

**Finding Success: The Role of Social Support in the Lives of American Teen Mothers**

BY

Melanie Sharick

A Study

Presented to the Faculty

of

Wheaton College

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for

Graduation with Departmental Honors

in Sociology

Norton, Massachusetts

May 2015

## Abstract

This study was designed to determine the influences of various types of social support on the life trajectories of teen mothers. In this study, I conducted semi-structured interviews with ten teen mothers regarding their support networks and the types of support they received. I particularly focused on emotional support, cognitive support, material support (both monetary and goods and services), and social network support. Framed by social reproduction theory, the concept of capital, and the importance of transformative assets, I determined that certain types of support, such as monetary material support, are more transformative for the future of a teen mother than others. These types of support tend to be offered by the families of middle-class teen mothers rather than lower-working class teen mothers, resulting in the disparity of outcomes. While other types of social support, such as emotional support, are also crucial to the daily life of a teen mother, they will not break the cycle of inequality as an experience such as attending college would.

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to thank Professor Karen McCormack for her help with this project throughout this year, as well as her advising over the past four years. Professors Kersti Yllo and Donna Kerner, the other members of my committee, have also been incredibly helpful throughout this process. Also, thank you to Professor Ruth Foley, my faculty writing tutor, who has been instrumental in the editing and organization of this thesis. Lastly, I want to acknowledge the ten young women that were willing to partake in my study – I would not have been able to complete my research without their eagerness to participate.

Table of Contents:

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	Page 5
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	Page 9
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	Page 37
Chapter 4: Data Analysis.....	Page 45
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	Page 79
Appendices.....	Page 82
References.....	Page 88

## Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

In 2013, the national teen birth rate was 26.5 per 1,000 teenagers aged 15-19 (Martin et al. 2015: 2). This number has been steadily declining over the past few decades, and is currently at a historic low. However, only 40% of teen mothers finish high school, and just 2% will finish college by age 30 (Shuger 2012: 1). By age 30, teen mothers earn (on average) just 57% of the wages that those who delay childbearing do, and they receive over four times more public assistance than those who delay (Hotz 2008: 57). These outcomes are alarming. However, not *all* teen mothers fare so poorly – but how do some of these women achieve success that so many others cannot reach?

During the summer of 2013 I worked as a tutor and general intern at The Care Center in Holyoke, Massachusetts, an alternative education program for teen mothers to study for their GEDs. The Care Center provides classroom instruction as well as breakfast/lunch, childcare, and emotional and college counseling services. In a city where the public school system is failing and too many families are living in poverty, The Care Center seemed to provide hope for a disadvantaged population. In 2012, Holyoke's teen birth rate was 57.1 (Massachusetts Department of Public Health: 2014), the highest in Massachusetts, and significantly higher than the nationwide rate. Young women who attend The Care Center are greeted every day by a staff that wants them to succeed. Teachers and counselors spend their days not only helping students academically, but also listening when they need someone to talk to, and being there to give advice – and to care.

As a tutor at The Care Center, I felt as if I was helping to make a difference in the lives of those who I worked with – however at the same time, I saw that while many

graduates went on to attend college (often community colleges), they did not necessarily leave Holyoke or appear to be any better off. I wondered if The Care Center was actually making a difference in the lives of these young women. I wanted to know if the services provided by an intervention program like The Care Center would actually help improve the lives of teen mothers.

My experience at The Care Center helped me to develop my overarching question. How could teen mothers achieve success? I wanted to know if the support services that places like The Care Center provide could truly make a difference - and if social support overall can help a teen mother to improve her chances of being successful. It is important to consider that success is difficult to define, and certainly means different outcomes for different people. If there are certain things that are predetermined in one's life, such as family and socioeconomic status, can social support at the time of pregnancy help to keep a young mother on the right track or improve her chances? I wanted to find out if social support made the difference between the overwhelming number of teen mothers who make up the disheartening statistics and those who succeed. It seemed as though socioeconomic status would make a difference between successful and unsuccessful teen mothers, but could social support bridge this gap? Could social support supersede financial stability in the lives of low-income teen mothers, enabling them to succeed as well?

Because teen pregnancy is associated with increased welfare usage, and therefore more taxpayer dollars, American citizens are very concerned with the teen pregnancy rates nationwide. However, we must consider that many teen mothers are already living

in poverty prior to giving birth – would delaying childbearing have made a difference in their reliance on public assistance? Because research often influences policy decisions, this topic is crucial to American politics. Also, if educational/social support interventions like The Care Center are effective, then we need to put more resources into these programs, so that more teen mothers can take advantage of their services.

In attempting to discover the role of social support in the lives of teen mothers, I conducted interviews with ten young mothers, four of whom went to The Care Center. All of these women were either graduated from high school or studying for their GED, on track to graduate from college, or employed. To understand the lives of these young women and teen mothers in the United States, I use social reproduction theory and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of capital. These theories help to shed light on why teen mothers are repeatedly falling short, generation after generation. Furthermore, this framework helps us to understand why teen mothers are disproportionately represented in these statistics and how each young woman's life is shaped by the resources that she has access to.

In my analysis I found that while all types of social support are important for day-to-day life as a teen mother, certain forms of material support, such as major financial contributions, are more transformative for a teen mother's future. Not surprisingly, families of higher socioeconomic status are likely more able to provide this type of support for their daughters. Furthermore, the human capital that accrues from a continued education or a college degree is also vital for finding success, however college is expensive as well. This can leave many young mothers in a difficult "catch-22" type of situation. They need a college degree to be successful, but cannot get to college if they cannot afford it.

In this thesis I will be exploring how various types of social support can be life changing (or not) in the lives of teen mothers. I will begin by reviewing the relevant literature and providing a brief historical overview. In the literature review I will include the theoretical framework with which I analyze my data. Next, I will describe my methodology, which involved interviews with ten young mothers. After interviewing, I was able to begin analyzing the data and drawing conclusions, which I will discuss in the data analysis chapter and the conclusion.

## Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### INTRODUCTION

Teen pregnancy and childbirth affect a woman's life chances. Having a child at a young age interrupts the normal track for education, and disrupts family relationships. In this literature review, I will begin to explain why this is the case. Furthermore, I will begin to look at social support systems and how they work, with the goal of determining how social support can help a young mother to live a successful life. Can social support help to bridge the gap between successful and struggling mothers?

Many scholars have done research on the subject of teen pregnancy, however the majority of research does not focus on the implications of how social support can help these young women, or how this information might be used to help other teen moms as well. Much of the existing research focuses on the patterns of teen parenthood among minority and impoverished populations, and often their lack of support and limited opportunities. Not surprisingly, social support systems can be extremely helpful for buffering stress in times of difficulty, namely the process of teen motherhood – examples include childbirth, caring for a child while employed, dealing with sickness, and budgeting money. A significant amount of the literature in this area comes from the 1990s, due to the increased awareness of teen pregnancy as a social issue, and the welfare reform that was proposed and implemented during that decade. However, this literature is still relevant today because the debate over teen pregnancy and the discussion of the social problem still exists. Furthermore, welfare policies are certainly still “hot topics” in politics today, creating a polarization between the major political parties, and also tending to influence citizens' opinions on teen pregnancy, and the poor as a whole. With such

starkly different political views in the United States, people have very diverse and strong opinions on the issue. Because welfare benefits also play a role, and welfare involves citizens' tax money, many Americans feel strongly about the matter.

In trying to address teen pregnancy as a social problem, there is often debate about whether poverty results from social and economic structure in our society, or if it comes from individual personal choices. In general, liberals tend to think of this as a structural issue, while conservatives think of it as a personal issue (Luker 1996: 111). This question animates the debate on teen motherhood. Is it the time in which one enters motherhood that affects life "success," or do life chances shape the time at which one enters motherhood? Scholarly research tends to have an impact on policy decisions, making these important questions have real consequences for our society.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This social reproduction theory states that there are structures and practices in our society that transmit inequality, in a way that creates an intergenerational pattern of inequity. Over time, the hierarchical relations between classes are reproduced and continued. Education is one of the most central institutions contributing to this reproduction. Jay MacLeod provides a description and example of social reproduction theory in his book *Ain't No Makin' It* (2008), about the outcomes of two groups of boys living in an American public housing development known as Clarendon Heights. MacLeod follows two groups of teenagers living in this low-income area and examines their personal goals and the perpetuation of economic inequality in America. As he follows these men into adulthood, he concludes that regardless of their original

aspirations, most of these men have remained in a similar position to where they started. He says that the odds of succeeding, as the American dream “achievement ideology” suggests, are simply not as high when you start at the bottom. Social reproduction theory is a fitting perspective for my topic because of the immense overlap of class with teen pregnancy. Similar to the opinionated debate about the causes of poverty and teen pregnancy, there is a spectrum of opinions about how reproduction of inequality is generated, some more structurally focused, others more culturally focused. Social reproduction helps us to understand why teen mothers have so much difficulty finding success.

From the deterministic end of the spectrum, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976) take a Marxist, structural point of view. Marx said that the capitalist system would create a revolving relationship of the capitalist and the wage-laborer. The proletariat wage-laborers are taught a set of simple skills that do not allow them to climb the class ladder. On the other hand, the bourgeoisie use an entirely different set of administrative skills that are never taught to the proletariat. Marx argues that because these positions are predetermined by class, the inequality will be reproduced from generation to generation. If one’s class determines the type of job she is able to attain, then she will never be able to take a different type of job that could offer more money or better benefits. Thus, her family will remain where they are economically and the next generation will find themselves in the same place. Bowles and Gintis argue that through the process of tracking, schools divide students and prepare them differently, making some students ready for lower-class jobs and others prepared to work middle-class jobs (1976: 56). They point out that schools in working-class neighborhoods tend to focus more on

discipline and rule-following, whereas suburban schools are more likely to value student independence and participation. Because teen mothers tend to come from lower class backgrounds, their schools already set them on the track to remain in a lower class household. When they give birth and need to support their family, they have already been tracked into a job that will likely not deliver enough financially.

MacLeod also discusses Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of *cultural capital* and *habitus*. In comparison to Bowles and Gintis, Bourdieu pays a little more attention to the cultural influences behind social reproduction, rather than strictly the structures of our capitalist system. Bourdieu defines cultural capital as the general cultural background that a person has. This can include knowledge, skills, and general disposition. He says that these things vary significantly by class, but schools reward students who have upper-class cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977: 496). For example, a student who spends the weekend reading books, going to a museum, a concert, or a show at the theater will be able to use that knowledge to his or her advantage at school. Because these types of experiences fall under the dominant values of American culture, upper class cultural capital is rewarded, while lower class cultural capital is systematically devalued. Different levels of academic achievement reflect these differences, and a difference in academic success also leads to a difference in economic wealth later on. Similarly, because teen mothers tend to come from lower class families, their cultural capital differs from their middle and upper class peers. This cultural capital will be passed on to their children, thus reproducing a type of cultural capital and habitus that is not rewarded in school, or in the workplace.

Bourdieu combines his concept of cultural capital with the concept of habitus. He defines habitus as "a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past

experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions” (Bourdieu 1977: 82). Essentially, habitus is the combined attitudes, beliefs, aspirations, experiences, and values of a social group, or in this case a social class. The habitus is felt by stratified groups of people and is developed over time. According to Bourdieu, habitus is the link between the individual and social life. It can affect a child’s aspirations, or the goals that they set for themselves, but in return these goals and aspirations also construct the habitus. Lower-class students often grow up in areas where there are not many successful role-models, while a middle-class student might be surrounded by successful adults. These differences are reflected in the children’s aspirations. Habitus is determined by the social group that one is a part of. Generally, teen mothers come from a lower-class group – the group that Bourdieu says might set lower goals for themselves. The aspirations teen mothers do have are likely harder to reach due to their own cultural capital. Because they are often coming from a lower class family, with corresponding cultural capital, if they have high aspirations, they will be harder to reach in comparison with someone who has the same goals in a middle or upper class family. When this group finds success difficult to come by, they might reevaluate their goals, and remain in a lower-class job, or stay in a housing project. This understanding of the way of life is then passed on to the next generation, creating a cyclical pattern.

Basil Bernstein furthers Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital by including language. He argues that linguistic cultural capital is also varied according to class because speech patterns, and syntax are different (Bernstein 1977: 477). Furthermore, the conversations that children have with their parents influence their ability to answer

questions of higher order thinking. The complexity of conversation at home can serve to prepare or weaken students' abilities for the classroom. Depending on the family that young mothers were raised in, their types of cultural capital, linguistic cultural capital and habitus will be different. Some teen mothers (a small percentage) are able to find success, but so many others are not. A young mother's cultural capital influences the path that her life takes and the opportunities available to her, and later on, her children.

Beyond just cultural capital, Pierre Bourdieu also emphasizes the importance of other types of capital, including economic capital and social capital. In addition to Bourdieu's three types of capital, I will consider the importance of human capital. Economic capital is a concrete concept; it is the material resources that a person owns. Social capital, the network of contacts that a person has, can help one to advance her social position. Bourdieu argues that social capital only circulates within groups, thus allowing certain people to further themselves more than others; depending on the boundaries of the group they are in. Because of this organization, the preexisting social order is maintained (Bourdieu 1998: 20). This means that some groups will inevitably have more power and social capital (and most likely economic capital as well) than others, and those contacts will be able to take advantage of the available opportunity. In another group, the opportunities offered by even the most powerful member would not provide the same progress. If teen mothers find themselves with a limited social network, then they will likely have difficulty advancing their socioeconomic status.

Human capital is the knowledge, skills, education and other personal attributes that one can gain that can be used to produce economic value. These elements cannot be taken away from a person; rather they remain within a person's mind. A person's human

capital can change over time, and as it grows, the person will likely have additional skills and abilities to take on new jobs or responsibilities (Coleman 1988: 100). These new opportunities can result in economic advancements such as a higher salary (thus increasing economic capital as well). Human capital is crucial for teen mothers, given that it can contribute to finding a more reliable or higher salaried job.

In considering the spectrum of viewpoints on what creates the reproduction of inequality, we can see similarities in the debate on what causes teen pregnancy. Both of these debates have a more structurally focused argument and a more culturally focused argument. Poverty and teen pregnancy can both be transmitted from one generation to the next, so it makes sense that these debates would have similar arguments.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In her book *Dubious Conceptions*, Kristin Luker explains the common belief that if teen mothers would wait to have a baby until a later age, then both lives would be improved in terms of economics, health, education, happiness, and a whole host of other areas of life. From this point of view, teen childbearing is a cause for lower socioeconomic status (and all of these other things). However, Luker explains further that we must examine the larger issue of poverty. Often times, teen mothers are already on the track to a life in poverty. One way to explain this is through the economist term “selection effects,” which refers to the differences that already exist between the kinds of women who are becoming mothers as teens, and the kinds who are not (Luker 1996: 111). For example, many teen mothers were living in low-income families prior to giving birth, or were already attending an underperforming school. Whether they had a child or

not, these women were on the track to working class or impoverished status. Rather than resulting from personal choices, the outcomes of these young women were influenced by the structure of society.

