

2015

LESSON UNPLANNED: TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND A LACK OF EDUCATION IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, A DOCUMENTARY SHORT

jennifer d. gonzalez

Southern Illinois University Carbondale, jenniferdianegonzalez@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/gs_rp

Recommended Citation

gonzalez, jennifer d. "LESSON UNPLANNED: TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND A LACK OF EDUCATION IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, A DOCUMENTARY SHORT." (Jan 2015).

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at OpenSIUC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Research Papers by an authorized administrator of OpenSIUC. For more information, please contact opensiuc@lib.siu.edu.

LESSON UNPLANNED:

TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND A LACK OF EDUCATION
IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC,

A DOCUMENTARY SHORT

by
Jennifer Gonzalez

B.S., Southern Illinois University, 2012

A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree

College of Mass Communications and Media Arts
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
August 2015

RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

LESSON UNPLANNED:

TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND A LACK OF EDUCATION
IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC,

A DOCUMENTARY SHORT

By

JENNIFER GONZALEZ

A Research Paper Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Science

in the field of Mass Communications and Media Arts

Approved by:

Angela Aguayo, Ph.D., Co-Chair

Mark Dolan, M.A., Co-Chair

William Freivogel, J.D.

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
June 1, 2015

AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH PAPER OF

JENNIFER GONZALEZ, for the master of science degree in MASS COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA ARTS, presented on June 1, 2015, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: LESSON UNPLANNED:
TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND A LACK OF EDUCATION
IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC,
A DOCUMENTARY SHORT

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Angela Aguayo

As teenage pregnancy rates are slowly decreasing in the United States, rates in the Dominican Republic are double the world average. 105 out of 1,000 teen girls became pregnant in 2013 according to a study conducted by the United Nations Population Fund. This paper supplements the documentary "Lesson Unplanned" and elaborates on the process of the visual work as well as trends in use/misuse of contraceptives by teenagers, the reason pregnancy occurs in teenagers, and the social impact in the Dominican Republic. Information was collected by on-camera interviews with subjects during field work, both by verbal and visual reporting in written and multimedia formats, including still imagery, video, and audio recordings. This paper concludes with a reflection on the filmmaking process and a glimpse at my future plans for this project and as a filmmaker. Included Media: "Lesson Unplanned" (.mov file).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to my committee co-chairs Angela Aguayo and Mark Dolan, and committee member William Freivogel, for their continued support throughout my education and without whom this project would not have been possible. I would also like to thank Steve Matzker, Dallen Detamore and my fellow graduate students who continually offered their support and critique. Finally I would like to thank my mother, Carrie Gonzalez, Luke Nozicka and the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting for being irreplaceable and integral parts of this project from the beginning.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
ABSTRACT.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	v
CHAPTERS	
CHAPTER 1: Artist Statement.....	1
CHAPTER 2: Introduction	2
CHAPTER 3: Methods and Theories Used	7
CHAPTER 4: Print Exhibit and Captions	11
CHAPTER 5: Distribution Plan.....	19
CHAPTER 6: Concluding Thoughts	21
BIBLIOGRAPHY	23
VITA.....	24

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>FIGURES</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Figure 1. Title Card	11
Figure 2. Artist Statement	12
Figure 3. Pamela	13
Figure 4. Miriam	14
Figure 5. Yudeiqui	15
Figure 6. Yesenia	16
Figure 7. Maria & Yanilda.....	17
Figure 8. Danet.....	18

LIST OF TABLES

<u>TABLES</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Table 1. Distribution Plan	20

CHAPTER 1

ARTIST STATEMENT

As a childless woman, it amazes me how a teen mother can physically, mentally and emotionally handle and survive such a big change in the landscape of her life.

As a documentary filmmaker and photographer, I am drawn to the complex lives that these young mothers lead. These children one day wake up and find that they are no longer children.

Their teenage years, the time in their lives when they should learn, grow and enjoy their youth, are suddenly altered by pregnancy.

They are catapulted to adulthood, and they must endure it in order to lead bearable lives.

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Population Fund found 105 out of every 1,000 teenagers in the Dominican Republic became pregnant in 2013, more than triple the United States' teenage pregnancy rate of 31.3 and more than double the world average of 49 ("Teen pregnancy rate," 2013).

