobs he can get don't pay enough to give him the self-respect he feels he needs, and others require him to get along with unpleasant customers and coworkers, and to maintain a submissive attitude toward the boss. . . . Twenty-year-old Tasheika, an African American mother of three young children, gripes, 'He want[s] to be in the fast life and do things. He don't want to have a steady *job* or nothing. I said to him, 'That's what a family *is*—you have to bring a *paycheck* home.' . . . In the poorer neighborhoods of Philadelphia and its inner suburbs, the street corner offers a quick apprenticeship to any enterprising young man who's bold enough to flaunt the law. . . . Fathers are pulled in opposite directions when it comes to the easy money that drug dealing brings. Most try to stay employed at legitimate jobs, but if they lose them or are temporarily laid off, the continuing pressure to bring in money makes the street corner hard to resist." (76-83)

A: "With widespread joblessness, many inner-city people become stressed and their communities become distressed. Poor people adapt to these circumstances in the ways they know, meeting the exigencies of the situation as best they can. . . . The drug trade is certainly illegal, but it is the most lucrative and most accessible element of the underground economy and has become a way of life in numerous inner-city communities. Many youngsters dream of leading the drug dealer's life, or at least their highly glamorized conceptions of this life. . . . [I]n Philadelphia, a great many black boys and girls, especially the boys, are feared by employers. Even when they do get work, there is often a racial division of labor in the workplace. Inner-city black boys and girls tend to get stuck in entry-level jobs and are rarely promoted. . . . In addition, if a problem with stealing or some other trouble on the job arises, they are prime suspects and are sometimes summarily dismissed. Such experiences, and the reports of them, contribute to their working conception of the world. Their resulting bitterness and alienation then nurture the oppositional culture. To be self-respecting, many young men and women must exhibit a certain contempt for a system they are sure has contempt for them. When such factors are added to the consequences of deindustrialization, the result is an incendiary situation . . . The attraction of the violence-prone drug trade thus results from a combination of inadequate opportunity in the regular economy, on the one hand, and the imperatives of street life, on the other." (110-13)

#### 16. **The sometimes successful positive influence of mentors.**

E/K: "While older and wiser parents and kin may—and do—encourage the young to wait, to 'live their lives' first, many young women come to see parenthood as the point at which they can really start living. When Pepper Ann's mother learned she was planning to get pregnant at fifteen, she tried to put an end to her daughter's scheme. Now forty-seven, this African American mother of two grown children and a twelve-year-old remembers vividly how her mother wanted her to get a diploma first and 'live her life.' 'But to me,' she explains, 'that [baby] *was* life!'" (35)

A: "A girl growing up in such a family [with decent role models], or even living in close social and physical proximity to some, may have strong support from a mother, a father, friends, and neighbors who not only care very much whether she becomes pregnant but are also able to share knowledge about negotiating life beyond the confines of the neighborhood. The girl may then approach social mobility or at least delay pregnancy. In these circumstances she has a better chance to cultivate a positive sense of the future and a healthy self-respect; she may come to feel she has a great deal to lose by becoming an unwed parent." (48)

**17. The primary relational bond often being between mothers and sons.**

E/K: "Beatrice, a twenty-year-old Puerto Rican mother of a three-month-old, simply states, 'My son gives me all the love I need.' . . . Jennifer says of her oldest, 'What I like best about being a mother is that my son always keeps me company. . . .' Twenty-three-year old Amber . . . exclaims of her oldest, 'I never *imagined* that there was any kind of love like that *out* there, never imagined it! . . .'" (175)

"Sonia, a twenty-three-year-old Puerto Rican mother of a four-year-old son, puts it this way: '[My son is] my heart. [When I have hard times] I always tell myself I wanted him. Even if I get that rock on my finger, that white picket fence, and that deed that says the house is mine, 'I'll still have my son just in case anything goes sour. I'll say to my husband, 'You leave! This boy is *mine*.'" (211)

A: "A son is generally well bonded to his mother, something she tends to encourage from birth. It may be that sons, particularly the eldest, are groomed to function as surrogate husbands because of the high rate of family dissolution among poor blacks. . . . The young man's home situation with his mother thus competes effectively with the household he envisions with a woman his peer group is fully prepared to discredit." (174)

**18. Men hang out with peer groups that disparage responsibility and tout an ethic of freedom .**

E/K: "Fathers also get fewer rewards from their peers in their new status as a parent than mothers do. Staying home with the baby rather than 'ripping and running' with friends brings her social recognition for behaving the way a good mother should. He, however, wins no points with his friends for staying home in the evening and on weekends, no matter how good a father he desires to be. He often chafes at being required to spend all his leisure time at home, especially when the baby wins in the competition for his girlfriend's affection. . . . Many men respond to these pressures by returning to their streetcorner associations in a relatively short period of time. Mothers often argue that since they don't get any time off from parenting, the fathers shouldn't expect to either. But they also recognize that his peers can be a threat to their new families. As fathers reconnect with their 'associates' on the street, many resume the heavy drinking and drug use, casual drug dealing, joyriding, or other delinquent behavior,

and even the sexual encounters that they may have engaged in before becoming fathers.” (100-01)

A: “[M]any young black men form strong attachments to peer groups that emphasize sexual prowess as proof of manhood, with babies as evidence. These groups congregate on street corners, boasting about their sexual exploits and deriding conventional family life. They encourage this orientation by rewarding members who are able to get over the sexual defenses of women. For many the object is to hit and run while maintaining personal freedom and independence from conjugal ties; when they exist, the ties should be on the young man’s terms.” (147)