Luker helps explain the current attitudes towards teen pregnancy by providing the historical background of teen motherhood in the United States. Among affluent wealthy and middle-class women, the age of first birth has significantly increased over time. However, lower class women are still likely to become pregnant at an earlier age, following the traditional pattern (Luker 1996: 12). Today, the average age at first birth for all American women is 25.8 years old (Martin 2013). Overall this age has increased- we can compare to the average age of first birth in 1970, which was 21.4 (Mathews 2009). This means that giving birth as a teen in 1970 (or during the baby boom of the 1950s) was not as far from the norm as it is today. Furthermore, gender norms have changed over time as well – today there are much higher expectations for women in terms of their education and career attainment. Pursuing these things takes time, in particular in the early twenties, and often means women are waiting longer to have children.

During the the baby-boom years (1946-1964), teenage birthrates were almost doubled that of the previous decades. The rates increased from about 50-60 per thousand, to 97 per thousand at the peak of the baby boom, in the late 1950s (Luker 1996: 207). To put that in perspective, today's national teen birthrate is 26.5 births per thousand (Martin et al. 2015: 2). However because many teen moms in the 1950s were married, teen pregnancy was not necessarily viewed in the same negative light as it is today.

American values surrounding marriage have changed significantly over time. Thus, a married teen mother in the 1950s was not looked down upon, but a married teen

mother today might be just as stigmatized as a single teen mom. In the 1950s, although the teen birth rate was higher, the majority of these young women were married at the time of giving birth (Luker 1996: 8, 22). These differences are due in part to the fact that American ideas of adolescence are relatively new. The stage of growing between youth and adulthood is now seen as an unfit time for motherhood. It is necessary to ask, what determines the age at which a young woman is fit to have a baby? If she turns 20 before conceiving, is she likely to be accepted or ostracized by society?

#### POVERTY AND EARLY FIRST-BIRTH: Debate

There is some correlation between poverty and age at first birth. The debate lies in the relationship between these two variables. Does poverty cause early childbearing, or does early childbearing cause poverty? In other words, is it about the choices that people are making, or the structure of the society that they are living in? We must think about what would happen if the same women who gave birth as teens had postponed having a baby until they were older. Would this alleviate the problem, and would it reduce the population of Americans that receive federal assistance?

In her article on the debate about welfare reform, Arline Geronimus reported that teen mothers are far more likely to have grown up in particularly impoverished communities, and that they are more likely to have performed poorly in school (1997: 409). Educational outcome is one of the best determinants of how a person will fare later in life, in terms of income and both getting and holding a job (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: 2015). This means that children who grow up in poor neighborhoods with underperforming schools are more likely to experience low wages and unstable employment. Therefore, they are more likely to need assistance than their middle-class

peers. It is not surprising that teen mothers who live their childhood under these circumstances remain poor as they age.

The Welfare reform debate in the mid-1990s fed into the teen pregnancy debate. People questioned the difference between a “deserving” or “undeserving” poor person with regards to receiving benefit money, a dispute that has raged for decades. The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) put a time cap on federal aid, and required that those receiving money also work. The PRWORA was promoted by legislators who believed that the availability of federal assistance money dictated the actions of those who sought that money for themselves. However, if this were true, we might expect there to be a correlation between states with higher benefit levels and their corresponding teen pregnancy rates, but this correlation is not there (Weinstein 1998: 133). Furthermore, if those teens that give birth were already living in poverty, then the problem cannot be strictly teen pregnancy – we must also look at the structures that have created this environment.

## CLASS

Socioeconomic status can shape an individual or family’s access to resources that are central to upward mobility, education in particular. Class affects educational opportunities regardless of family structure. There is a strong correlation between socioeconomic status and education level, meaning that students of lower socioeconomic status are less likely to complete high school, or to attend college, than their middle and upper-class counterparts. George Farkas’ *How Educational Inequality Develops* helps to explain this phenomena from a socioeconomic standpoint, which can be applied to teen mothers. Statistically, teen mothers are more likely to be both low-income and single

parents in comparison to individuals who wait to have children (Hotz 2008: 56, 57). Resources including money, time, social contacts, and knowledge are all cut in half, when compared to two-parent families (Farkas 2006: 4). Furthermore, with one parent in comparison to two, children are left with half of the attention, interaction, instruction, and monitoring as their classmates with two parents (Farkas 2006: 11). Also, single parents are more likely to rely on either lower quality, or a higher quantity of non-maternal care for their child (Farkas 2006: 17). All of these factors in family life are correlated with underperformance in school (Farkas 2006: 5).

Lower income families are often unable to provide the same support, regardless of whether or not there are two parents, simply due to the fact that parents are working longer hours, or at more inconvenient times. Farkas explains this difference between parenting styles as *concerted cultivation*, where parents provide more activities and skills relevant to school, and *natural growth*, where parents do not provide as much stimulation of skills and behaviors that will be relevant in school (Farkas 2006: 7). We will see later in the literature review that concerted cultivation provides a type of cultural capital that is more pertinent to success in our society. Similar to the intergenerational pattern of wealth and inequality discussed by Thomas Shapiro (2003), these differences in parenting can result in both educational and socioeconomic status differences. While these authors are not directly discussing teen mothers, many of the characteristics that they study are also true of teen mothers. In general, socioeconomic status is a good indicator of life outcomes. Perhaps SES is actually a better indicator of how mothers will fare, as opposed to age at first birth.

In her book, *Unequal Childhoods*, Annette Lareau (2011) deeply explores the difference between *concerted cultivation* and *natural growth*, and the influences these parenting styles have on the opportunities available to and outcomes of their children. Lareau explains that through concerted cultivation (which tends to occur in middle-class families), children gain a sense of entitlement, while children raised with natural growth (which tends to occur in lower/working-class families) feel an emerging sense of constraint (Lareau 2011: 2). These differences result from variances in children's schedules, the conversations that they have with their parents, and in how families go about intervening with public institutions, such as the public school system. For example, a middle-class student might have a weekly schedule that is loaded with extra-curricular activities such as soccer practice and piano lessons, while a lower-class student may spend the majority of their afternoons playing outside with friends or watching TV (Lareau 2011: 31). Additionally, middle-class parents applying concerted cultivation might consistently ask their child questions and look for opinions, and encourage the child to negotiate statements in a conversation. Comparatively, lower-class parents might simply direct their child, and their child does not question or challenge what the adult is saying (Lareau 2011: 31). Lastly, middle-class parents intervene and make criticisms on behalf of the child in institutional settings such as the school. By doing so, they are also training their child to take on that role as they grow older. In the accomplishment of natural growth, parents simply depend on the institution to take care of everything, which can result in a conflict between the child-rearing practices at home and at school (Lareau 2011: 31). Lareau argues that all of these differences in parenting, which tend to follow a class divided pattern, can influence the life experiences of a child. As a result, a teen

mother who comes from a middle-class background, with parents who raised her through concerted cultivation, may be better able to navigate the difficult path than one of her counterparts who comes from a lower-class family and was raised through natural growth.

Considering that many teen mothers raise their children alone, it is also important to look at the outcomes of single mothers. Sara McLanahan (1985) discusses The Economic Deprivation hypothesis as a reason for the trend of lower educational achievement amongst children of single parents. Rather than being due to the change in family structure, the hypothesis states that lower achievement is due to the lower socioeconomic status of the family (1985: 878). This means that the underperformance of children in female-headed households, which includes single teen mothers, is a result of lower income, rather than the lack of a second parent. She states that this may be because of a lack of parental supervision, or because children in single parent households may have to begin working at an earlier age to contribute money, thus causing them to spend less time focusing on school (McLanahan 1985:878).

In his book, *The Hidden Cost of Being African American*, Thomas Shapiro demonstrates the relationship between a family's wealth and income, and how these factor into racial stratification in American society. Because of the overlap between poverty, race, and teen pregnancy, the perpetuation of the racial socioeconomic gap is relevant to teen mothers. We can see the manifestation of this in teen pregnancy rates by race. For Non-Hispanic whites, the rate is 18.6 per 1,000 births, in comparison to Non-Hispanic blacks who have a rate of 39.0, and Hispanics who have the highest rate at 41.7 (Martin et al. 2015: 6). It is clear that there is a racial divide here. Shapiro defines wealth

as the total value of what the family owns excluding debt. This includes inheritance, and income as earnings from work, interest, and dividends (2003: 32). He uses these definitions to show how a family's wealth can provide them with a safety net in a time of need, or get them off to a head start initially. Shapiro's examples demonstrate the particular differences in assets between an African-American family and a white family of the same class. However the notion of the effects of assets can be applied to low-income families in general. If they do not have savings, or wealthy family members who are willing to assist them, these families will naturally fall behind other people who do have these advantages.

#### TYPES OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

There are various types of social support that we all give and receive to those within our social network. By definition, support means "to keep from failing; give courage, confidence or power to; supply necessities and lend assistance to" (Turner 1990). When we think of social support specifically, we must consider its definition within the presence and products of human relationships (Turner 1990: 46). With regards to social support for teen mothers, this definition could include a range of things, such as providing childcare, just being there to talk or listen, donating a box of diapers, or helping someone apply to college. R. Jay Turner, Carl Grindstaff, and Norman Phillips conducted a study on social support in teen mothers, published in 1990, that identifies some of these forms of support. Turner et al. interviewed each subject (N= 251) upon first confirmation of pregnancy, and then again four weeks after giving birth. The authors measure social connections with the Provisions of Social Relations Scale. Turner et al. use Barrera's (1986) categories of social support, which include social embeddedness, perceived social

support, and enacted support. Social embeddedness is defined as the connections that individuals have with significant others in their social environment (or their social network), while perceived social support is how the individual feels supported by people in his or her social network. Enacted support involves the actions that people take to provide assistance (1990:46). In my study I will focus particularly on enacted support. In their study, Turner et al. found that overall family social support appeared to impact a teen mother's well-being (1990: 53). The authors' findings pointed to the particular importance of social support for teen mothers of lower-class backgrounds, although stated that social support is crucial for "high-stress" situations (i.e. teen pregnancy), regardless of socioeconomic status (1990: 54).

There are various forms of enacted support. David Jacobson (1986) defines these types of social support in his article about the types and timing of social support for stressed individuals. Various types of social support are used to meet the different kinds of care that a person might need. The first type of social support is *emotional* support. This type of support allows the individual to feel loved, cared for, respected, admired, and provides a sense of security (Jacobson 1986: 252). Emotional support includes a broad range of acts, such as listening during a time of need, just "being there," or talking a friend through a difficult situation. A second type of social support, called *cognitive* support, includes any information, knowledge, or advice that can help someone to cope with, or understand his or her situation more fully (Jacobson 1986: 252). An example of cognitive support would be a counselor helping a student apply to college, or an older mother teaching a younger one what to do. The third type of social support is more straightforward. *Material* support refers to physical goods or services that are provided to

help a person solve practical problems (Jacobson 1986: 252). Material support could come in the form of financial contributions, or in a more concrete form, such as diapers, or childcare – goods and services.

While material support can come in many varieties, there are certain types of material support that will make more of a difference than others for the future. Having a friend cook dinner, provide childcare, or offer some extra diapers can be very helpful on a day-to-day basis, but will not truly transform the person's life. This is where Thomas Shapiro's (2004) *transformative assets* come into play. Transformative assets are inherited wealth that can help to "raise a family above their own achievements" (Shapiro 2004: 10). By this, Shapiro means that certain material supports will enable a family to achieve economic stability and class mobility that they would not necessarily be able to find on their own. For example, if a young mother's parents are able to pay for her food and rent for awhile while she saves money, moving forward, the young mother will be able to make a purchase, such as a house, that she would not have been able to afford without that help. Similarly, if a student's parents can pay for her post-secondary education, not only will she then be able to afford it, she will also gain valuable human capital as a college student that will benefit her upon graduation.

As Shapiro explains in his book, these assets are a building block that many middle-class families begin with, enabling them to build and grow their families. This way they are able to better themselves and take advantage of greater opportunities. His concept of *transformative assets* also helps to provide insight into the reproduction of class inequality – families who can provide extra wealth from the get-go are already ahead, even if they inherited that wealth from a family member.

In addition to material, emotional, and cognitive support, the support that comes from one's social network is crucial in achieving class mobility. The social network makes up what Bourdieu calls *social capital*. The connections that can provide these transformative forms of support are likely circulating within middle and upper class social networks, rather than lower class ones. While lower-class women certainly can certainly have supportive social networks, the individuals that make up their network are not necessarily as helpful in terms of advancing their status. This makes it much difficult for a woman of lower-class economic status to make a connection that will help her to be financially stable and achieve class mobility.

#### SOURCES OF SUPPORT

From a sample of 18-21 year old single mothers, Schrag and Schmidt-Tieszen found that mother figures (either birth mothers, or the woman that served as her primary caregiver) were the most supportive family members, and that sisters and aunts were also considered supportive (2014: 321). Furthermore, participants in the study felt that overall their family was either very supportive or very unsupportive and negative towards their situation – there was not much middle ground (2014: 320). Schrag and Schmidt-Tieszen concluded that in general, young single mothers had more support than they thought they had. While many young women envisioned themselves as not having a lot of social support, after participating in the study, they realized that they did have a network of supportive people. To conduct their study, the authors worked with participants to complete a Social Network Map (Tracy and Whittaker 1990), which measured forms of concrete support, emotional support, and advice from various family members and other individuals who were important to the teen mother. The social network map that the

authors used looked like a circle that was divided equally into about eight sections. Each section represented a different potential group of people who were supportive in the mother's life. Participants were asked to list the people who were supportive under each category. Examples of these categories included immediate family members, friends, and the baby's father. Consistently, the literature showed that family members were the strongest source of social support.