Amid the welter of numbers, statistics, and statements from doctors or nurses, there is an absence visual documentation and representation from the women. Where are the voices and images of these pregnant and teenage mothers? This is a visual documentation through still and moving image, sound, interviews, and reporting to explore the question "Why is the teenage pregnancy rate in the Dominican Republic this high?"

I chose to focus on one area, that being a rural mountainous village just past San Cristobal, called Jamey. Working in this location allowed me to see how girls in this area were affected by pregnancy, education, and social and cultural norms associated with having a baby as a teenager.

Through the documentary "Lesson Unplanned," the voices of these girls tell their story – how they feel; how they overcome; what they know, what they don't; what life has been like as a teenage mother; and what their hopes are for their futures.

The film shows that the dominant reason for a high teenage pregnancy rate in the Dominican Republic is the lack of education (in school and in the home) in regards to sexual and reproductive health, as well as social and cultural norms and acceptance (Gonzalez, 2015).

In the Dominican Republic, doctors often clash with education and religion over the use of contraceptives, contributing to the country's high number of pregnant teenagers. While contraceptives are fairly available to teenagers in the Dominican Republic, pregnancy prevention is seldom practiced, at least before an adolescent's first child — prevention is taught after a teenager's first pregnancy, not before.

"If there was a first pregnancy, [we] avoid a second one," said Lilian Guerrero, 39, who has been a gynecologist for seven years at Maternidad Nuestra Señora la Altagracia in Santo Domingo, the country's capital. "That's what we do here" (Gonzalez, 2014).

Elisa Doñe Frias, 43, who has been a nurse at Clinica Rural el Jamey in the mountainous region of San Cristobal known as Jamey for four years, said teenagers do not get contraceptives until they are already pregnant because talking about sex is taboo in most homes, even though teenage pregnancy is a generational issue (Gonzalez, 2014).

"Prevention lessons are about not having a second child," said Frias, whose clinic offers four types of contraceptives.

You can teach the kids, but the family needs to learn too because teens aren't allowed to have contraceptives in the home" (Gonzalez, 2014).

This is largely because the Dominican Republic is predominantly Roman Catholic, which, according to Pope Paul VI's 1968 *Humanae Vitae*, states, "any action which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation, [is intrinsically wrong]" (Pope Paul vi, 1968).

Pablo Wagner, 54, who has been the sub-director at Materno Infantil San Lorenzo de Los Minos in Santo Domingo for 10 years, said church teaching could contribute to the high numbers of pregnant teenagers (Gonzalez, 2014).

"[Churches] are opposing to allow young teenagers [to use] planification [contraception] methods," said Wagner, who had 64 pregnant teens ages 11 to 15 in his hospital in 2013. "The church says [contraceptives are] a way to encourage them to have sex" (Gonzalez, 2014).

Guerrero, who has a 15-year-old patient with three children, said because the church does not agree with contraceptives, doctors are often left in a predicament.

"Churches have their own opinions, but we as doctors have our own," she said. "[Neither Catholics or Protestants] agree with oral contraceptives, so that's a dilemma, but as doctors we think about health first" (Gonzalez, 2014).

Frias said teenage girls also do not get contraceptives because they fear people will think they participate in sex work, which is legal in the country.

“[There is] no education, no prevention lectures,” said Guerrero, whose teenage-specific maternity ward assists about 80 patients each day. “They do not [know] about planification and start very young to have sex” (Gonzalez, 2014).

Eudhy Estevez, 24, who has completed six months of a yearlong internship at the Jamey clinic, said the high rate of pregnant teenagers can be attributed to the insufficient knowledge and discipline of contraceptive use (Gonzalez, 2014).

“They don’t use the pills as they are supposed to,” Estevez said. “For example, they take [birth control] three hours after the time frame or they want to take them all together after [they have] forgotten. We keep giving them planification pills but they do not use them. They are kids having babies” (Gonzalez, 2014).

In this Caribbean country, teenagers are simply advised, mostly by parents, to not have sex, but are rarely taught about it. Though trends in the country’s developing cities differ from the mountainous rural regions, one remains constant: Teenage pregnancy is everywhere.

To counteract these alarming figures, the country's government is launching a national plan to decrease and prevent more adolescent pregnancies. The initiative, set to launch in January 2015, will require all public schools to teach sexual education.

As opposed to teaching about contraceptives, something the country has tried with previous programs, this new strategy is based on morals and values.

