

Being a Mother

I could feel the pounding in my chest, while trying to catch my breath. The cafeteria that was usually filled with the aroma of grilled cheese and french fries was replaced with the salty smell of sweat. The sound of my team finishing our last cheer, preparing for homecoming, rang in my ears. Their voices echoed from the tall ceilings of the room. My stomach was in knots, but not from nerves. The physical pain was making me nauseous. I had cramps so tight, like my intestines were trying to tie themselves into a knot.

“Are you sure there is no chance you can be pregnant?” asked my cheer coach.

“I’m sure.”

“No possible way?” she persisted.

“No.” I repeat, with more hesitation. I guess I wasn’t 100% positive.

One of my best friends, on the team, left practice and headed to Walgreens. I was only 15 at the time, and not old enough to drive. When she got back, practice had subsided. By that time, we were all sitting in a circle. I’m still not sure if I was just too nervous to pee or if I lacked the desire for confirmation. Sitting next to my coach, I finished watching practice that day. That was the last practice I would participate in for a year.

After practice, my friend drove me home. My house was still, except for my dog who must have sensed something was wrong. He stood by my side, as I walked up the stairs to my parent’s bedroom. I opened the double doors that led to the bathroom. Their bathroom was a large room that contained a whirlpool, stand up shower, toilet room, office, closet, and double vanity. I saw myself in the large mirror that extended across one of the entire walls. I could still smell the sweat on my body. The bathroom tiles were cold, sending shivers up my back. I peeled

my workout clothes off, but couldn't gather the energy to shower. Plus, I wasn't sure how long I had until my mom got back from the mall.

I finally opened the package and saw what seemed like 20 pages of directions. While going through the motions of reading the directions, opening the wrapper, and peeing on the stick, I wasn't scared, like most would think. In fact, I wasn't totally convinced that I was going to see 2 pink lines. After 2 minutes of waiting, I saw it.

I saw what I knew would be judgment. I saw fear that I wasn't going to be enough. I saw disappointment from my family. I saw poverty. I saw my education extend outside of my reach. I also saw determination. I saw motivation. Purpose. I knew that every future decision would be for someone else. My life had a new meaning, and I was going to defy every preconception society had toward unplanned pregnancies.

I was unsure where these ideas came from. I don't know when I learned that was the way society viewed teenage mothers. However, I knew the judgment was there. It's likely that a large contributor was the media. Shows like "16 and pregnant" or "The Secret Life of the American Teenager" played a role. I loved watching those shows, but never realized how it portrayed young moms, or the impact it likely had on viewers' attitudes towards them. The way society looks down on young moms, unwed moms, and unplanned pregnancies is felt by individuals that find themselves in positions like mine. It is not rare that I had these feelings of doubt; in fact, many would argue that it would be wrong to feel any happiness or excitement about this type of pregnancy.

The real fear society should have is having to answer for the lack of resources to help those in a situation like mine. It was difficult to find a place that didn't encourage me to get an abortion or give my child up for adoption, but rather help me embrace and prepare for

motherhood. While we should focus on preventing unwanted pregnancies, in any age group, we should also create more opportunities for success. Allocating more resources to facilities that encourage women to make their own decisions, even if that decision is to keep their child, should be a priority. Furthermore, these resources should help women prepare for motherhood. Help with learning how to care for themselves as well as their children, from pregnancy through birth, should be offered.

My experience helped me realize many things that had previously gone unnoticed. For example, the lack of resources for those not knowing where to turn or the fear of being judged. These can be driving factors to pregnancy terminations in women that may not want to, but feel it is their only option. Society instills the need to feel fear if one gets pregnant before society determines they are ready. This poses several questions, such as when is the “right time?” Who gets to decide when someone should have a child? Is there a certain age or time in their life that is appropriate? Who gets to make that decision? The one getting pregnant or someone else? What someone may deem an appropriate time, another may not.

Eleven years later, I don’t think about the moments leading up to that positive pregnancy test very often. I don’t think about the fear that I once had or focus on the unknowns anymore. I have embraced who I am as a mother. Not as a teenager who got pregnant. Not as a statistic. I don’t see myself as society once saw me. I see myself as any other mother would. A woman who loves her child and will do everything she can to provide him with the best possible life. I stopped letting society influence the way I viewed myself. I took control of my own feelings and I let it empower me to make the best decisions for my family, regardless of how society may feel about it.