In her study of the influence of social support on maternal psychological well-being, Maxine Seaborn Thompson (1986) found that support from female siblings and friends was often related to an increase in maternal stress (1986: 1016). She argues that more support from female siblings and friends brings more stress. The timing of teen motherhood could affect the nature of support that siblings are able to give, in comparison to women who give birth later on. Consequently, a young woman who gives birth as a teen is likely to have younger siblings who are much more limited in the ways that they are able to support her. For example, a young sibling may not be mature enough to provide childcare or to cook meals. Furthermore, if they themselves don't have an income, they probably cannot provide other material support such as a box of diapers. Thompson defined social support as "resources accessible to an individual through social ties to other individuals or groups" (1986: 1008). The potential limitations of siblings or other teenage friends could also limit the resources that the teen mother has access to. Thompson also noted that the increased responsibility of a child could affect the relationship between a teen mother and her friends. Also, adding another person to a family could create tension among the mother and her younger siblings, creating a complicated relationship (1986: 1017). However, it is important to note that Thompson's

findings conflict with the work of many other scholars. Other researchers (Schrag and Schmidt-Tieszen (2014), Bunting and McAuley (2004), Turner, Grindstaff, and Phillips (1990)) found that female social support is beneficial to the young mother.

*Support from the Teen Mothers' Mother*

Elaine Bell Kaplan published a qualitative study (1997) of black teen mothers' experiences in the low-income area of Oakland, CA. She interviewed 32 women, and followed the lives of seven of these women in greater detail over a period of seven months. She examined the relationships between these young women and the various people involved in their lives, some of whom were more supportive than others.

In Kaplan's study, almost all of the teen mothers' relationships with their own mothers became extremely complicated after the pregnancy. Many of these relationship strains stemmed from the mothers' anger, embarrassment and personal stress about the pregnancy. These women were not ready to be grandmothers, emotionally or financially. Adult mothers found it difficult to balance between continuing to mother their daughters and allowing their daughters to be independent (Kaplan 1997: 85). This lack of balance created struggle between the two people, because the daughters sought either more or less support, depending on the case. Conflict between the teen and her mother often times resulted in the teen mother moving out of the house with the baby, even when she did not have a place to go.

In an even more nuanced article, Kaplan (1996) further analyzes her study, looking at the intersectionality of gender, race, and class. The relationship strain between a teenage mother and her own mother often stems from the stigma associated with teen pregnancy. The teens' mothers don't want to offer support because teen pregnancy is so

stigmatized in our society. If she offers support to her daughter, it may look as though she is condoning the pregnancy, which could cause the stigma to be passed on to her (Kaplan 1996: 432). This problem is particularly prevalent in black communities, given the general stigma that these communities are more accepting of teen parenting, thus resulting in the higher rates of teen pregnancy. By refusing to support her daughter, the mother distances herself from her daughter's deviant sexual actions. The problem with this negative reaction is that the daughter still needs support from her mother, even though she is now a mother herself (Kaplan 1996: 433). It is a complicated time when the daughter is both independent and dependent at once. While the mother might be experiencing added stress from the presence of another child, and a deviant daughter, the daughter still expects that she provide support. In particular, because there are often few other people able and willing to provide support (i.e. baby's biological father, teen's father), the mother-daughter relationship becomes strained (Kaplan 1996: 440). While there is a strain on the relationship, it often still remains as one of the strongest social connections that the teen mother has available.

In attempting to explain the mothers' unwillingness to support their daughters, Kaplan utilizes Goffman's concept of social stigma. Stigma comes about when a person possesses an attribute that is undesirable and unusual to the majority of a society. Other members of that community hold a strong disapproval of the person because they have that quality. She provides examples of mothers' actions that demonstrate a concern of society's perception of them. For instance, one mother lied about her daughter's age, and still does not tell friends or community members her daughter's actual age. Another mother did not tell anyone she had a grandchild until he was three years old (1996: 439).

These “covering” strategies show that the mother is trying to conform to norms and opinions of society at large. Meanwhile, the daughters still wanted help from someone who they expected could be supportive for the extent of their life.

While Kaplan’s research showed that mother-daughter relationships became extremely complicated upon pregnancy, many other studies showed that the mother was the greatest source of support for the teen mom. In a study of teen mothers’ relations with the baby’s biological father, Christina Gee and Jean Rhodes (2003) found that teen mothers indicated receiving support from their mother and the baby’s biological father most frequently during the perinatal period. However, after three years, the mother continued to be the most prominent part of the social network, while fathers fell below friends and new male partners (Gee and Rhodes 2003: 378). This trend in social networks indicates that mothers provide a significant amount of support.

In their 14-year longitudinal study of resilience amongst teen mothers, Howard et al. (2007) found that young women were positively impacted by support from mothers, fathers, friends and siblings. Support from the mother of the young woman can be instrumental in her success, and in particular when the father of the baby has an inconsistent or nonexistent presence (2007: 211). In their study, Borkowski et al. (2007) found that less than 40% of the mothers they studied (N= 110) were considered “resilient” five years after giving birth. Borkowski defined resilience as successful adaptation despite exposure to risks or stressors (2007: 24). It is not a characteristic of one’s personality, but rather something that is proved in the experience of adversity. In general, women considered to be resilient had completed more schooling and had more social support (Borkowski 2007: 56). The privilege of additional schooling and greater

social support has allowed these women to persevere. Borkowski explains that familial support systems act as a buffer in the avoidance of adverse outcomes that are common among teen moms (Borkowski 2007: 25). The grandmother may provide childcare, and financial assistance, as well as advice to her daughter (the teen mom) (Borkowski 2007: 211). This type of support provides the mother with the opportunity to further her education or pursue a career interest, a privilege that is not available to all teen moms.

#### *Support from the Baby's Father*

In her qualitative study, Kaplan found that many teen mothers had little or no contact with their baby's father, even though originally many of them expected that they would raise the baby together. It was not uncommon for the baby's father to end the relationship when they found out about the pregnancy (Kaplan 1997: 92). Financially, many of the fathers did not provide child support, and two of the mothers in Kaplan's study attempted to obtain child support through the court (Kaplan 1997: 102). While it is obviously not ideal, many of the mothers understood that raising the baby on their own would be better than trying to work things out with the biological father.

As mentioned above, Christina Gee and Jean Rhodes found that father support began to diminish at three years post-partum (2003: 378). Through conducting interviews and surveys (N=218), the authors found that father absence was positively associated with depressive symptoms and anxiety in the teen mother. Surprisingly, teen mothers who did have the support of the biological father showed no positive association of psychological adjustment to motherhood (Gee & Rhodes 2003: 378). Essentially, according to their results, the presence of the biological father is not as beneficial as we might expect. However, the absence of the biological father is still harmful. To contrast

the Gee and Rhodes (2003) study, Thompson and Peebles-Wilkins found that partner support (partner is defined as a husband, male companion, or the baby's biological father) was related to a reduction in distress, and depression, and an increase in self-esteem (1992: 322).

Multiple studies have shown that involvement from the baby's father negatively affects the teen mother's academics. While emotionally they may seem supportive, there is actually an association with non-completion of schooling. Warrick et al. (1993), Unger and Cooley (1992), and Roye (1994) all found that partner support has a significant correlation with dropping out of school. Warrick et al. found that when the male partner was also involved with the Teenage Pregnancy and Parenting Project (TAPP), maternal dropout rates decreased. TAPP is an in-school teen pregnancy intervention and support program. They considered that the dropout pattern might be due in part to jealousy of the partner, because the young woman could be meeting other men in school. Contrary to what we might expect from partner support, these studies show that the mother will not be as successful in terms of education if she is in a relationship with the baby's father. When both the teen mother and her partner were involved in the TAPP program, however, those suspicions were lessened. Evidently, there are conflicting results on teen mother outcomes when the baby's father is present and supportive.

#### *Support from the Teen Mothers' Father*

In Kaplan's study, she found that the majority of young mothers had little or no contact with their own fathers. For the most part, the teens were not able to rely on their fathers for any type of stable support. At the same time, many of the young women forgave their fathers for being absent, welcoming them back into their lives when given

the opportunity, because it was that important to them (Kaplan 1997: 114). Additionally, the mothers sometimes used their pregnancy as a way to create intimate relationships that their own childhood had lacked (Kaplan 1997: 125). Having a child of their own would enable them to love someone, and to be loved. Societal values made the young women believe that the father would act as a breadwinner, and provide status for the family. But, because many of the women were raised by single parents themselves, they did not necessarily see their babies' lack of a father to be a problem.

### *Support Through Religious Institutions*

Religiosity has been shown to positively affect mental health and well being among all people in most previous research. People who actively participate in their religious communities are likely to be better able to deal with stress (Williams 1991). Howard et al. (2007) found that religious involvement among teen moms provided positive role models, encouraged pro-social behaviors (rather than antisocial behaviors), and increased self-esteem (2007: 212). For women who might not have as much familial support, the positive influences found in religious settings may be able to serve as emotional support.

In contrast, Sorenson et al. (1995) found that religious involvement among teen mothers did not serve as a positive source of emotional support. In their study of 261 teen mothers, Sorenson et al. collected data showing that religious involvement may actually hinder emotional adjustment and the ability to cope with stress among adolescent mothers (1995: 75). This could be due in part to teen mothers' divergence from religious values about reproduction and family/marital status. This divergence may actually add stress because the mothers know that their actions do not align with the values of their religious

institution. However, this study is somewhat limited, because respondents were only categorized as “Protestant,” “Catholic” or “Other.” Furthermore, the study was done in Southwestern Ontario, where perhaps the population was much more homogenous than the United States. Tracking other geographic areas or religions could conceivably lead to different results.

## OUTCOMES

Hotz, McElroy, and Sanders (2008) looked at the consequences of teen childbearing for mothers by comparing teen mothers with teens who conceived, but miscarried. In this way they were able to compare teen moms with other young women who were on the same track. Because miscarriages are random, and can only occur for pregnant women, this group acts as a good control. The authors aimed to answer the question of whether or not delaying childbearing would have a more positive outcome for teen moms. Using the 1979 cohort of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), the authors took a sample of white, Hispanic, and black women (N=4,926) who were aged 13-19 in 1979, and followed them until 1993 (Hotz 2008: 55). At the conclusion of their study, they found that in comparison to those who miscarried, teen mothers’ spousal income started at a similar level, but actually ended up being significantly higher - about \$8000 more annually - by age 30 (Hotz 2008: 67). They also found that personal labor market earnings would be higher (Hotz 2008: 70). Difference in educational attainment by age 30 was not seen to be statistically significant when the GED and high school diploma are considered equal. These results show that teen mothers are not actually much worse off than if they had not given birth, and that their SES prior to giving birth would likely be a better determinant.

Saul D. Hoffman furthered this study by following the youngest members of the original study to age 35 (year 2000). He took a similar, but slightly smaller sample from the NLSY between 1979-2000. Hoffman found some outcomes to have a weaker positive effect than those in the original study, such as earnings and spouse's earnings. He also found that teen motherhood did significantly decrease likelihood of completing post-secondary education (Hoffman 2008: 82). The youngest cohort of women (who gave birth between 1974-1983) had consistently negative outcomes- they were less likely to graduate high school, the GED had only a small positive effect, and the impacts on their own and spouse's earnings were consistently, significantly negative (Hoffman 2008: 92). This could imply that the time period in which a teen mom gives birth also influences her experiences afterwards due to societal views and policies. These views and policies can affect the way a teen mother is treated, or her ability to achieve upward mobility. The *Kids Having Kids* studies demonstrate why we cannot necessarily think of teen pregnancy as a cause for lower SES and dependence on food stamps or housing assistance. Rather, we might consider initial socioeconomic status as an indicator for early pregnancy, and as a determinant for the outcome of a teen pregnancy.

## FINDING SUCCESS

Most research that has been done focuses on the barriers to success teen mothers face and the negative influences teen parenting can have on children. Some scholars, however, have published studies that focus on the success of teen mothers. In their study of the outcomes of children of teen mothers, Luster, Bates, Fitzgerald, et al. (2004) found

that more successful children were born to mothers who had more years of education, were more likely to be employed, and more likely to live with a male partner (Luster et al. 2004: 133). Children were ranked by their scores on the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised* prior to entering kindergarten. These results indicate the importance of both education and partner support.

In their study of the impacts of a school-based parent support and childcare program for teen mothers, Sadler et al. (2007) found that this program showed promising trajectories for involved young mothers. The program not only helped women increase their parenting knowledge, but also decreased rapid subsequent pregnancies and helped them to stay engaged in school (Sadler et al. 2007: 121). Intervention programs like this one provide a source of social support for the teen mother, in addition to helping prevent her from dropping out of high school. Also, this program offers safe child-care on site, and health care services. While this program is for young mothers who are still enrolled in high school, the services that are given are similar to those offered by The Care Center.

Lee SmithBattle examined the outcomes of teen mothers using longitudinal data and found that those who came from lower-working class backgrounds had a much more difficult time achieving success than their middle-class counterparts. She concluded that teen mothers who had advantages during their own childhoods fared better as they reached their 30s (SmithBattle 2007: 409). Similarly, this advantage was passed on to the children of these women. SmithBattle pointed to the importance of studying samples of women from diverse family backgrounds in order to determine the relationship between poverty and teen pregnancy (SmithBattle 2007: 417). This is because family socioeconomic background influences the opportunities available to a young mother.

## THE PRESENT STUDY

My research will attempt to identify “successful” teen mothers, and to understand what sources and forms of social support have helped them to find success (if any at all). I will be able to compare the results that I find to the previous research on social support. In a system where the majority of women in this situation do not succeed, I hope to understand how it is that some women do succeed. This understanding of success can then be used to identify ways in which we can help other women to find the same success. While there are already some programs in place to help teen mothers, many of these programs do not provide the right tools, or the type of support that young mothers need most. It is my hope that social support can take the place of financial support in achieving success, because many teen mothers do not come from families with the means to support them monetarily.

## Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

### QUESTION AND CHOICE OF METHOD: INTERVIEWING

Because I wanted to discover the role of various types of social support in the outcomes of teen mothers, I chose the method of in depth interviewing to conduct my research. This is the most appropriate technique for answering my question because it allowed me to gain an abundance of information about each participant. This wealth of data allowed me to look for patterns among different participants. Furthermore, each respondent had a different experience, and the interview format enabled me to ask follow-up questions specific to that person. The personal questions that I ask are much better operationalized through an interview, rather than a survey. This is because in an interview setting, I am able to ask additional questions if I think an answer is unclear. If the respondent does not understand my question, I am able to clarify for them.

Why did I choose semi-structured? I did not want the interviews to be entirely structured because I anticipated that conversations would go off on some tangents, and some questions would be answered in those tangents anyway. I wanted the conversation to feel natural and comfortable for the participants, which would enable them to give more detailed responses, thus creating richer data. Furthermore, with semi-structured interviews, I let the respondents shape the direction of the conversation. In a survey or a closed-ended interview, I would have had to predict the possible experiences and answers that respondents could give me. Because I used semi-structured interviews, I could then use the data that they provided to find patterns among respondents. This process is more inductive, rather than deductive.