Using books and games, teachers will advise and educate students to wait to have sex until they are "educated, economically stable, loving each other, and that's the way it should be, that's a blessing," said Maria Guillen, who has worked at the country's Ministry of Education for more than 25 years (Gonzalez, 2015).

Guillen said each of the ministry's 18 regional offices are assigned to work with several schools on the initiative conceived by the office of Margarita Cedeño de Fernández, the country's vice president.

"We need to take into account the biological, psychological, cognitive and social aspects," Guillen said.

Still, when one walks through an area like Jamey, where pregnant teenagers and young mothers live at nearly every fifth house, it is hard to believe much is being done.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND THEORIES USED

The field research completed required a qualitative approach. I wanted to gain a deeper, more personal understanding of this phenomenon in this particular region of the country (Booth, Columb & Williams, 2008). The research is based on observation, in-depth interviews, audio recordings, videos, and pictures. They offered the human side of the issue. Often including contradictory behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals.

My colleague and I received a grant from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting to assist in funding. Pre-travel work included standard logistics including booking flights, places to stay, transportation, translators, and field assistance.

The task of locating and contacting potential subjects proved difficult. Through a translator – a Peace Corps volunteer living in the area, who I met via email – I was able to locate a subject pool. I made sure to relay my needs for the visual documentary/reporting project to the translator precisely. It is easy to fall into pitfalls when reporting overseas while not being able to speak the native tongue. I requested the translator to speak to the subjects before my arrival in the country.

I wanted to make sure they were fully aware of what I was requesting and the situations they would be in. Time commitments, willingness and openness to speak and be filmed/recorded, and agreeing to sign a standard release form for research and filming, were other matters I brought to the subjects attention before my arrival. "A real disaster is when a participant withdraws or fails to appreciate how much is at stake when you plan a shoot" (Rabiger, 1997).

Once on location, the translator would introduce a subject and me. I began the process by observing – first without a camera. I watched and made mental notes of how a woman (subject) would interact with others of her own age, elders, and her child (if applicable). At some point I began creating images, still and moving. I attempted to capture creatively their way of life, sometimes for minutes, sometimes for hours.

When it came to the interview, the first thing I would do, through the translator, is describe what the process was like. I would explain the act of an interview with me asking a question, the translator replying in the spoken language, the subject responding, the translator relaying the response.

Questions for pregnant teenagers or teenage mothers included:

- Did you plan your pregnancy? Tell me why or how it came to be.
- What was your initial reaction?
- Did you use contraceptives? Do you know what contraceptives are?

- Are you taught about sex in school?
- How do you think a teenage pregnancy could be prevented in the future?
- Do you wish you had been older before having you child?

Additional follow-up questions were asked based upon the subjects' answers given.

I worked in the field with equipment that could achieve a multimedia presentation. Meticulous planning was required so I was able to travel with everything necessary but optimized for lightweight travel. The equipment that was required for this project included:

- (2) DSLRS, Nikon D800, D610
- (3) Lenses, 24-70 mm F2.8; 80-400 mm F4.5; 60 mm F2.8
- Audio Equipment; H4N Recorder, Wired Lavalier, Nikon ME-1
- Rigs; (2) fluid head tripods, Gorilla pod, Slider track
- Multiple CF, SD memory cards, card reader
- Laptop with required software for data management from the field

The project began with preproduction and research, which began in June of 2014. Field production lasted for a month between December 2014 and January 2015. Postproduction concluded in May of 2015. Preproduction and postproduction was completed in Carbondale, Illinois. Field production was completed on location in the areas of Santo Domingo, San Cristobal, and Jamey, Dominican Republic.

CHAPTER 4

PRINT EXHIBIT AND CAPTIONS

A print exhibit was created as a visual aid to complement the documentary to create a multimedia experience combining the use of moving and still imagery. Each slide represents the component included in the print exhibit. Image captions included in the print exhibit are included below each respective image.



Figure 1: Title Card, The project title and artist name displayed at the beginning of the print exhibit.

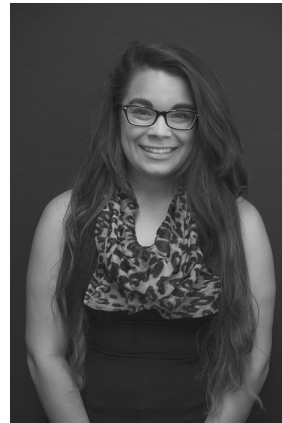
ARTIST STATEMENT

As a childless woman, it amazes me how a teen mother can physically, mentally and emotionally handle and survive such a big change in the landscape of her life.

