TEENAGE MOTHERS WHO GO ON TO EARN A COLLEGE DEGREE:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Jena Kerry Salazar

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:
Linda Gable, Ph.D., Committee Chair
Kelly Bingham, Ed.D., Committee Member
Marc Mossburg, Ph.D., Committee Member
Scott Watson, Ph.D., Associate Dean, Advanced Programs
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to discover the shared experiences of the two percent of women who have obtained a college degree by age 30 after having been a teen mother. Most studies dealing with the issue of teen pregnancy focus on the adverse consequences of becoming a teen mother; however, this study focuses on the success stories. The central research question addressed by this study was: “What were the unique experiences shared by the teen moms who graduated college by age 30 that accounts for their educational success?” This phenomenological study used a questionnaire, surveys, and interviews as methods of data collection. Moustakas’ method will be used to analyze data gathered through interviews. All data gathered was triangulated to ensure trustworthiness. Seventeen women answered and completed the questionnaire and surveys, 11 women participated in a one-on-one interview. The findings included four major themes that were common amongst the participants’ stories: challenges faced during pregnancy and subsequent attendance at college, resources available during pregnancy and while attending college, turning points experiences by the participants that changed their course, and motivation to continue when so many did not. This study has implications that are far reaching. Government, social and educational institutions can use the results of this study to influence policy aimed at helping teen mothers find the resources available to them that will enable them to continue with their education and increase the 2% who graduate from college by age 30.

Keywords: teen pregnancy, educational attainment, college persistence, challenges experienced by teen moms, motivation
DEDICATION

I would like to especially thank my husband, Rosendo Salazar, for his enduring support and unconditional love for 22 years. To my six children; Aaron, Alia, Aidan, Dustin, Daisy and Dariyan, I would like to say thank you for your sacrifice these past five years. I know it has not been easy sharing your mother. To my mother, who believes I can do anything, thank you for your encouragement. I have always tried to make you proud of me. To my father-in-law, Russell C. Salazar, you changed my life from the moment I met you. You challenged my thinking and held my feet to the fire, thank you. To my friend Mark, I thank you for your tireless effort on my behalf to listen, read, or simply cheer me on. I am truly grateful for our friendship. To my extended family and friends, thank you for all the encouragement, advice and help you have blessed me with. To my teachers who have taught me and have influenced me throughout my academic journey, I thank you. I love you all! Last but not least, to that baby boy I delivered 21 years ago at the age of 18, thank you for giving my life meaning. I dedicate this dissertation, my life’s work, to you.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Linda Gable, my chair, for her help along this journey. I am grateful she saw my vision and worked alongside me to create this dissertation. She offered valuable feedback and suggestions, which allowed me as a researcher to learn and become better throughout this process. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Lucinda Spaulding, my research consultant, for her extraordinary insight and amazing ability to bring out the best in my writing. Moreover, I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Marc Mossburg and Dr. Kelly Bingham, for assisting me throughout this process. I would also like to acknowledge the many faculty members at Liberty University that provided me with a strong foundation in order to take on this dissertation and see it through to fruition. Finally, I would like to thank and acknowledge the 11 brave, strong and resilient women I had the pleasure of interviewing. Your stories are awe-inspiring. It was my great privilege to listen and write your stories. I am confident that your challenges and perseverance will encourage and inspire other women.
# Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.................................................................................................................................................. 3
DEDICATION.................................................................................................................................................. 4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS................................................................................................................................. 5
Table of Contents .......................................................................................................................................... 6
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.................................................................................................................. 11
  Background .................................................................................................................................................. 12
  Situation To Self ........................................................................................................................................ 14
  Problem Statement ................................................................................................................................... 17
  Purpose Statement .................................................................................................................................... 17
  Significance of the Study ............................................................................................................................ 18
  Research Questions .................................................................................................................................. 19
  Research Plan ........................................................................................................................................... 20
  Delimitations ............................................................................................................................................ 21
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW ....................................................................................................... 24
  Introduction ............................................................................................................................................... 24
  Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................................................. 24
  Review of the Literature ........................................................................................................................... 30
    Contributions to Teen Pregnancy .......................................................................................................... 30
    Consequences of Teen Pregnancy ........................................................................................................ 34
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................... 43
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY ........................................................................................................... 45
  Introduction ............................................................................................................................................... 45
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Researcher’s Role</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Phase</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Phase</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Phase</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Considerations</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Portraits</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1: Challenges Faced During Pregnancy and Subsequent College Attendance</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic underachievement</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low parental expectations</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Unstable life after pregnancy.................................................................92
False starts.............................................................................................102
Financial struggles ...............................................................................106
Daycare concerns ..................................................................................108
Balance.................................................................................................110
Self-doubt..............................................................................................112

Theme 2: Resources Available During Pregnancy and While Attending College.... 113
Parental support ....................................................................................114
Social or institutional supports..............................................................117
Government assistance........................................................................120
Self-reliance and internal resolve.........................................................122