## SAMPLE

My sampling technique for identifying participants was a non-probability purposive sample. I first located initial participants through personal contacts and The Care Center, in Holyoke, Massachusetts. The Care Center is an alternative education program for teen mothers; a non-traditional school where young women study for their GED degree. After contacting an initial group, I used a snowball sampling technique to find additional participants. I had prior contact with The Care Center, as a math and reading tutor in the summer of 2013. This provided me with a relationship with some young women and the faculty at The Care Center, allowing me to connect with them initially.

The sample for this study consisted of young women (N=10) between the ages of eighteen and twenty-seven. All of the women are either completing school, have graduated, or are employed. Seven out of ten of the women are racial minorities. Five women considered themselves to be Hispanic/Latina. Another woman considered herself to be half black, half white. One respondent considered herself multi-racial. Three women are white. The women come from cities and towns in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York and West Virginia. Seven out of ten of the participants considered their family of origin to be lower class. In terms of their own parents, only one of the interviewees has parents that are still married. All of the others' parents are divorced, single, deceased, or remarried. Seven of the women received federal assistance of some form at one point throughout the process. Six of these women are still receiving assistance. Types of assistance included food stamps, cash assistance, childcare vouchers, fuel assistance, and a medical card.

## PROCESS

### *Ethics*

Before beginning interviews, I submitted a proposal to the Institutional Review Board committee at Wheaton College. This included a complete description of the proposed study and ensured that my study would be ethical, and not harmful to participants. After receiving approval from this committee, I was able to begin interviewing. Each participant was provided with an Informed Consent form, notifying them of the goals of the study, and their rights as a respondent. These rights included the option to refuse to answer any question without penalty and the option to discontinue participation at any time without consequences. Additionally, respondents were notified of any risks that could occur with their participation. Furthermore, all participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity and keep information confidential. All interview data was kept solely on my computer, and available only to my advisor, Karen McCormack, and myself. In conversations, identifying information was still kept confidential, and pseudonyms were used.

### *Interviews*

Each interview is structured very similarly. I began by giving the respondent the informed consent form (See Appendix #1). The informed consent form allowed the respondent to understand the purpose of the study, their rights as a respondent, and any risks of being involved. Following the informed consent, respondents were given a short demographic questionnaire (See Appendix #2). The questionnaire asked basic questions about age, race, schooling, and parents' employment. The questionnaire included both open-ended and closed-ended questions. There was one question that asked respondents

to categorize their family's socioeconomic status, measured ordinally. Categories included *lower/working class*, *lower middle class*, *upper middle class*, and *upper class*.

After the questionnaire, I began the semi-structured interviews (interview questions are listed in Appendix #3). Throughout each interview I asked only open-ended questions, and certain inquiries also included additional contingency questions. I always began interviews with more general questions about life goals and feelings about their pregnancy. Examples of these included "How did you see your life playing out before you found out that you were pregnant?" / "What are your career aspirations and goals for the future now?" / "How did you feel when you first found out that you were pregnant?" After I finished questions of this nature, I moved on to questions about social support through the rest of the interview. As we reached this point, I asked respondents to fill out a Social Network Map.

The Social Network Map was originally created by Elizabeth M. Tracy and James K. Whittaker in 1990 (See Appendix #4 for their map). The Social Network Map is a way for an individual to organize and visualize the network of personal relationships that they have. These authors intended for the map to be used in clinical practice in order to recognize and emphasize the client's social support network (Tracy and Whittaker 1990: 461). Their map appeared more like a pie graph in comparison to the one that I created. The map that their respondents used was a circular shape, divided into sections, like pieces of a pie. Respondents would write the names of those who supported them within each category. Additionally, there are differences in the category titles for my Social Network Map. For example, I included "*baby's father*" as a category – making the map relevant to my question.

Respondents filled out my Social Network Map (Appendix #5) by listing members of their support network that came from different areas of their lives. The map was broken up into six bubble-like sections, including *family*, *friends*, *baby's father*, *school*, *religious community*, and *other*. Respondents went through each category and listed people who had supported them from that category. This helped to get them started thinking about who provided support.

After the Social Network Map was completed, the remaining part of the interview varied a little more depending on which groups of people were supportive to that particular respondent. Questions from this section included, “How did your mother, father, siblings react when you told them that you were pregnant?” / “How do you manage time? Tell me about a typical day for you and your child.” / “Is there anybody who has been unsupportive in the process? How?” / “What are your expectations of the baby's father?” I allowed the interviews to flow more freely at this point so that I could hear everything that respondents wanted to tell me. At the end of the interview, I asked respondents to recap by going through their Social Network Map and explaining how the people listed were supportive throughout the process of pregnancy and parenting, if they had not already mentioned them.

For participants who were interviewed via Skype or FaceTime, there were slight alterations to these methods. Three of the interviews were completed through this method. First, I emailed them the Informed Consent form, rather than providing a hard copy at the time of interview. Additionally, I asked them the demographic questions verbally, and recorded their answers myself, rather than having them fill it out. I used this same verbal/recording procedure when filling out the Social Network Map. In terms of

the interview questions themselves, online interviews did not differ from in-person interviews.

### *Data Analysis*

In order to analyze the data, I began by transcribing each of the interviews entirely. I first uploaded the audio file to my computer and deleted it from my phone. Once the file was on my computer, I was able to play it through iTunes, while typing the transcription in Microsoft Word. I used the play/pause button when I needed to go back and listen to something a second time. Each of the interviews was transcribed in the same way.

After I had three of the interviews transcribed, I began to look at the data on the hard copies. I highlighted quotes that seemed important and interesting to me. Then I began to see patterns. I used an inductive process where I started with the data and let the codes emerge from there. After finding a few codes that I could build on, I developed a more systematic process. At first, I used blue marker to mark spots where the mother was mentioned as either supportive or unsupportive, and green to mark the same patterns for the baby's father. As I continued transcribing, I highlighted each of the interviews with these color codes, but determined that it was also necessary to look at the different types of support – not just who was providing the support. I decided to examine three main categories of support: emotional support, material support, and cognitive support. I went through all of the hard copies of my transcriptions and marked each of these types of support, or a lack thereof, on the paper.

After coding the entire set of transcriptions, I compiled all of the relevant marked quotes into one document. This document had six sections- one for each of the codes.

This way, I could easily see all of the quotes that I found relevant and helpful. From there I could easily copy and paste the quotes I decided to use in my data analysis.

In order to determine pseudonyms for the respondents, I used a random name generator that I found from the Google search engine. None of the names I chose were the names of anyone I interviewed. I also created pseudonyms for some of the respondents' relatives if it was necessary for the quotes I chose.

I compiled the demographic data from the short questionnaire into an Excel spreadsheet, where I could easily compare and understand the demographics of the group as a whole. In this document I included age, age at child's birth, race/ethnicity, home town, town of school, socioeconomic status, education level, private/public HS, mother's education, father's education, parents' marital status, parents' employment, employment status, federal assistance (yes/no), financial notes (what type of assistance), relationship with baby's father (still together? Yes/no), and other notes. From this document, I was easily able to recognize demographic patterns and put these into the data analysis.

In mid-January I participated in the 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Sociology and Anthropology Senior Symposium. I presented my preliminary findings from that point, and demonstrated some of the first patterns that I saw such as the impact of material support, the lack of support from the baby's father, and the variation in family support over time. The symposium acted as a way to jump start my data analysis, and helped me to start the initial writing. The patterns that I discussed in my symposium presentation were also included in my actual data analysis.

## SUBJECTIVITY

Because I am a young woman of a similar age to the women I interviewed, and have previous experience working with this population, my interviewees may have felt more comfortable opening up to me about their experiences as a teen mother. Similarly, I knew my initial interviewees prior to the study, which meant that these women were already comfortable talking with me. This might mean that they were able to be more open with me when answering questions. My previous experience tutoring teen mothers certainly influenced my interest and stake in the study. I used this experience at The Care Center to inform my initial study, as I designed the study with the goal of identifying social support factors that could help struggling teen mothers succeed.

## LIMITATIONS

My study has a few limitations that could be improved if repeated in the future. It is important to keep these in mind when reading the data analysis. First, I had a small sample size. While I interviewed women from various backgrounds, I only talked to ten women, thus reducing the representativeness, generalizability and reliability of my results. Additionally, my respondents came from relatively limited geographic locations, which could make my results different from those that would be found among a national sample. There could be differences in outcomes of teen mothers depending on their geographic location. This could be improved by including women from a wider range of American cities and rural areas. Furthermore, the study would be excellent if carried out as a longitudinal study. This would allow the researcher to follow teen mothers throughout the course of childbirth and parenthood as they and their children progress, thus conclusively determining outcomes and success.

## Chapter 4: DATA ANALYSIS

### INTRODUCTION

In trying to determine how social support can help a young mother to stay on the right track after a teen pregnancy, it is helpful to look at various types of social support. These kinds of support unfold in different ways in the life of a teen mother. Perhaps a teen mother who does not have the material support of her family could be strongly aided by their emotional or cognitive support instead – which could also lead to an improvement in her quality of life. By focusing on four different areas of social support, I attempted to understand what types are more beneficial and how they act in a way that can lead to more positive outcomes for teen mothers.

There are four types of enacted support that emerged from the interviews that I have focused on throughout the course of my study: emotional support, material support, cognitive support, and social network support. In many cases, these types of support overlap with each other. Some women in my study had strong sources of all of these supports, while others certainly had more of one type than another. Family socioeconomic status tended to shape the amount of material support that the teen mother was given, but did not play as much of a role in the amount of emotional or cognitive support that families could provide.

Many people in the respondents' lives provided multiple kinds of support. For example, someone's mother might be extremely helpful in terms of providing goods and services, such as babysitting or meals (material goods and services support), but at the same time offering the teen mother advice and comfort in times of distress (emotional support). Usually, when respondents pointed to one person who was most helpful in their

life, that person provided multiple types of support. At the same time, many of the respondents' babies' fathers were unsupportive in more ways than one. By not being present, they were neither supportive materially, emotionally, nor cognitively.

Certain outcomes, such as attending college, required more than one of these types of support in order for the respondent to be successful. In order to attend college, a young mother needs the economic capital to pay the bills and the material support of childcare, but she also needs the human capital that she has gained from her education thus far, and cognitive support that will enable her to succeed academically. Throughout the stressful period when the young mother is attending college, emotional support will help her to cope with her situation, which is unlike that of many other traditional college students. As a mother and a student, a teen mother cannot solely focus on her academics and extracurricular commitments; rather she has the responsibility of caring for herself and her child. She must ensure that her baby has childcare, attends doctor's appointments, and eats proper meals – things that a “normal” college student does not have to think about. A study by Sandra Hofferth, Lori Reid, and Frank Mott (2001) showed that teenage mothers completed an average of 11.3 years of schooling, while their counterparts who waited until after age 30 to give birth completed an average of 14.5 years of schooling. The multitude of responsibilities of a teen mother could certainly account for this schooling differential.

In this chapter, I will begin by demonstrating the patterns that I found in emotional support, before moving into material support, and then lastly, cognitive support. These types of support relate to the types of capital discussed by Bourdieu, including social capital, economic capital, and cultural capital, which I presented in the

introduction. I will also discuss the importance of human capital in being successful. These types of capital correspond with types of social support received by my respondents. For example, economic capital appeared to influence the types of material support that a family could provide. Furthermore, the support that a young mother gets from her social network is determined by her social capital. While there are four separate sections within the data analysis, the examples demonstrate the interrelationship between them. Social support is not simply one thing or the other – rather it is a combination of many types of support, a point that I will return to at the end of the data analysis.

## EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Emotional support was one of the most central social supports that respondents discussed throughout the interviews. In particular, emotional support relates to the social network that an individual has inherited and created for herself. Emotional support comes from the people in one's social network - making up her social capital. If a woman has strong relationships with the contacts that make up her social capital, then she may receive more support from these people. People in this network are able to provide emotional guidance and security for the individual in need, namely the teen mother. Emotional support is support that allows the individual to feel loved, cared for, respected, admired, and provides a sense of security (Jacobson 1986: 252). This could include listening in a time of need, providing a sense of relief after childbirth, or something as simple as suggesting deep breaths or taking a walk in the fresh air. A wide range of acts could be considered to be emotional support.

Emotional support is particularly necessary and helpful for individuals in times of extreme stress or pressure. Not surprisingly, childbirth is one of these times. While the experiences of pregnancy and becoming a new mom are taxing for all women, the occurrence is particularly difficult for teen women. Teen mothers have to deal with societal stigmas and negative views from community members, in addition to the regular stresses of becoming a mother. Also, teen mothers are generally not financially stable (Hotz 2008: 56, 57). While an older mother might have a job and a home before giving birth, teen mothers have not yet reached this stage of maturity in their life. Furthermore, young mothers often lose the support of people that they were close to prior to the pregnancy, due to their young age.

It is important to understand where the emotional support is coming from, because if we know where it comes from, then we can help more teen mothers to find this source of support. While emotional support does not necessarily relate to “success,” – which is difficult to define, as noted in the introduction – a strong emotional support system might influence a young mother’s willingness and ability to think about college, or a brighter future. A young mother who is cared for and comforted by her mother (or anyone) could feel more empowered, and be more likely to pursue higher goals such as graduating from a four-year college. Emotional support provides a link that allows young mothers to take advantage of other opportunities.

Among my respondents, emotional support came from a variety of groups of people. Primarily, young women said that their own mother was their biggest source of support. Six out of ten interviewees identified their mother as a primary source of emotional support. Other significant sources of support included foster parents, sisters,

the teen mother's father, the new partner, and the baby's father. While levels of support often fluctuated throughout the course of the pregnancy/parenting timeline, young mothers still listed these people as providing the most support.

### *Support - Variation with time*

Parents were the most common source of social support among the respondents. Only two out of ten respondents said that their parents are still married. Two respondents mentioned that their father was supportive, while in comparison; six respondents listed their mother as one of the biggest sources of social support. Elaine Bell Kaplan published a qualitative study in 1996 that demonstrated the complicated relationship between a teen mom and her mother. While mothers were generally the most emotionally supportive people, there is a complex dynamic there. On the one hand, teen mothers' mothers often felt the societal stigma of teen pregnancy if they supported their daughters. By providing emotional support for their daughter, mothers risked community members seeing their support as praising the pregnancy rather than condemning it. Also, now that their daughters were mothers themselves they sometimes seemed to fail to continue "mothering" their own daughters. These factors tended to strain the relationship between the teen mom and her own mother. However other scholars, including Gee and Rhodes (2003), and Borkowski (2007), found that mothers were the greatest source of support for the teen mom. While my findings showed complicated relationships with the mother at first, for the most part, these relationships evolved into supportive ones, both emotionally and materially.