As a documentary filmmaker and photographer, I am drawn to the complex lives that these young mothers lead. These children one day wake up and find that they are no longer children.

Their teenage years, the time in their lives when they should learn, grow and enjoy their youth, is suddenly altered by pregnancy.

They are catapulted to adulthood with tremendous force, and they must endure it in order to lead bearable lives.



Jennifer Gonzalez is a Master of Science candidate in the Mass Communications Digital Documentary program.

Figure 2: Artist Statement, Personal statement about project, artist image and short bio displayed after the title card at the beginning of the print exhibit.



Figure 3: Pamela, 16 years old, 7 months pregnant – Pamela Pinales poses for a portrait outside of her family home where seven people live. While Pamela is a junior in high school, she says it is common for girls to get pregnant while attending school. She says her parents' advice about sex was to "not have a boyfriend." "Before I got pregnant, I did not know anything about sex. I was very scared," she said. "I can't tell you what my baby's future is because I'm not even sure what my future is."



Figure 3: Miriam, 18 years old, 9 months pregnant - Miriam talks outside of a hair salon with Peace Corps volunteer Zena Clements. Zena started hosting weekly lessons on the mountain to teach teenagers how to properly use condoms and to talk about sex, relationships, and contraceptives - things that are considered taboo in homes. Doctor Eudhy Estevez, who has completed six months of a yearlong internship at the Jamey clinic, said the high rate of pregnant teenagers can be attributed to the insufficient knowledge and discipline of contraceptive use.



Figure 5: Yudeiqui, 18 years old, Aleini, 3 years old, Yobel, 4 months old - While her son Yobel sleeps inside, Yudeiqui Brito Guzman, who goes by Ariza, sits and feeds her daughter. "I'm here alone and I have no one to help take care of my children," said Ariza, who begins her day at 7 a.m. to prepare breakfast for Aleini and Yobel. Her partner Yosandi, 19, visits Saturday through Monday when he is not counting oranges at the market for work. Because he only makes about 5,000 pesos - roughly equivalent to \$113 - each month, Ariza's parents sometimes send them money. "It's not enough - what he gets at work - but we make everything possible to cover the kids' needs," she said.



Figure 6: Yesenia, 16 years old, 4 months pregnant, Jason 2 years old - Yesenia, 16, and four months pregnant, sits with her niece and 2-year-old son, Jason. Standing with them is her partner Vilo, who she believes is 32. He is actually 73, about her father's age. Although teen mothers' spouses are commonly older in the mountainous region of San Cristobal, known as Jamey, Yesenia's case is drastic. "I wish he could be younger," she said of Vilo, who has at least 12 children with other women in the village. "I have to love him because he is my baby's father."



Figure 7: Maria, 18 years old, 5 months pregnant, Omar 2 years old; Yanilda, 18 years old, 7 months pregnant, Yason, 1 1/2 years old - Maria and Yanilda bathe their children before bathing themselves outside of their home. The two girls, both pregnant with their second child, live together with their children in Jamey. Maria says she did not know how to avoid having children. Her mother's advice was 'Don't be with too many boys,' and to 'Protect yourself.' "If I had known about birth control and condoms, I might have been protected," Maria said. "I did not know anything."



Figure 4: Danet, 17 years old, Daneuris, 11-days-old - Danet Pinales, pauses during an interview while holding her son, Daneuris. "I feed him, bathe him," said Danet, who wants her baby boy to become an engineer. "I take care of him very good." Danet stopped attending school after completing the fifth grade. She said she plans to go back once her child is three months old, but for now, her focus is on tending to her newborn. "I did not want to have the baby now," she said. "I should have waited, but it just happened.

CHAPTER 5

DISTRIBUTION PLAN

A goal of creating this project is to have it seen by many and to draw attention to the issue at hand. Included is a beginning distribution plan for film festivals. Hopes for future endeavors include gallery exhibits, screenings, online viewings and publication, etc. I hope to be able to package the film and the print exhibit to pitch to galleries and spaces to provide a varied multimedia experience.