Theme 3: Turning Points Experienced by Participants that Changed Their Course .. 123
End of a relationship................................................................................123
New relationships..................................................................................124
Loss of a job............................................................................................124
Unexpected chance ..............................................................................126
Forced changes......................................................................................126
Unpredictable employment..................................................................127

Theme 4: Motivation to Continue When so Many Did Not .......................... 128
Prove to others......................................................................................128
For their children..................................................................................130
A better life. ..........................................................................................132
Extrinsic motivation..............................................................................134
The Financial Strain Survey ................................................................. 244
The Social Support Network Questionnaire ........................................... 246
APPENDIX K : Interview Log .................................................................. 253
APPENDIX L: Interviews ........................................................................ 254
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In the United States, 305,388 teen girls gave birth in 2012. Roughly one third, or approximately 88,500 teen births, were to girls ages 17 and younger. That translates to 1,700 new teenage moms between the ages of 15 and 17 each week in our country (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2014). Whether viewed in the short or long term, this is an alarming statistic; more importantly, it is a critical social issue with rarely positive implications and consequences. The lives of nearly every citizen of the United States has been or will be in some way affected by teen pregnancy, whether directly by having been a pregnant teen or the father of a child being born to a pregnant teen or indirectly by having a family member or friend who was a pregnant teen, or a taxpayer helping to cover the costs of teen pregnancy. Regardless, teen pregnancy has directly or indirectly had an impact on every United States citizen.

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy first reported in 2006 that a startling 2% of young teen mothers, 17 years old and younger, attain a college degree by age 30 (Hoffman, 2006; The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2012). This statistic, when viewed as a significant part of the landscape for social and personal success, portrays an alarming and disturbing reality. Furthermore, there are numerous studies on teen pregnancy, most of them detailing the bleak societal, educational, and financial prognosis awaiting nearly 98% of teens who become pregnant in America today. This study, however, was not about the 98%. The aim of this study was to attempt to help provide support and encouragement for the 98% by focusing on the 2%. This phenomenological study not only examined the personal phenomenon of women who were teen mothers, but, more importantly, provided insights on how these women overcame these social, educational, and economic
barriers and went on to obtain a college degree by age 30. This chapter provides the background pertinent to this study, the problem and purpose statements, and significance of the study, as well as the research questions, research plan, delimitations, and limitations.

**Background**

Since the 1990s, the United States has had the highest teen pregnancy rate among all developed countries in the world (Kearney & Levine, 2012a). More than 750,000 women younger than age 20 became pregnant in 2006 in the United States (Kost, Henshaw, & Carlin, 2010). That was 7% of all females in that age group. This rate of teen pregnancy is twice as large as it is in England, three times what it is in Canada, and more than nine times higher as rates in Switzerland (Kearney & Levine, 2012b).

In recent years, there have been some positive gains with regard to teen pregnancy in the United States, however, much work still remains. Teenagers having babies in American society is commonplace. A study published by Suellentrop (2010) made a case that “Pregnancy and childbearing among older teens is closely linked to a host of other critical social issues, including poverty and income disparity, overall child well-being, and education to name a few” (pp. 4-5). In fact, a statistical analysis by Stewart and Kaye (2012) offered insights which brought a heightened awareness that 70 percent of teen births were to older teens ages 18 and 19, and an alarming 30 percent were to teens 17 and younger. These previous studies and many others have used the data reported by Hoffman (2006) for The National Campaign To Prevent Teen Pregnancy as a foundation for their own research. In keeping with Hoffman’s report, which classifies teen mothers into three categories, 17 and younger, 18-19 years, and 20-21 years, this study focused on teens that were 17 or younger at the time they gave birth, so the findings can fit within the categorization of the current research. Suellentrop (2010) stated that regardless of the
age of the teen mother, it is important to note delaying child bearing is critical and children born to teen mothers fare worse than those born to mothers in their twenties.

Statistics show an almost extricable link between teen pregnancy and poverty. Since 1981, unintended pregnancies have become increasingly concentrated among poor and low-income women (Guttmacher Institute, 2012). In 2006, the rate of unintended pregnancies among women living in poverty was 132 per 1,000 births; more than five times the rate among women at the highest income level. According to a 2010 study, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy reported a minimum of 75% of teen mothers who are unmarried will be on welfare within 5 years of the birth of their first child. Just two years later, in 2012, the same organization reported 63% of teen mothers were, within the first year of giving birth, receiving some type of public assistance.

The economic forecast among teen mothers is bleak; however, their prospects for educational success are even drearier. To illustrate this point, a study conducted in 2010 by Perper, Peterson, and Manlove showed that of all female high school students in the U.S., 89% attain a high school diploma, while only 51% of teen mothers achieve the same level of education. The aim of this phenomenological study was to identify and understand the mechanisms of resilience, persistence, and perseverance of those two percent of teen mothers who overcame social, educational, and economic barriers and achieved their college degrees by age 30.