In examining my interview data, I found that support (of all types) tends to fluctuate over the course of the pregnancy. While many family members were angry and

unsupportive at the beginning, they also tended to be some of the most supportive people overall. When asked if there was anyone who had been unsupportive, respondents usually did not mention their family members, even though some of them were kicked out of the house, or largely unsupported at first. Sometimes parents did things that, to me, seemed largely unsupportive, however respondents usually did not think of their parents as unsupportive.

For example, Natalie, a 22-year old senior at a private Massachusetts college, said that her mother: "...kicked me out and that was for a little while and I would always try to reach back home and she wouldn't answer me." Yet she seemed to contradict herself later in the interview when she stated, "My mom stayed with me the whole time. She didn't leave. ... She was just there the entire time. ... So she did an awesome job, I think my mom is phenomenal." This is a very interesting contradiction. In recounting her experience, Natalie demonstrated that she primarily thinks of her mother as supportive, even though her mother's initial reaction was quite negative. Although they had no communication for awhile, now her mother is extremely supportive, both emotionally and materially in terms of goods and services. She is the primary caretaker for Natalie's son during the school week. In her description of her experience, Natalie seemed to believe that these actions have overshadowed the lack of support back at the beginning of her pregnancy as a 14 year old. Similarly, when describing her father's reaction to the news that she was pregnant, Allison, a 22-year old stay at home mom, says:

I've never seen him so mad in my entire life. Um, at first, he was just, I think they were both just like disappointed, and like, they were just like worried about how like I was gonna be like supported.

But then, like Natalie, Allison's relationship with her parents seemed to evolve into a more constructive one. At a later point in our conversation she said,

They're really supportive [parents]. Like they watch her. My dad watched her when I was in the hospital having Elena [her second daughter]. And um, they just, like they're always there like when I need them. They're always there whether I need help watching the girls, or you know, with anything.

Both of these women experienced extreme hostility from their parents at the beginning of the process, but they now consider their parents to be a central part of their support systems. Both Natalie and Allison's family members were unsupportive at first, but after some time, they started providing a significant amount of both emotional and material support.

### *Parents*

Consistent with the literature (Kaplan 1995; Gee and Rhodes 2003; and Howard et al. 2007), most respondents in my sample listed their mother as either the most emotionally supportive, or as one of the most emotionally supportive people in their lives. Throughout the interviews, respondents described various ways that their mothers supported them. Some respondents had trouble specifically describing how their mother was emotionally supportive, but I often heard things such as, "She's just there when I need her." Anita, 20, is currently studying for her GED exams at The Care Center in Holyoke. She now lives on her own with her child in an apartment complex. Neither her four sisters nor her mother live near her anymore. Last year her mom moved a few hours away; however, Anita still considers her mother to be by far her biggest emotional support, as she explains here:

I've been through a lot and whenever I needed somebody she's always there for me. No matter what. She can be far. She will always be there for me. She's a good person and I thank God that I have a mom that cares.

For Anita, the distance does not affect her mother's ability to provide emotional support. Her mom is always calling her on the phone and giving her advice on how to care for her baby. Although she is not physically present, the phone calls allow her to listen and provide comfort. For Anita, this sense of knowing that her mother is there for her provides that sense of comfort.

Unlike Anita, whose mom provided support from a distance, Natalie lived with her mother, and her mother stayed with her to provide comfort. Natalie is a 22-year-old mother of an eight-year-old boy, and she is currently a senior at a private Massachusetts college. Her mother played a large supportive role in Natalie's labor process, in addition to providing emotional support after Natalie's son was born. When Natalie describes her son's birth, she says: "So then I ended up going to the hospital and I gave birth that night. And then my mom stayed with me the whole time. She didn't leave. She didn't move. She didn't shower. She didn't change. She didn't do anything; she was just there the entire time." In both examples, the mothers were able to provide a sense of comfort for their daughters, but they used different strategies to do so. While Natalie's mother stayed with her and provided a more physical sense of comfort, Anita's mother stayed in contact with her even though she moved far away.

Nicole is a 22-year-old senior at a Massachusetts university, where she has family housing for herself and her son. Nicole's mother has also been extremely supportive emotionally throughout her pregnancy and parenting experience. Likewise, her mother has provided support in other ways, which we will see in the following sections. Nicole and her mother had differing opinions about how to handle the pregnancy at first, but Nicole's mother remained emotionally supportive nonetheless, as she describes here:

She really really wanted me to have an abortion, but she wasn't pushy about it. She was just like these are all the things that are gonna happen if you have this baby and I think that the best decision is to have an abortion, but if you pick not to, I'm gonna still be there.

While her mother had a different opinion about what Nicole should do, she did not force Nicole to pursue that option, or abandon her when she decided to do something else.

Throughout the process Nicole knew that she could rely on her mother for help. Similar to Anita and Natalie, Nicole had the sense that her mother would be there for her and stick with her through a tough situation. Their mothers have given them a sense of security.

In more traditional families, mothers tend to provide a significant amount of support for their daughters, but they are also one of the biggest emotional supports for teen daughters who have become mothers themselves. As demonstrated in the quotes, these mothers are able to provide a sense of security and caring, which allows their daughters to know that they will not abandon them during a difficult time. Emotional support appears to be more about this deeper sense of love and caring, rather than specific supportive actions. Furthermore, among my interviewees, emotional support did not seem to depend on a family's economic capital. Emotional support was something that seemed to be available to all of my interviewees in some form or another. This type of support is absolutely crucial to the well-being and subsequent success of a young mother.

Emotional support does not directly correlate with Bourdieu's capital – it does not depend on possessing a certain level of capital, rather it is simply an aspect of strong relationship ties. However, a stronger emotional support system may influence a young woman's ability to take advantage of other ties in her social network or to pursue higher education. Emotional support can provide a sense of security and sanity during difficult

times. Without these relationships, a young mother may not be able stay mentally and emotionally healthy from day to day.

*Significant Other – Supportive vs. Unsupportive*

As discussed in the material support section, the majority of respondents were not still in a relationship with their baby's father, and these men were not reliable or involved in the children's lives. However, the three respondents who were still in a relationship with their baby's father seemed to have significantly more emotional (and material) support than those who were not. These women had the opportunity to share responsibilities with the father and to offer and receive support throughout the process. As Tricia, an 18-year-old mother studying at The Care Center, mentioned of her boyfriend (who is her daughter's father) in her interview, "The effort between me and him--we do 50/50." Tricia's boyfriend is there when she needs him, and she is able to rely on him for help with her daughter.

While only three of my interviewees were still in a relationship with the father of their baby, three others are currently in a relationship with a new partner. Those respondents with significant others appeared to have significantly more emotional (and material) support. The three respondents that had new partners were unable to rely on their baby's father for any support for the child; however, they were able to fill that void with the support of their new partner.

For example, Irene, 20, is studying for her GED and is currently engaged to a new partner. She is able to count on him to help with the baby, and he is able to make her feel better in times of stress.

He's always there, like I don't know. He's just there when I need him, when I'm emotional, when I stress, when I have anxiety attacks. When I get bad news from

the doctor, he's always there. He's constantly near my side. He knows how bad I stress, and he's supportive when I need something for my son, he's always walking to the store, already getting it. When I go food shopping I get anxiety attacks cuz there's too many people, I get claustrophobic, so he's like we can go, we can stay, I'll do it, just relax. And he knows how to calm me down. I have an asthma attack, he's there already calming me down, take deep breaths. He's just been there ever since I met him.

Other respondents who had new partners demonstrated similar feelings. Monica, 22, has received her GED and is enrolled in a culinary program at a Massachusetts community college. While her son's father is not a reliable source of support, emotionally or materially, she is supported by her current boyfriend. She says:

He basically acts like [her son's] father, big role model, always there for us whenever we need him, so there's never been any issue. So he's very supportive of like what I do and he helps me a lot with [my son].

While Monica states that her boyfriend is able to help her care for her son and support her emotionally, her boyfriend is also able to provide encouragement in other areas, such as furthering her education. It is interesting to note the contrast to literature here. In their studies of teen mothers' partners, Warrick et al. (1993), Unger and Cooley (1992), and Roye (1994) all found that significant others tended to have a negative impact on continued education. However, these findings seem contrary to what we might expect of a supportive partner.

#### *Support of other young mothers*

In addition to family and partner support, another source of emotional support for respondents came from other teen mothers. Four out of my ten respondents described receiving emotional support from another teen mother. This strong source of support could be because together, both young women are going through an experience defined as deviant. They both face stigmas, and are able to help each other through the difficulties

of parenting as a teenager. The relationships between teen mothers are a place where the types of social support have a great deal of overlap. Anita described the give-and-take experience she had receiving emotional support from her cousin, who was also a young mother.

She lives right down the street, so. Um, she actually loves my son and she's always there for me when I need childcare, she's there. Or when she needs childcare I provide that too. Cuz you know, we get along, we're not sisters and it's just like when I need somebody to talk to she's there.

She talked more about the support she received from her cousin later in the interview:

She helped with the childcare. And sometimes when I'm *so* depressed, or she just tells me to come over, we hang out, we cook, sometimes she'll tell me to go get some air. Go out with your friends. And that's good because sometimes I need those days and she's always there when I need her.

Anita is able to rely on her cousin for emotional support. When she is feeling down, her cousin is able to help her relax and help her feel better. She mentioned that she is able to provide support for her cousin as well. They are able to understand and help each other through the experience of teen parenting. Anita also mentions childcare, which is a form of material support – this is a place where the two types of support are intertwined. Teen mothers formed this type of relationship with each other at both The Care Center and more traditional school systems. Sometimes, this support came from family members, such as Anita receiving support from her cousin. However, many times this support simply came from a friend who was also a teen mother. None of these examples required a certain amount of capital. My respondents had strong relationships with their families, friends, or significant others, and with those relationships comes an inherent source of emotional support.

## MATERIAL SUPPORT

Material support is the second form of enacted support that I examined among my respondents. There are two types of material support: monetary support (direct financial contributions, paying for tuition, paying rent, etc.) and goods and services (diapers, food, clothes, babysitting, etc.). While some of the women in my study had a great deal of material support, others did not have much at all, and these relative amounts of material support appeared to impact a young mother's opportunities. Material support connects with Bourdieu's economic capital, which also plays into the cultural capital that a child inherits. Economic capital is simply the resources that a person owns – this can include physical items, property, or money. Those with more material support, and thus more economic capital, are more likely to have greater opportunities for higher education, employment, and other experiences. Similarly, the experiences and opportunities that a child has access to, in relation to her family's socioeconomic status, will likely influence the cultural capital that she will gain. Depending on what types of activities she is able to participate in, she might gain knowledge and awareness that is highly valued and beneficial in society, or not. Maybe she had the opportunity to go to a history museum, take a tour through a national park, or read and discuss books with her parents each night, but maybe she did not have books at home, and could not afford these trips and so she watched television instead. Whichever path she took will help determine her opportunities later on – she may be rewarded in institutional settings (i.e. school) or she may fall behind. As Annette Lareau noted in her analysis (2011), this difference in parenting leads to advantages for some children (those whose parents practiced concerted cultivation) and disadvantages for others (those whose parents practiced natural growth).

### *Socioeconomic Status*

Family money and socioeconomic status appear to have a significant influence on the opportunities available to a young mother (Hotz 2008: 57). Economic status determines the amount of material support that a family is able to give. A family with more resources is likely to have some extra to give to help out, and they are also probably better able to donate goods or services in a time of need. However, just because a family does not have the resources to provide more material support does not mean that they are unsupportive. For example, a family that lacks the ability to be materially supportive can certainly still be supportive in an emotional and/or cognitive sense. While socioeconomic status appears to affect the monetary contributions and goods and services that a family is able to provide, other supports do not necessarily require economic stability. A family can still be materially supportive, without possessing the resources to make a significant monetary donation. Furthermore, while certain contributions, such as a box of diapers, are helpful and necessary for daily life, these types of contributions will not transform the opportunities of the young woman. Certain material supports are more transformative than others, and these types of support are likely more available to someone whose contacts have higher socioeconomic status. The economic capital that a family possesses influences whether or not they can provide monetary support for their daughter. If they have enough economic capital, then perhaps they will be able to help in a more transformative way. Otherwise, they might only be able to provide occasional childcare or a donation of groceries here and there.

Nicole is relatively privileged. She is a 21-year-old senior at a Massachusetts state university. Both of her parents have doctorate degrees, and they are financially stable.

Her parents are able to help her financially if she is in need. Nicole's mother's job flexibility allowed her to provide support in a way that most families were not. Nicole described the time after her baby was born:

And then my mom happened to have a sabbatical for work the semester after and so that was super helpful but I felt super bad because she wanted to travel and she ended up just staying and taking care of my son, but I could still go to school and take classes and do all of that.

Nicole was able to continue her college education without pause because her mother's academic job entitled her to a semester on sabbatical. Her mother was able to spend all of her time caring for the baby, whereas someone in another type of job may not be able to balance work and caretaking. Her job was stable, yet flexible, allowing her to find this balance. Babysitting, or child-care, is considered a service, a form of material support. Because they had more resources overall (economic capital), the upper-middle class family was able to provide more material support. Her family's economic capital has enabled her to take advantage of greater opportunities, such as continuing along the same post-secondary educational track that she would have without a pregnancy.

Estelle, 27, is now solidly employed, but had a different experience when she first gave birth. In comparison to Nicole, Estelle's family was lower-working class, and she could not rely on her parents for material support to the same extent that Nicole was able to. She described her experience balancing work and childcare:

And [her father] watched her when I couldn't. And I would work 16-hour shifts on the weekends, so that I would only be gone two days. I would just work really, you know long and um, just spend as much time with her as I could.

Estelle's parents certainly helped her when they could by providing goods and services such as babysitting. However the services they offered were not transformational

contributions that would change Estelle's future – in the way that Nicole's parents contributed.

To compare, Pamela comes from a lower-working class family, and lives on her own. She gets by without much support from her single mom. While she is pursuing a bachelor's degree at a Massachusetts university, she has to come up with most of her own resources. Pamela cannot rely on her mother for financial assistance when times are tough. In our interview, she described her experience with federal assistance:

... they cut my assistance because I got a second job during winter vacation last year, and so they said that I was working too much to be considered like needy for assistance. So I haven't had assistance since then, but it's been like really tricky since then cuz food is so expensive and I don't have food stamps. So all my money goes to food and then I have no money left.

Pamela's parents are separated. Her mother does not support her at all financially.

Whereas Nicole was able to completely rely on her mom for help, Pamela is alone. She cannot depend on her family to provide any regular material support. While she has still taken advantage of the opportunity to go to college, she has had a much more difficult experience throughout the process, having to worry about housing, food, and other expenses for her son and herself. Pamela's mother was unsupportive in terms of both material and emotional support throughout the process of pregnancy and teen parenting. However, Pamela did have a foster mother who was able to provide some emotional and cognitive support, as we will see in the discussion of cognitive support.