Festival	Budget	Location	Deadline	U.S./Int'l
Brooklyn Film Festival	\$50	Brooklyn, New York	November	US
AFI Docs (formerly Silverdocs)	-	Washington, DC	June	US
Human Rights Watch Film Festival	-	Canada, Switzerland, UK, USA	June	Intl
LA Film FEST	-	Los Angeles, CA	June	US
New Media Film Festival	\$65	Los Angeles, CA	June	US
Northside Film Festival	\$25	New York, NY	June	US
San Francisco Documentary Festival	\$40	San Francisco, CA	June	Intl
New York Film Festival	-	New York, NY	September	US
DocuFest Atlanta	-	Atlanta, GA	September	US
New York Independent Film & Video Festival	-	New York, NY	September	US
IDA Documentary Screening Series	\$160	Los Angeles, CA / New York, NY	September	US
Chicago International Film Festival	\$70	Chicago, IL	October	US
Indie Memphis	\$50	Memphis, TN	October	US
New Orleans Film Festival	\$65	New Orleans, LA	October	US
NYC Independent Film Festival	-	New York, NY	October	US
PaleyDocFest	\$55	New York, NY	October	US
San Diego Film Festival	\$105	Del Mar, CA	October	US
Savannah Film Festival	\$60	Savannah, GA	October	US
Social Change Film Festival & Institute	\$45	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	October	Intl
Starz Denver Film Festival	\$45	Denver, CO	October	US
UNAFF (United Nations Association Film Festival)	\$25	Stanford, CA	October	US
AFI Fest	\$55	Hollywood, CA	November	US
Big MINI Media Festival	\$25	Brooklyn, NY	November	US
DOC NYC	\$65	New York, NY	November	US

Table 1: Distribution plan for film festivals organized by location, budget, deadline, and festival name.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

I am the daughter of a teenage mother and the older sister of two teenage mothers. This is my reality. I've worked hard to not let this be my definition, and have worked even harder to help my mother and sisters not let 'teenage mother' define them. I believe because I have witnessed teenage pregnancy and motherhood within my own household, this allowed me to document my subjects in a different way.

I tried not to judge the women. I chose to listen, observe, and document. I want my images to cause a viewer reaction, whether that be anger or sympathy.

I imagined these girls would be regretful and upset with their decision to have sex at a young age and as an outcome, become pregnant teenagers. What I learned was that, while these girls are unquestionably regretful, it's more so a regret of not being properly educated – by their mothers, by their schools, by their society.

I hope my film "Lesson Unplanned" can connect with girls in the Dominican Republic – help them see that they're not alone, if they are facing the future of teenage motherhood. The subjects share what's in their hearts and minds in poignant interviews. They speak so frankly of their mistakes and regrets. I believe young girls would be intrigued to ask questions and seek answers about sexual reproduction and health.

I do not believe this issue has received the attention it requires and hope that my involvement as a visual journalist can bring additional eyes and hopefully positive impact to the problem.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Booth, W. C., Colomb, G. G., & Williams, J. M. (2008). *The craft of research*. (3rd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gonzalez, J. (Producer) (2015). *Lesson unplanned* [Web]. Retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/130579457>

Gonzalez, J. (2014, December). Interview by L. Nozicka. [Personal Interview]. Elisa's interview.

Gonzalez, J. (2014, December). Interview by L. Nozicka. [Personal Interview]. Eudhy's interview.

Gonzalez, J. (2014, December). Interview by L. Nozicka. [Personal Interview]. Lilian's interview.

Gonzalez, J. (2015, December). Interview by L. Nozicka. [Personal Interview]. Maria's interview.

Gonzalez, J. (2014, December). Interview by L. Nozicka. [Personal Interview]. Pablo's interview.

Gonzalez, J. (2014, December). Interview by L. Nozicka. [Personal Interview]. Yesenia's interview.

Pope Paul vi, . (1968, July 25). *Humanae vitae*. Retrieved from [Http://w2.Vatican. Va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae. Html.](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html)

(Rabiger, Michael. (1997). *Directing the documentary*. Burlington, MA: Focal press.)

Teen pregnancy rate doubles the world average: Un. (2013, July 12). Retrieved from <http://www.dominicantoday.com/dr/poverty/2013/7/12/48276/Teen-pregnancy-rate-doubles-the-world-average-UN>

VITA

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University

JENNIFER GONZALEZ

JENNIFERDIANEGONZALEZ@GMAIL.COM

Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Bachelor of Science, Journalism, December 2012

Research Paper Title:

Lesson Unplanned: Teenage Pregnancy and A Lack of Education in the
Dominican Republic, A Documentary Short

Major Professor: Angela Aguayo