“When Martin announced his decision [to marry the mother of his child] to his friends . . . it was met with scorn . . . The young men with whom he socialized saw marriage as a loss of freedom and derided him for wanting to ‘put his head in a noose.’ They didn’t believe he could meet the responsibilities of being a husband; they also thought he was putting himself in a position in which a woman might exploit him.” (189)

**19. Men’s difficulty in taking long-term commitment seriously, of “playing” house or “playing” daddy.**

E/K: “On the surface, Sean seems like an excellent bet for a long-term relationship. He is apprenticing with a local plumbers’ union, has no other kids, and is willing to play daddy to all three children.” (191)

A: The unwed father “may reason that he is much better off remaining single, ‘staying home with mama,’ and maintaining his freedom ‘to come as I want and to go as I please.’ Given his limited employment prospects, such a resolution may afford him a better alternative than ‘playing house’ and being ‘tied down with kids, bills, and all that.’ Thus, he has a distinct incentive for playing his role of father and ‘husband’ part-time.” (“Neighborhood Effects” piece, 393)

**20. The “education” of the girls once their dream falls apart—the realization of the distinction between the good man and the nothing .**

E/K: “[T]hough Mahkiya deemed Mike a ‘perfect’ boyfriend prior to pregnancy, he became ‘nothing’ when the pregnancy failed to prompt him to respond the way Emilio had—to ‘get off his butt’ and land a ‘real job.’” (52)

A: “One older single mother, who now considers herself wiser, said, ‘I know the difference now between a nothin’ and a good man. I can see. I can smell him. I can just tell a nothin’ from the real thing.’” (167)

**21. The independent woman.**

E/K: “A young mother often fears marriage will mean a loss of control—she believes that saying ‘I do’ will suddenly transform her man into an authoritarian head of the house who insists on making all the decisions, who thinks that he ‘owns’ her. Having her own earnings and assets buys her some ‘say-so’ power and some freedom from a man’s attempts to control her behavior.” (9)

A: “However, an undetermined, but some say growing, number of young women, unimpressed with the lot of young single men, want to establish households on their own, without the help or the burden of a man.” (165)

## 22. **Motherhood and ‘the dream.’**

E/K: “We spent five years talking in depth with women who populate some of America’s poorest inner-city neighborhoods and, to our surprise, found astonishingly little evidence of the much-touted rejection of the institution of marriage among the poor. In fact, these mothers told us repeatedly that they revered marriage and hoped to be married themselves one day. Marriage was a dream that most still longed for, a luxury they hoped to indulge in someday when the time was right, but generally not something they saw happening in the near, or even the foreseeable, future. Most middle-class women in their early to mid-twenties, the average age of the mothers we spoke to, would no doubt say the same, but their attitudes about childbearing would contrast sharply with those of our respondents. While the poor women we interviewed saw marriage as a luxury, something they aspired to but feared they might never achieve, they judge children to be a necessity, an absolutely essential part of a young woman’s life, the chief source of identity and meaning.” (6)

“How Does the Dream Die?” [chapter title] (71)

“[T]hese couples live in a world where the better-off men go to the better-off women. Thus, unless poor women can improve their own positions through education and work, they have no choice but to abandon the dream of marriage altogether or attempt to change the available men. For most, giving up on the possibility of marriage means abandoning hope that their difficult economic and social situations will get better in time. Marriage is the prize at the end of the race. Because these women live in circumstances that are often too bleak to endure without hope that someday, in some way, they can make it, they still hope for marriage. But ‘getting themselves together’ while also trying to redeem the fathers of their children is hard work, and failure is more common than success. Yet the fact that some succeed is enough cause for hope.” (136-37)

“What is crucial to note is that *now there are few differences between the poor and the affluent in attitudes and values toward marriage*. . . . Conservative social commentators often charge that the poor hold to a deviant set of subcultural values that denigrate marriage, but these claims miss the point entirely. The truth is that the poor have embraced a set of surprisingly mainstream norms about marriage and the circumstances in which it should occur. Though we believe that a culture-wide



redefinition of marriage is the primary reason for changes in marriage rates over time, we assert that the role the economy has played, and continues to play, is still profound. . . . We argue that the growing divide in the material circumstances of the poor and the affluent has led these groups to make radically different family adaptations to the new cultural norm about marriage. . . . We believe that the primary reason for the rather striking class difference in marriage rates that has emerged since the 1950s and 1960s is quite simple: though the poor and the middle class now have a similarly high standard for marriage, the poor are far less likely to reach their 'white picket fence dream.' . . . Mothers like Mahkiya Washington show their adherence to middle-class marital norms when they insist that the 'perfect picture' of the lifestyle they aspire to includes a man and a woman with wedding rings. In the worldview of the poor, marriage and class respectability still usually go hand in hand. Thus, for a poor single mother to say she's abandoned the goal of marriage is the equivalent of admitting she's given up on her dreams for a better future. Both marriage and upward mobility are as central to the American dream as apple pie." (200-02)

A: "The girl has her dream of a family and a home, of a good man who will provide for her and her children. The boy, knowing he cannot be that family man, because he has few job prospects yet needing to have sex to achieve manhood in the eyes of his peer group, pretends to be the decent and good man and so persuades the girl to give him sex and perhaps a baby. He may then abandon her, and she realizes he was not the good man, after all, but rather a nothin' out to exploit her. The boy has gotten what he wanted, but the girl learns that she has gotten something, too. The baby may bring her a certain amount of praise, (in the past) a steady welfare check, and a measure of independence. . . . In this inner-city culture people generally get married for love and to have something. But this mind-set presupposes a job, the work ethic, and perhaps most of all, a persistent sense of hope for an economic future. . . . For many of those who are caught in the web of persistent urban poverty and become unwed mothers and fathers, however, there is little hope for a good job and even less for a future of conventional family life." (177-78)

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