Two of these young women, Nicole and Pamela, are friends. Pamela describes their relationship, and Nicole's help through her donation of goods. Their relationship, which entails both emotional and material support, is a demonstration of support from

another teen mom. Nicole's family has enough resources that she has enough for herself, and to give some to Pamela:

Like if I run out of food, she'll go grocery shopping and bring me food to my house. Or like anything, like my power went out the other day, and my car was broken, and she came and brought me candles and flashlights and like, she just like helps me with everything.

Even among interviewees that categorized themselves as from "lower working class" families, there is a wide range of "opportunities." While some are at four-year state universities, others are still working on their GED, and looking at shorter vocational programs that will give them jobs in the culinary industry or as a certified nurse's assistant. While a Bachelor's degree doesn't guarantee a stable or well-paying job, the opportunities are much greater. Furthermore, middle and upper class families are typically able to provide more material support than their lower class counterparts. The difference in material support could play a role in whether a young mother can afford to get a Bachelor's degree or a culinary certificate, both financially and in terms of childcare. While Pamela was fortunate enough to get into college, and to have her foster mom encourage her to attend, she is going through it mostly on her own. She has to come up with her own resources, and cannot rely on anyone else to provide for her and her son.

Bourdieu discusses economic and cultural capital as determining one's social standing in society. Two people that have similar amounts and types of capital will likely have more in common than those who do not. While many of my lower-working class respondents have similar economic capital to each other, those who are pursuing four-year degrees, Pamela for example, are gaining cultural capital that is more similar to that of their middle and upper-middle class counterparts, thus creating more in common with those women. By enrolling herself in a Bachelor's degree program, Pamela is acquiring a

middle-class cultural capital, and the human capital that she needs to get a more stable job. College is a transformational experience. For those who do not grow up with college as a “given,” gaining a Bachelor’s degree is transformational for the future of their family.

While many people believe that early childbirth causes poverty, women from impoverished families are more likely to have an early first birth and remain low-income than their middle-class counterparts (SmithBattle 2007: 409). Likewise, when teens from middle-class families give birth, they tend to have more resources available to them, enabling them to take advantage of opportunities such as staying in school or getting a job. These patterns perpetuate the pattern of inequality, the social reproduction of poverty.

Allison, 22 comes from a middle-class family, similar to Nicole, and is currently married to her baby’s father. Allison and her husband both graduated from high school in the same class. When she first became pregnant, Allison and her partner lived with her family for a while. Because her parents were both emotionally supportive and financially stable, Allison, her husband, and their baby were able to live at home – allowing them to save money on rent and food. Allison’s husband was able to find reliable employment, and has fully supported her and their (now two) children, as she describes here:

Like I feel like I’m at the point where I am now because of Tony’s [her husband] job, and his you know, his, we have everything, we don’t have to struggle in that way because he has a good job.

Yeah cuz he didn’t make as good of money [at his first job], like when I first got pregnant he didn’t have the job he has now. Um, so like he was working for a company making you know \$400 a week, which when we’re living with my parents that’s fine, but like could never live on our own for that. And then one of his friends like offered him a job at the place he works at, which is the place he’s at now, and he took it and he’s just like gradually gone like up the ladder, and he,

you know he's made it to the top pretty much. So it's kind of all worked out, like the best way possible.

At this point, their economic capital has allowed them to live a “normal” life, without having to worry about putting food on the table for their children, or paying rent. If at some point they do need help financially, Allison can reach out to her parents or her husband's parents for a little extra help. The financial cushion also means that Allison does not have to work a full time job, and can stay at home with her girls until they start going to school. All of these opportunities would not necessarily be available to someone of lower socioeconomic status.

In terms of material support and economic capital itself, resources in the early years of a family are extremely important for the future. A financial cushion to start will help a family to maintain a cushion throughout the years – in comparison to starting in debt and continuing in debt. The investment that her parents have provided is a transformative asset – one that has enabled Allison and her husband to improve their opportunities. The ability of Allison's new family to live with her parents and save up their money during that time provided them with a quantity of money that they had saved. Going forward, they already had money in their bank account, rather than starting from scratch. Now, if they run into any problems such as medical expenses, they have some extra money saved. Additionally, Allison mentioned that her parents, who are economically stable, would be able to help them out financially if she needed it. If Allison and her new family had not been able to live with her parents initially, they would not have reached the stability that they have now achieved. The help of her parents enabled them to grow beyond what they were capable of themselves.

Allison's case shows the difference between income and wealth, as Thomas Shapiro considered in his book *The Hidden Cost of Being African American*. As discussed in the literature review, Shapiro's book showed that middle-class parents are often able to help their children put a down payment on a house, rather than taking out a loan – shaping the financial future of the family from the start. This type of material support is transformative for the future (what Shapiro called *transformative assets*), and will open them up to broader opportunities, in comparison to the offering of a box of diapers, or being there to talk and listen. While Allison's husband is now earning a solid salary (income), their family also has wealth that they have both inherited and saved. Already, Allison and her husband own a house, so they do not have to pay rent. The money that they have saved provides Allison and her family with a head start in comparison to other people. For example, not everyone's parents are financially stable, and able to provide as much material support when their child starts a family. The monetary material support that Allison's parents provided for her and her husband made it so they had more than they could have built on their own. Without the help of her parents, they would not have gotten to the stable point that they have reached today. Initially, Allison and her husband were living on his low-wage salary, but the investment that her parents provided transformed this into a situation in which they could work towards moving up, rather than perhaps taking a second job or falling behind on bills or rent.

#### *Lack of Material Support*

While many of the respondents had at least some material support from family members, the majority of women did not get any material support (financial or goods and

services) from the baby's father. I found that seven out of the ten women I interviewed were *not* still in a relationship with the father of their child. Many women described their baby's fathers as very unreliable, and not living up to the expectations of the respondents.

Nicole's description of her baby's father is typical:

He's very on and off, so my hope and I think everyone's hope at the beginning was that everything was gonna go well and we were gonna, I already had my own place so he was just gonna live with me and we're gonna be a happy family and all that. ... Like I'll see him consistently for a little while, and then he'll drop off the face of the earth. And so it's very frustrating. I've tried to make a schedule with him. I've tried to sit down, we sat down with like his parents, and like nothing.

My findings regarding the baby's biological father were similar to those in Elaine Bell Kaplan's study (1997). As discussed in the literature review, she found that many teen moms had little or no contact with the baby's father even though at the beginning they expected to raise the baby together. Similarly to Kaplan's findings, only three out of my ten respondents were still in a relationship with their baby's father. And only one other respondent said she would consider her baby's father a reliable, consistent source of support. This leaves about two thirds of my sample that said they could not rely on their baby's father for support. Over and over I heard phrases like "off the face of the earth" and "disappeared for months." The sentiment that Nicole described was certainly not unusual among my respondents. I heard a similar feeling from other mothers as well – wanting to give the baby's father a second (or third, or fourth) chance, even though they have not shown that they can be reliable. Respondents had much higher hopes and expectations for the father at the beginning, and while they still cannot trust them, they want to be able to. Pamela explains how she felt about her baby's father's inconsistency:

I expected him at first for him to be there all the time, but then, that immediately didn't happen. So that kind of knocked my expectation right away, but then he

started to come around, so then I was like oh, maybe, he's gonna help, and then he disappeared again and I was like 'okay, whatever I did this already' but then he came back again, so I was like 'okay, so now he's gonna help this time for real' and so it's like kind of because you want it to be okay, that every time it could maybe be okay, your expectations change. Even though realistically you probably know that it's gonna be the same thing.

Anita is a 20-year-old mother who is currently studying for her GED at The Care Center. She expressed a similar sentiment with regards to her baby's father. While she expected more of him upon becoming a father, he is rarely there to help out, and only when he feels like it. She cannot rely on him for any type of support.

He didn't pull through it with me. It was just like difficult for me, because he wasn't there for like a year. ... Like he doesn't help me like that. Like financially or nothing. He just calls when he feels like it and you know. It doesn't help me. One call is not gonna do nothing.

A lack of contact with the baby's father has left these young women raising their babies on their own without a partner. Additionally, these women are alone in supporting themselves and their baby financially. This contributes to the intergenerational reproduction of their living situation.

#### *Outside Sources of Material Support*

Among respondents that lacked material support from family members and others in their social network, many looked to government aid and other services for help. Seven out of my ten respondents receive (or did receive at some point) some form of government assistance. While the majority of these women received food stamps, other forms included childcare vouchers, fuel assistance, and cash assistance. These forms of material support helped to fill the void and make up for the lack of material support from family members and others.

We can see an example of this when Pamela described how food stamps and cash assistance helped her financially. She does not have the support of her mother, and her father is not around. While she does receive some support from extended family members and her foster family, for the most part she must support her son and herself on her own. Evidently, she relied on food stamps and cash assistance, and this became very difficult when they took assistance away. Pamela's government aid was taken away because they told her she was working too much when she took a second part-time job over her college winter break. Now, she spends all of her money on food, and sometimes still does not have enough money. While the government aid acted as monetary material support for a period of time, she doesn't receive any monetary support anymore. She has a significantly lower amount of economic capital than her counterparts who are supported by their parents.

Natalie, from a lower-working class family, has also relied on other sources of material support to help her financially. While her mother has been supportive, she does not have as many resources to give. Natalie uses other sources of financial support to make up for the lack of monetary material support that her family can give:

I think that my mom was pretty proactive on finding a lot of programs and a lot of services to help me, um because I was underage it was a lot easier and I would get priority and things like that. So I got, and still do, cuz I'm a full time student I still get a lot of government assistance, um welfare, food stamps, and all that so that my mom, yes she's caring for Matt [her child], but she's not spending all of her money on him.

Natalie's mother cannot help her and her son with monetary contributions, but she is able to provide housing and childcare for her son. Furthermore, while she cannot provide the monetary contributions on her own, she helps Natalie find that support in other sources. While someone from an upper-middle class family might be able to directly contribute

money, Natalie's mother, who is unemployed, does not have the ability to do so. Instead of monetary support, her mother helps by providing goods and services. While these are both examples of material support, direct monetary contributions may be more helpful as investments in the future – these donations help to advance the family in the way that Shapiro discusses; they are transformative. Natalie's case is interesting because while her mother does not necessarily provide financial support, giving Matt (Natalie's son) a place to live is allowing Natalie to take advantage of the opportunity to go to school. While this contribution is not monetary, her childcare help in itself could be transformative for the future of Natalie's family, because as a result, Natalie is gaining a Bachelor's degree.

Another outside source of support (that is more cognitive and emotional than material) is found in school – The Care Center, an alternative educational program for teen mothers, helps young women prepare for the GED exam. They provide free childcare, and in addition to classes, they have counseling services, college advising, and many extracurricular activities. This school is a place where many young mothers can find support, where they might lack it at home.

My sample highlights the different levels of material support that families of higher socioeconomic status are able to offer their daughters. While all of the families of these successful teen moms were supportive, the ways that they were able to be supportive differed based on the family's economic standing. While some parents could provide more monetary contributions, others could offer babysitting services instead. Economic capital, in the form of material support, is at the root of the other types of capital--economic capital is directly convertible to money. While Bourdieu's other types

of capital are not directly convertible to money, they can influence and contribute to what can be translated to economic capital. While socioeconomic status does not appear to affect the amount of emotional support a family can provide, a family's resources do affect the material support that they can offer. The level of material support that a young mother has can either restrict or expand the options that she has to choose from.

Education is one of these opportunities. This serves to continue the pattern of inequality for future generations, because those who cannot afford transformational experiences, such as college, will have repeatedly restricted experiences and those that can afford these experiences will continue to grow.

#### COGNITIVE SUPPORT

In addition to emotional and material support as forms of enacted social support, cognitive support is helpful for individuals. Cognitive support consists of information, knowledge or advice that might help someone to cope with their situation (Jacobson 1986: 252). Of course, cognitive support and emotional support can very much overlap, particularly in terms of "advice."

Cognitive support manifests itself as human capital, which is actually an economic concept. Human capital consists of education, medical care, and other types of trainings. These things are positively associated with well-being, and an increased income (Weaver and Habibov 2012: 48). Increasing a person's human capital will increase their independence, and likelihood of acquiring a reliable job. Unlike the salary itself, something such as education cannot be separated from that person. Once someone is educated, that cannot be taken away from him or her. Cognitive support can help teen mothers to achieve things such as getting into college, or ensuring that their babies are

properly cared for. Increasing their human capital will help to create an improved situation for the teen mother and her new family.

Among my respondents I tended to see cognitive support come in the form of advice related to mothering (feeding, sleeping, doctor visits etc.) or about college and education. While cognitive support seemed like it would vary greatly by socioeconomic status, some of the most impoverished respondents actually received the greatest amount of cognitive support because they were attending The Care Center. The teachers, counselors and college advisors provide an immense amount of cognitive support for the students, always reminding them of the greater opportunities they will have if they continue their education. Through their experiences at The Care Center, teen mothers were gaining valuable human capital that they could take with them after graduation.

#### *Cognitive Support Through Education*

The Care Center is an intervention in the progression of the life of a teen mother – one that can help to break and reshape the cycle of class reproduction by providing its students with the human capital and network ties they need to move upwards. However, from my interviews with the young mothers there and in my observations during my summer internship, it seems as though there is only a partial redirection of the intergenerational pattern. Without the corresponding economic capital, this potential is rarely fully realized.

Four of the ten respondents were attending or had already graduated from The Care Center. All of those who attended spoke very highly of the support systems they had from the faculty at the school. Anita, in particular, stressed her gratefulness for the help of The Care Center staff:

They're very supportive and those are the people that you can really rely on, really the most. Like they push you to succeed in life, they help you get into college, they do a lot of stuff, just so you can come here, not only just to come here, but you know so you can. Like I come here, ever since I started coming here I became a whole different person. They took us to field trips, they did so many things. And there was a lot of girls, like graduating here. And that's my next goal. I just need one more exam so I can graduate. So I can go to college, and they, all the teachers here are amazing. The counselors. Everybody here, they're so good. They like push you to help you be a better person in life and succeed.

Throughout her interview, Anita expressed her gratefulness for the opportunities that have been opened up through her enrollment with The Care Center. She knows that she will be better off moving forward after having graduated with the GED. In addition to the education and knowledge that she is gaining, Anita is also gaining advice for the future from the counselors and college advisor. At The Care Center, staff members regularly talk to students about their future plans and what they will do upon earning the GED degree. It is made clear that while the GED itself is a good accomplishment, young mothers should strive for more. Irene, 20, is also a student at The Care Center, and similarly expressed her appreciation. She discussed how The Care Center has helped her to open her eyes to greater opportunities and how her teachers have helped her to set higher goals for herself.

