

Power of Pressure

By Sarah Blystra

“Give a little love to a child and you will get a great deal back.”

—John Ruskin

The importance of each child is indisputable; the rewards of every child are irreplaceable and have no equal. Behind Doris Lessing’s story “Debbie and Julie,” one can see how a child influences those around him or her, whether that child is born or unborn. That is one of many reasons why taking the life of a child, or not taking into consideration the life you can offer a child before physical birth is not only wrong but sad. In the story readers see how parents are influences, how the friends are influences, and how the general public is an influence of the creation and birth of a child. In the same way we can see how a child influences our lives, and the lives of those around us.

Hubert H. Humphrey once said, “Each child is an adventure into a better life—an opportunity to change the old pattern and make it new.” In “Debbie and Julie,” the reader sees how the mother, Julie, is distraught about both the physical birth of the child and the life she wants to give it. She feels that she can’t, for many reasons, keep this child and be able to support it. The common factor seems to be the lack of encouragement and support from those around her; this is the driving cause of her actions. “The fatty girl in the sky-blue coat again took herself to the mirror. She could not keep away from it. Why did the others not comment on her scarlet cheeks, just like when she got measles, and the way her hair was stuck down with sweat? But they didn’t notice her; she thought they did not see her. This was because of Debbie who

protected her, so they got nothing out of noticing her” (Lessing 31). This quote exemplifies the fact that she gets no support; the only person that gives her support is Debbie, who ends up leaving her on her own. The biggest lack of support is that from her parents, her parents are cold and distant from her; they are the reason that she leaves and seeks refuge somewhere else. Even after having the child she returns home with fear that they will find out, she neglects the subject and hides any hints that might give away her secret. Throughout the story she contemplates giving up the life of the child, and abandoning it and leaving it to its fate. If she would have been more comfortable with her relations with her parents and peers she would have been inclined to keep the child and raise it herself. Her parents did not provide her with the help and support she needed, so how was she to do this for the child she gave birth to. If a child is not given the help and support they need, they are unable in the future to show those characteristics to others. In the end of the story she wonders what life with that child would have been like, and wishes that she could have given that idea more thought before leaving the child. She also wonders how her child is doing and if it is being taken care of.

Throughout the story this child has affected her in many ways, she grew as an individual, and the experience built up her independence and responsibility. Though it would seem that she did not grow as a person in responsibility or independence do to the fact that she left her child in a telephone booth, and ran back to her home and parents after having the child, she actually does show these characteristics in a different way. Though she was not able to make the wisest decisions and think things through completely, she does think enough to make sure that this child comes into the world safe and that her baby is received by a couple. She built her independence by having this baby on her own. Running away from home and depending on a stranger may not have been the wisest decision, but every decision made helps us grow as individuals and getting

through it with the safety of her and her child shows in a small way that she has learned some independence and responsibility.

Just like in the story, many parents effect the decisions their children make during teen pregnancies. The parents are sometimes supportive and willing to help their child out, and in other cases, like that of Julie, they are unsupportive enough to make their child feel as though she needs to run away to escape from their judgment. This affects the lives of the teen themselves and also the life, or lack thereof, they choose for their baby. Teens feel forced by their parents to make certain decisions, even if they don't agree. Parents may say that if their daughter decides to keep the child that they will no longer provide for either of them, forcing them to make the decision to either give the child up or keep it and make a life for themselves. In addition to that example, many parents transfer their children to different schools, or take their child out of school during their pregnancy. This may be worse for the mother than just staying in her normal school, because she is being judged now by more than just her normal peers. She is now being judged by her new peers and teachers, who only know her as the pregnant girl; they have no memory of the girl she used to be. Parents have such a big influence on their children, and sometimes they don't realize how they affect their children.

Another driving force in the decisions Julie makes is the influence of her friends, or her lack of friends. The friends that Julie had before her pregnancy up and left at any signs of trouble, leaving her with no support. Then she found Debbie, who took her in and gave her what she needed, a roof over her head, food, and guidance for when the baby would come. Like Julie's other friends, Debbie too left her on her own when time came for Julie to give birth. "Debbie had left her to cope on her own, after providing everything from shelter and food and visits to a doctor, to the clothes and bright blue coat that had hidden her so well no one had known . . ."

(Lessing 33). With this sudden abandonment Julie was once again left to fend for herself, and figure out what she was to do in this situation. She was given no emotional support and no help medically; this put both her and the life of her child in danger. With some support from friends her situation could have been much easier emotionally and physically, she may have been able to collect her thoughts and think more about the child and how she wanted to deal with this situation.

Just as Julie loses her friends, many teen girls who become pregnant are also abandoned by their friends. Some are even transferred to other schools, forced to make new friends, when it is hard enough to keep old ones. They are rejected by their peers, and forced to make the best of things with no support from those who would best understand and relate to them, those who are their age. If a girl's relationship with her parents is not good, and she is not getting advice and support from her friends, she is left on her own to deal with what is going to be the biggest part of her life.

One of the last big influences on Julie is the environment and the people she is surrounded by. These people, her peers, elders, and all those she comes in contact with, look down on her and give her no encouragement. She tries desperately to hide her secret, wearing clothes that will hide her stomach and doing what she can to not gain a greatly noticeable amount of weight. With just a little support from those around her she may have been influenced to go to a clinic or the hospital to have her child, instead of taking the risk of giving birth in a shed and endangering the life of her child and also her own life. Also with some support from the public she could feel more comfortable with what she is going through and may have been more comfortable with the idea of keeping the baby or making sure that it is given to a good family or couple. Instead she feels that hiding and staying undercover would be the best way to keep her

secret, when this “problem” doesn’t really need to be secretive. With support from others she could be more open.

Our society is very similar in the way it deals with teen pregnancy, it makes it very hard for girls to feel like they can be open with their experiences, and that they can release the fears and struggles they are going through. Our society is trying to be better with this subject, and is making improvements, but there are still many ways that the public can help in the decisions that these girls have to make.

The support of family, friends, and the community you live in greatly affect the decisions you make and the path you chose to take. In this case these factors played a role in the life of a single pregnant teenager named Julie, and the decisions she would make for her child’s life based on the help and comfort she was given by each of these factors. The situation Julie finds herself in directly connects to situations many teenage girls find themselves in when they find they too have no one to rely on. Teen pregnancy should not be seen as a problem, but as a blessing, because that is what each new life is.

Works Cited

Lessing, Doris. “Debbie and Julie.” *The Human Experience: Core 110/115 Coursepack*.

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