They've done a lot. They've helped me figure out my future, they've helped me with my son's future, um they've helped me calm with my anxiety. My counselor, Daniela, she's always, noticing different things about me where I don't even notice it. And immediately she figures out something to help me relax myself to really open my eyes to the world, knowing that you can do more than you have done. She encourages me to like, go to college, do what I need to do. She tells me you know get that job that you want. Do what's on your mind.

As we can see, Irene received cognitive support from The Care Center staff, but she also felt very emotionally supported. Prior to attending The Care Center, Irene did not see the point in striving for school after high school. The Care Center helped her to reevaluate

and create new goals for herself. Upon graduation from The Care Center with her GED, Irene now wants to pursue a program to obtain a CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant) certificate. Through continuing her education, Irene will gain additional human capital that she would not have otherwise gained. Her additional knowledge and skills will stay with her and she can put them towards a career, such as a Certified Nursing Assistant.

Respondents who did not attend The Care Center also received cognitive support regarding college attendance, although the topic did not come up as frequently with these respondents. Family members and partners often encouraged respondents to attend college, or to continue their education. While Pamela's birth mother was not as helpful in this regard, her foster mother, Julia, supported and encouraged her to attend college when she was feeling overwhelmed.

[Julia] helped me find housing and like save my money and go to New York. And she's the one that actually planned it cuz I was not gonna go to college, I was like 'hmm guess I'm not gonna go' and she was like 'you have to go' so she helped me like figure out everything. And she always does still. And she pushed me a lot, cuz I had gotten the acceptance letters and I had just like kind of threw em in the corner and not even thought about them cuz I was so overwhelmed with everything else. And then it came to be like August and she was like 'are you going to college?' and I was like 'I don't know I haven't even thought about it yet,' and she was like, 'well, you have like no time left and you should really go' and so we sat down together and we looked at all the schools that I got accepted to, and like most of them, like for you to accept your acceptance had already passed. So I only had like two choices, and I was like 'eh I don't want to stay here, so I'll try New York.'

The support that Pamela received from her foster mother translated into human capital. Her mother advised her to accept her college offers and continue her education at a post-secondary institution. She would then gain an invaluable education that could not be taken away from her. Furthermore, this education will likely enable her to gain a more stable, or higher paying job upon graduation. Many high school girls, although certainly

not all, have a goal of attending college. Teen mothers who receive this encouragement are gaining human capital that will help them close the gap with their classmates who are not also mothers.

### *Parenting Advice*

In addition to academic advice relating to school and college, respondents also received advice for parenting. Anita's mother often kept up with her to help her learn parenting techniques, and make sure she was doing the right things. Anita also had similar support from her aunt with whom she lived for a period of time. The coaching that her family members gave her included parenting skills that Anita would retain for life.

She [her mother] was always telling me how, cuz this was my first child. You know how when you have your first child you don't really know, like parenting. She was helping me, she was guiding me through things. What not to do, what to do with my son. Helping me bring him to the hospital, to the doctors, it was good.

In comparison to other respondents such as Pamela, Anita received a lot of advice about how to be a new parent of a child. Pamela, on the other hand, did not have much help at all when she was first learning the ins and outs of parenting. Her birth mother was not present to guide her and while her foster mom was sometimes there, she was not consistently acting as a mentor.

### *The Importance of the Social Network*

While many of the women in my sample were emotionally, materially, and cognitively supported by family members, significant others, friends, and teachers, the levels of social capital among them varied to a great extent. Bourdieu explains that the contacts in one's network (that makes up his or her social capital) can be used to secure or advance one's position (Appelrouth 2012: 658). Some contacts are more "beneficial"

than others because they can provide access to greater opportunities. The social network is a place where the various types of support combine to create the web of people that are available to help. Some young women had a significant amount of emotional or cognitive support, but the contacts in their social network did not help to “advance” their position because these ties were not to people in power or in the position to provide them with a new opportunity.

Inevitably, some people have more individuals in their social network than others. Similarly, some people have social networks with individuals that hold more power, or social capital themselves. In addition to providing emotional comfort or stability, a member of one’s social network could potentially aid that person in advancing herself socially or economically. People with stronger social networks will be able to connect with others who may be able to help them out in a time of need. This could include a letter of recommendation for admission to an academic institution, or a friend who can secure an interview for a new job. In relation to teen mothers, this might consist of knowing someone who owns a childcare center and can help with getting their child into that program – we must consider that what would advance a teen mother socially is not necessarily the same as what would advance a “regular” teen. A teen mother may need different contacts in her network in order to achieve her goals. If we know the source of successful young mothers’ social support, it could provide insight into how to help other young moms who are not doing as well.

In my study, some respondents did have stronger social networks that helped them further their life. Often times, this also included the contacts that their partner had. For example, Allison’s husband, Joseph, worked at a fast food restaurant when they were

dating in high school. However, after she gave birth to their first child, he got a new job at a sheet metal shop through one of his friends who also worked at the company. Since getting his foot in the door, Joseph has been able to work his way up, and is now a manager there. Financially, they are comfortable, but the initial job came from the connection to the friend. Joseph's social capital enabled him to gain a better job, thus providing more material support for their family.

## CONCLUSION

While there are certainly differences between the types of support and the types of capital that tend to go along with these supports, there is also a good amount of overlap between them all. Attending college is one particular opportunity that requires all of these. This process involves economic, human, social, and cultural capital, and will result from teen mothers receiving various types of social support. Of course, attending college at all requires a certain degree of material support and economic capital – that which is necessary to pay for the education. However, many teen mothers would not even consider attending college without the emotional and cognitive support of their family members, friends, and partners. Their personal social networks have enabled them to strive for bigger goals, and to increase their own human capital.

Nicole provides a good example of the combination of many types of support and capital. She has benefitted from each of the various types throughout the process of pregnancy and young parenting. Her parents, although divorced, are both economically stable and able to support her with concrete goods as well as monetary donations. Her upper middle class family has a comfortable amount of economic capital, which they are

able to use to help their daughter. Additionally, Nicole has found material assistance in government aid. Nicole also receives emotional support from her family. She and her son see her mother every single day, and Nicole has grown close to her mother. At one point in the interview, Nicole referred to her mother as her “co-parent,” indicating the high level of emotional and material support that her mother provides. Her friend Pamela, who also has a young son, has also supported her emotionally. Pamela had a baby before Nicole did and was able to help her cope with the situation and provide comfort during a difficult period of time.

In Nicole’s family, she was always expected to attend college and to perform well academically. Her parents raised her with the goal of going to college. This is the type of cultural capital that will be rewarded by American society after high school. Furthermore, the knowledge that Nicole is gaining through her double major at a Massachusetts university will serve her well in the future – this knowledge is building her human capital, which she could use to her advantage in the job market.

Among respondents overall, college was a point where the various enacted supports came together. In order to successfully get to college and get through college, respondents needed a certain degree of material, emotional, and cognitive support that came from their personal social network.

Respondents all showed overlapping types of support, but certain types of support seemed to be more transformative than others. While providing diapers and childcare or offering emotional support can be crucial to surviving daily stress, they are not necessarily transformative for the future. Other types of material support such as

providing a place to live in order to save money, or paying college tuition will be more transformative for one's life in the future.

In my findings, the teen mothers who categorized themselves as middle class did seem to be off to a much more solid start than those who categorized themselves as lower-working class – as social reproduction theory would predict. Two of these women are graduating from college this year, while a third is in her second year of college. The fourth works part-time and stays home with her children, while her husband has a stable job and is able to support the family. However, my findings diverge slightly from the expectations of social reproduction theory when we look at the trajectory of lower-working class women. Two young women who categorized themselves as from lower-working class families will graduate with Bachelor's degrees this year. A third woman completed some college, but is now working a stable job and supporting herself and her two children. Social reproduction theory would not have predicted these outcomes. However, for the rest of the lower-working class women that I interviewed, family socioeconomic status does seem to play a role in the types of support that are available and the resulting life outcomes.

It is very interesting to note that when we look at who is receiving a four-year post-secondary degree, there is not a convincing pattern according to family socioeconomic status. Two of the four middle-class women are currently attending four-year institutions. Similarly, two of the six lower-working class women are also attending four-year institutions. This represents half of the middle-class women and just a third of the lower-working class women, however a larger sample size would be needed in order

to determine if these figures are statistically representative. Each of these four women is gaining the college degree that will transform her future.

## Chapter 5: CONCLUSION

In attempting to determine the role of social support for the lives of teen mothers, I was certainly able to draw some conclusions from my sample of respondents. Mainly, I determined that certain types of social support are more beneficial to a teen mother than others. In particular, monetary material support is more transformative than goods and services or other types of emotional and cognitive support. This means that supportive financial contributions such as direct donations, providing housing (or paying rent), and paying college tuition will be more beneficial in transforming the woman's life into a successful one. While these other supports are certainly important for day-to-day life and personal/family well-being, they are less likely to lead to upward mobility, or a disruption to the reproduction of poverty. Unfortunately, these transformative assets are often only available to teen mothers of middle or upper-middle class socioeconomic status.

Additionally, human capital is crucial for teen mothers' successful futures. A young mother who continues her education and graduates from college is much better off than one who only graduates from high school, or drops out. For this reason, interventions such as The Care Center are very important for teen mothers. Many young women who do not have social support at home or in their public school need someone to believe in them and to teach them. While these programs may not be able to give teen mothers monetary contributions, the cognitive support that they provide and the education and aspirations that they instill make up a type of transformative support in themselves.

Social reproduction theory would predict that middle-class teen mothers are much better off than their lower-working class counterparts. For the most part, I found this to

be true, in particular among the middle-class respondents. However, among lower-working class respondents, I found three who appeared to be on a more solid track than the others. These women stray from the predictions of social reproduction theory.

### *Looking Forward*

In the future, my findings could help to shape a larger study of a similar nature. If this study was expanded upon, there are a few changes that would help to make it more reliable. First, I would interview a larger sample of teen mothers from a broader range of geographic locations. The majority of my interviewees lived in Massachusetts, which statewide actually has one of the lowest teen birth rates in the nation (although the rate in the city of Holyoke, where four of my respondents lived, is significantly higher than the national average). The study would benefit from respondents that reside in a bigger variety of states and cities. It would be interesting to look at the results if we could follow my respondents' lives over a longer period of time, allowing for a more conclusive judgment of their outcomes. This would enable me to track factors such as their income, employment status and children's education, which would provide a more complete picture of the influences of these factors on their lives.

Further research in this area would be beneficial for drawing stronger conclusions, and therefore determining how our government policies should be written and how our education systems are organized. If we can conclude that interventions like The Care Center are important, then we should support those organizations to a greater extent, in order to help more teen mothers reach success. The teen mothers in my study certainly benefitted from the cognitive and emotional support that The Care Center provided for them. It would make sense that other young mothers would benefit from similar support.

Moreover, if we agree that teen parents tend to live in poverty because they came from impoverished families themselves, rather than because of their decisions to raise a baby at a young age, then perhaps we should focus our efforts more towards eradicating poverty and creating a stronger education system overall. In my study, the majority of respondents did come from lower-working class families and those who came from middle-class families did not seem to be worse off financially after giving birth, because of the support that they received from their families. Had these women lost class status after giving birth, it would have demonstrated the notion that teen pregnancy causes poverty – but they did not. Further longitudinal research could make this point more solidly. While much of the American public still has the impression that teen pregnancy causes poverty, further research could help to disprove this hypothesis and help us to refocus our efforts.

APPENDICES

*Appendix #1: Informed Consent Form*

Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in this interview as a part of my senior thesis research project, designed to study social support and success among teen mothers. If you agree to participate, you will take part in an interview that is approximately one hour long, and be asked to fill out a chart about your support network. You will be allowed to stop the interview at any point, or refuse to answer any question without penalty. There are no known risks to participating in this study.

All information collected from the interview will remain confidential. You will be given a pseudonym in order to maintain privacy. With your permission, I will record the interview, but your name and contact information will be taken off the transcription, and only available to me.

If you have questions, please contact me, Melanie Sharick, at 413-461-5529, or [sharick\\_melanie@wheatoncollege.edu](mailto:sharick_melanie@wheatoncollege.edu). Additionally, you may contact my faculty advisor, Karen McCormack, at [mccormack\\_karen@wheatoncollege.edu](mailto:mccormack_karen@wheatoncollege.edu). You may also reach out to Wheaton College's Research Compliance Officer, Joel Relihan at 508-286-3662 or [relihan\\_joel@wheatoncollege.edu](mailto:relihan_joel@wheatoncollege.edu).

---

With my signature, I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I can refuse to answer any question, or withdraw my participation at any point, without penalty.

---

Signature

---

Date

---

Signature of Interviewer

*Appendix #2: Demographic Questionnaire*

Please answer the following questions. If there is some information that you are unwilling to give that is okay, you may leave that section blank.

1. How old are you?
  
2. How old were you when you gave birth?
  
3. What is your race/ethnicity?
  
4. What town did you grow up in/go to school in?
  
5. How would you categorize your family's socioeconomic status? Please circle one.  
lower/working class    lower middle class    upper middle class    upper class?
  
6. How much schooling have you completed at this point?
  
7. Did you attend private or public elementary/high school?
  
8. What are your parents' education levels?
  
9. Are your parents married? Separated, divorced, single parents, guardians?
  
10. Are either or both of your parents employed?
  
11. Are you employed? Where?
  
12. Do you receive federal assistance, and if so, what form of assistance?

Interview questions

Ask respondent to fill out the brief background questionnaire.

*Goals:*

- How did you see your life playing out before you found out you were pregnant?
  - What has changed?
  - Did you plan on attending college before you got pregnant?
  
- What are your goals for the future now? Career aspirations?
- Do these goals fall in line with the ones you had before becoming a mom?
  
- How have your life goals changed since having a baby? Higher aspirations?  
(Lower?)

(At this point, the participant is given the Social Network Map to fill out.)

*Questions about support:*

- Do you receive support from family, friends, or other role models in your life?
  - What about social workers, teachers,
  
- How did you feel when you first found out that you were pregnant?
  
- How did your mother/father/siblings react when you told them that you were pregnant?
  
- Did you tell the baby's father? How did he react?
  
- How do you manage time?
  - Tell me about what a typical day looks like for you and your child?
  
- Tell me about who you receive the most support from?  
This could be:
  - Financially – bills, education, groceries, childcare, child support
  
  - Emotionally – someone you can talk to?
  
  - Concrete support (diapers, baby food or babysitting)
  
- Is there one specific person that you can point to who provides the most support?
  - Did this person encourage you to pursue higher education?

-Are there also family members or close friends who you feel have been unsupportive in the process of pregnancy/motherhood?

-Tell me about how this person was unsupportive.

-How do you manage childcare?

-How do you manage your finances? Do you receive financial assistance from a family member or significant other in order to help with essential “fees” for your child?

-Do you receive any federal assistance? What type?

*Questions about participant’s mother:*

-Tell me about how your mother responded when you told her you were pregnant?

-Did her views change as you got closer to giving birth, or after the baby arrived?

-Do you feel that your mother can still act as a mother to you, even though you are also a mother now? Power dynamics

-Does/did your mother allow you to live in her house? Do/did you want to?

*Questions about the baby’s biological father:*

-Is the father involved in your life? Or in the child’s life?

-What are your expectations of the father?

-Does the father support you financially even if he is not involved?

-Did the father want you to have the baby? Suggest abortion?

*Participant’s father:*

-What about your own father? Is he, or has he ever been a part of your life?

-Does/did he have a positive impact on your family?

-Response upon learning about your pregnancy?

-In conclusion, what factors would you point to that have aided you most in getting to where you are?

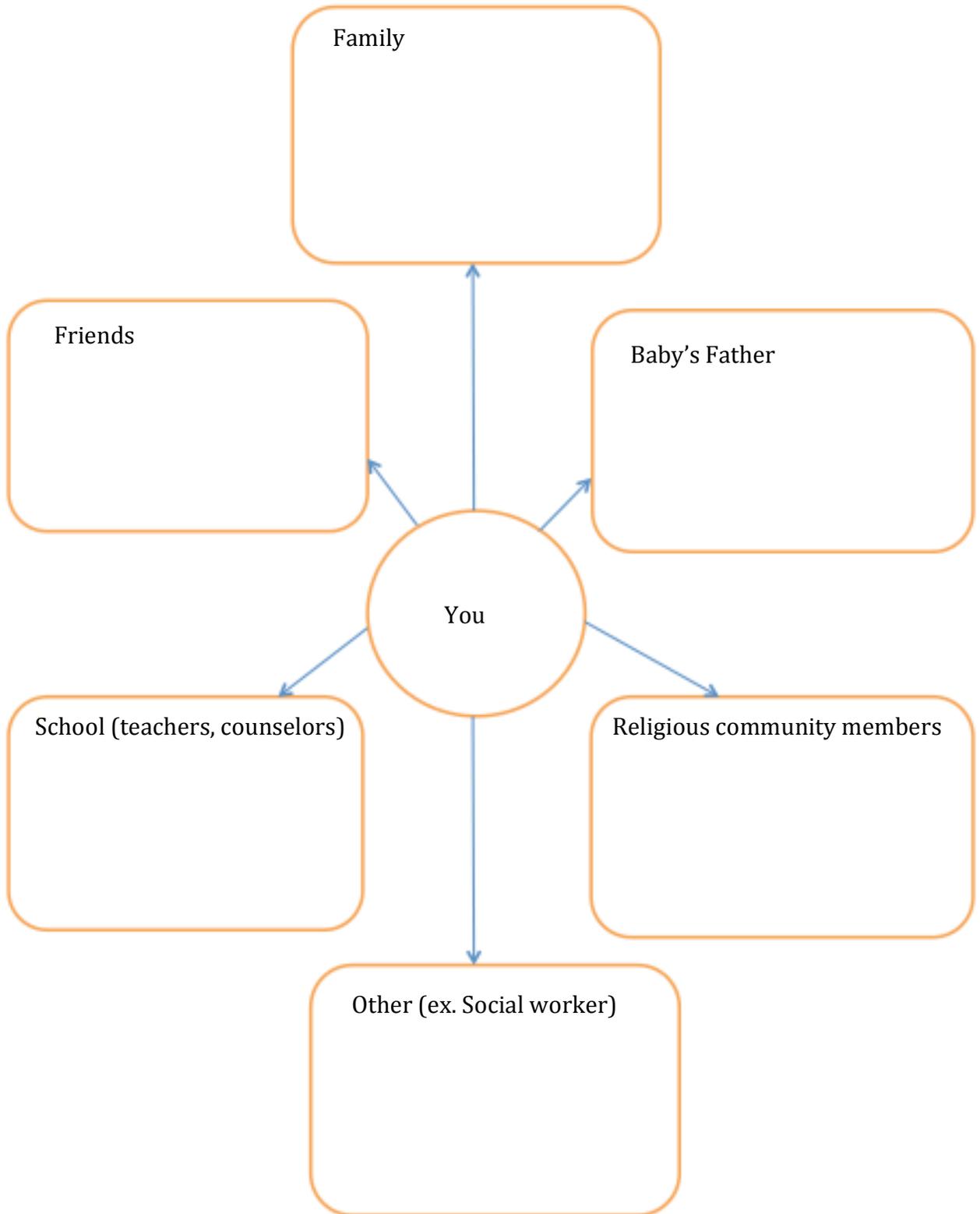
-Support – financial, emotional, concrete

-Education

-Personality

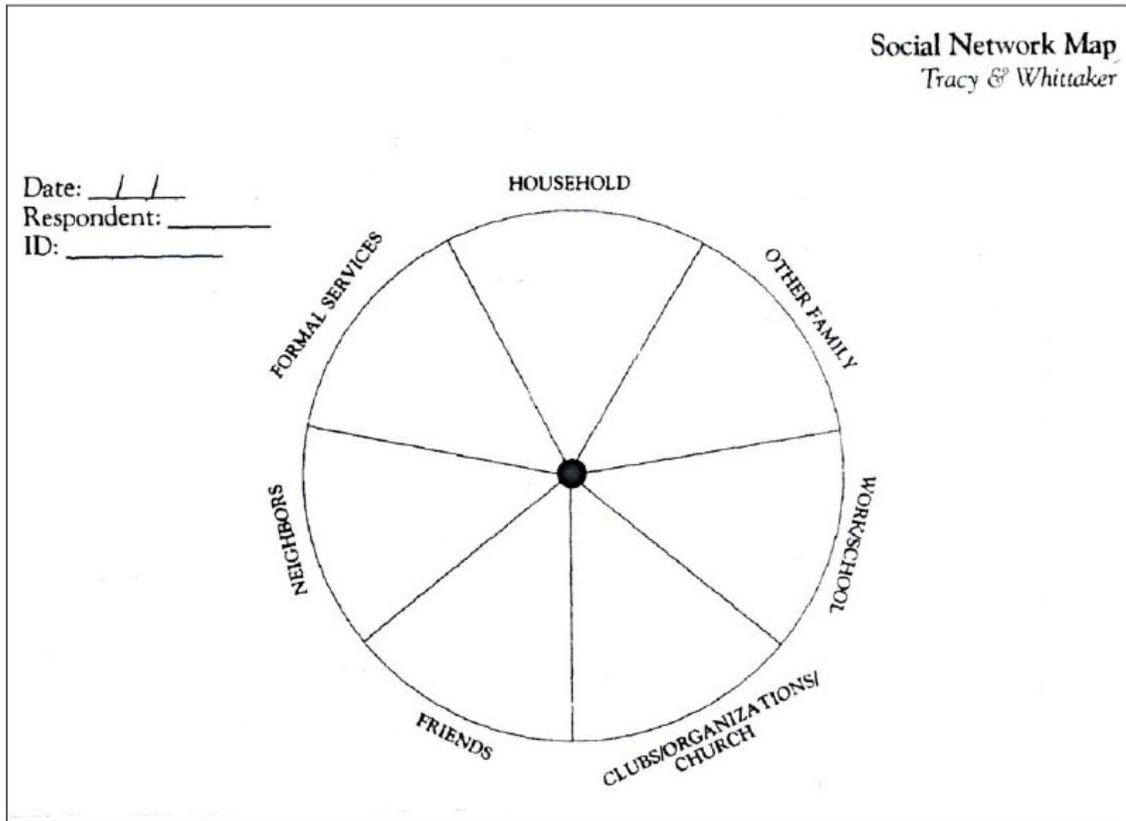
-Is there anything else that you would like to add?

*Appendix #4: Social Network Map*



Appendix #5: Tracy and Whittaker Social Network Map

**FIGURE 2**  
**SOCIAL NETWORK MAP**



Source: Tracy and Whittaker (1990:463)

## REFERENCES

- Bernstein, Basil. 1977. "Social Class, Language, and Socialization." Pp. 477 in *Power and Ideology in Education*, edited by Jerome Karabel and A.H. Halsey. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Borkowski, John et al. 2007. *Risk and Resilience: Adolescent Mothers and Their Children Grow Up*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction." Pp. 496 in *Power and Ideology in Education*, edited by Jerome Karabel and A. H. Halsey. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1998. *Practical Reason*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bowles, Samuel and Herbert Gintis. 1976. *Schooling in Capitalist America*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bunting, Lisa and Colette McAuley. 2004. "Research Review: Teenage pregnancy and motherhood: the contribution of support." *Child and Family Social Work* 9(3):207-215.
- Coleman, James S. 1988. "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital." *American Journal of Sociology* 94: S95-S120.
- Farkas, George. 2006. "How Educational Inequality Develops." *National Poverty Center Working Paper Series*.
- Gee, Christina and Jean Rhodes. 2003. "Adolescent Mothers' Relationship With Their Children's Biological Fathers: Social Support, Social Strain, and Relationship Continuity." *Journal of Family Psychology* 17(3): 370-383.
- Geronimus, Arline. 1997. "Teenage Childbearing and Personal Responsibility: An Alternative View." *Political Science Quarterly* 112(3): 405-430.
- Hamilton, Brady and Stephanie J. Ventura. 2012. *Birth Rates for U.S. Teenagers Reach Historic Lows for All Age and Ethnic Groups* (NCHS Data Brief No. 89). Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.
- Hofferth, Sandra, Lori Reid and Frank L. Mott. 2001. "The Effects of Early Childbearing on Schooling over Time." *Family Planning Perspectives* 33(6): 259-267.

- Hotz, V. Joseph, Susan W. McElroy, and Seth G. Sanders. 2008. "Consequences of Teen Childbearing for Mothers." Pp. 51-92 in *Kids Having Kids: Economic Costs and Social Consequences of Teen Pregnancy*, edited by Saul Hoffman and Rebecca Maynard. Washington DC: Urban Institute Press.
- Jacobson, David E. 1986. "Types and Timing of Social Support." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 27(3): 250-264.
- Kaplan, Elaine Bell. 1996. "Black Teenage Mothers and Their Mothers: The Impact of Adolescent Childbearing on Daughters' Relations with Mothers." *Social Problems* 43(4): 427-443.
- Kaplan, Elaine Bell. 1997. *Not Our Kind of Girl: Unraveling the Myths of Black Teenage Motherhood*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Lareau, Annette. 2011. *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Luker, Kristin. 1996. *Dubious Conceptions: The Politics of Teen Pregnancy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Luster, Tom, Laura Bates, Hiram Fitzgerald, Marcia Vandenberg, and Judith Peck Key. 2004. "Factors Related to Successful Outcomes Among Preschool Children Born to Low-Income Adolescent Mothers." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 62(1): 133-146.
- MacLeod, Jay. 2009. *Ain't No Makin' It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Martin, Joyce et al., 2013. *Births: Final Data for 2012*. National Vital Statistics Reports. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved October 26, 2014 ([http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr62/nvsr62\\_09.pdf#table01](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr62/nvsr62_09.pdf#table01)).
- Martin, Joyce, Brady Hamilton, Michelle J.K. Osterman et al. 2015. *Births: Final data for 2013*. National Vital Statistics Reports 64(1): 1-65. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.
- Massachusetts Department of Public Health. 2014. *Massachusetts Births 2011 and 2012*. Boston Office of Data Management and Outcomes Assessment.
- Mathews, T.J. and Brady Hamilton. 2009. *Delayed Childbearing: More Women Are Having Their First Child Later in Life* (NCHS Data Brief No. 21). Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.
- McLanahan, Sara and Christine Percheski. 2008. "Family Structure and the Reproduction of Inequalities." *Annual Review of Sociology* 34: 257-76

- McLanahan, Sara. 1985. "Family Structure and the Reproduction of Poverty." *American Journal of Sociology* 90(4): 873-901.
- Sadler, Lois, Martha Swartz, Patricia Ryan-Krause, Victoria Seitz, Mikki Meadows-Oliver, Margaret Grey, and Donna Clemmens. 2007. "Promising Outcomes in Teen Mothers Enrolled in a School-Based Parent Support Program and Child Care Center." *Journal of School Health* 77(3): 121-130.
- Schrag, Allison, and Ada Schmidt-Tieszen. 2014. "Social Support Networks of Single Young Mothers." *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* 31: 315-327.
- Shapiro, Thomas. 2004. *The Hidden Cost of Being African American*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Shuger, Lisa. 2012. *Teen Pregnancy and High School Dropout: What Communities Can Do to Address These Issues*. Washington, DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.
- SmithBattle, Lee. 2007. "Legacies of Advantage and Disadvantage: The Case of Teen Mothers." *Public Health Nursing* 24(5): 409-420.
- Sorenson, Ann Marie. 1995. "Religious Involvement Among Unmarried Adolescent Mothers: A Source of Emotional Support?" *Sociology of Religion* 56(1): 71-81.
- Thompson, Maxine Seaborn. 1986. "The Influence of Supportive Relations on the Psychological Well-Being of Teenage Mothers." *Social Forces* 64(4): 1006-1024.
- Thompson, Maxine Seaborn, and Wilma Peebles-Wilkins. 1992. "The Impact of Formal, Informal, and Societal Support Networks on the Psychological Well-Being of Black Adolescent Mothers." *Social Work* 37(4): 322-328.
- Tracy, Elizabeth and James Whittaker. 1990. "The Social Network Map: Assessing Social Support in Clinical Practice." *Families in Society* 71(8): 461-469.
- Turner, R. Jay et al. 1990. "Social Support and Outcome in Teenage Pregnancy." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 31(1): 43-57.
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2015. *Current Population Survey: Earnings and Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment*. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Labor.
- Weaver, Robert D. and Nazim Habibov. 2012. "Social Capital, Human Capital, and Economic Well-Being in the Knowledge Economy: Results from Canada's General Social Survey." *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 39(2): 31-53.

Weinstein, Megan. 1998. "The Teenage Pregnancy Problem: Welfare Reform and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996." *Berkeley Journal of Gender, Law and Justice* 13(1): 117-147.

Williams, D.R. et al. 1991. "Religion and psychological distress in a community sample." *Social Science Medicine* 32: 1257-1262.