Critical to the educational success of any teenager is having both a supportive environment and available resources; however, when it comes to teen mothers, these essential support mechanisms are paramount. This fact was revealed in a 2007 study done by Brosh, Weigal, and Evens, which found many pregnant teens were able to identify what they believed
would help them be successful in their academic futures. Among the most helpful factors mentioned by teen mothers were: someone to talk to, someone to help care for their children while they were either at school or tending to homework, and having someone available to ask child rearing questions. Of these top resources, however, having someone to talk to was believed to be the most essential in helping teen mothers achieve their academic goals. Having a support system is helpful for anyone seeking higher education, but it becomes imperative for teen mothers, who are trying to continue their education. Surprisingly, teen mothers ranked having help in furthering their education, help learning about services, and help with schoolwork as being the least imperative (Brosh, et al., 2007). This study has expanded upon the previous study and uncovered what the participants viewed as the most important resources present, as well as those which were absent, as they worked to overcome the social, educational, and economic barriers in achieving their college degree.

Research into the causality of teen pregnancy continues to expand while stories concerning teen pregnancy and the effects of teen pregnancy continue to make headlines. However, few studies focus on the factors contributing to the academic success of teen mothers (Perrin & Dorman, 2003). This study specifically targeted those factors and subsequently illuminated the experiences of women who were once teen mothers, yet were able to attain a college degree by the age of 30. It was not the intention of this study to glamorize or minimize the seriousness of teen pregnancy, but to identify insights from women who were able to overcome obstacles in order to graduate from college by age 30.

**Situation To Self**

My connection to the topic of this study runs deep; not only am I the product of a teen pregnancy, I became pregnant in high school at the age of 17. In fact, my daughter will be the
first female in my family for five generations, to not have a child as a teenager. Unlike the
women in my family before me, I was able to continue with my education and graduate from
high school, college, and even graduate school despite having been a teen mother. However, I
realize I am the exception, and not just within my family, but statically within the United States.
I am very familiar with the obstacles I had to overcome and how I overcame them. I am also
aware of the assistance and support mechanisms in place in my own life and how I utilized them
to help me to continue with my education. This study will focus on the small percentage of
women who were pregnant as teenagers, yet they still managed to fulfill their academic potential
and earn a college degree by age 30.

My interest in this topic stems from my own personal experiences. My philosophical
assumptions to this research flowed from a social constructionist paradigm where I relied on the
experiences of my participants, the women who were teen mothers and overcame their situations
to obtain a college degree by age 30. Participants in this study are considered participants
because of their expertise and firsthand experience with the phenomenon. From an ontological
perspective, the realities of each woman in this study are subjective (Creswell, 2007). Their
perspectives are unique; therefore, I aimed to uncover what could be known about their
perspectives. While avoiding researcher bias, my story acted as a filter by which to construct
reality of the participants. I was an “insider” looking in, and will be able to validate the research
by uncovering what “rings true” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). I used the interview process to
extrapolate quotes and themes from the participants to use as evidence and data to validate their
experiences.

Epistemologically, the greatest strength I brought as a researcher was my knowledge of
the subject matter. The relationship between the phenomenon being examined and myself is
important. According to Moustakas (1994), the researcher has a specific objective in conducting their investigation, which is personal to the researcher. Moreover the researcher is “intimately connected with the phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 59). I was better able to establish a relationship between the participants and myself, which allowed me to lessen the distance between the research and the participants (Creswell, 2007). It was imperative that I take precaution to be aware of my bias, and used it to critically validate the stories and experiences of the participants.

My axiological assumption was evident as I told my own story. I took on the role of a human instrument for this study. As a researcher, I used “epoche” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22), or “bracketing” (p. 97) techniques, to diminish bias throughout the study. Putting brackets around and then setting aside, for the time being, anything the participants might say that evokes a reaction in me accomplished this. Although my own experience afforded me valuable insights, it was imperative to comprehend the participants’ experiences as objectively as possible. Thus, sharing my own narrative was limited throughout the research process. The participants were aware of my story in order to gain the rapport necessary to conduct the research. These restrictions allowed the participants to share their own experiences without being influenced by a story of another.

For this qualitative research, the rhetorical assumption I employed is literary in form (Moustakas, 1994). I used first person pronouns. In asking interview questions, I gathered information from the participants in a personal, yet informal manner; however, the discussion of the findings was factual and objective. Creating this type of environment facilitated the discovery of the true stories of the participants whom have similar experiences with the shared phenomenon.
Problem Statement

Teen pregnancy remains a high priority, both socially and economically in the United States; however, the critical problem with this phenomenon was just beneath the surface and just beyond the reach of much of the current literature. In 2006, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy reported that 60% of teen mothers do not graduate from high school on time and 98% will not graduate from college by age 30. Hoffman, in 2006, corroborates these findings by showing when young women put off child bearing until their early 20s these numbers improve to 25% and 91% respectively. A more recent (2012) study by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy confirmed these findings demonstrating that 98% of teen mothers are unable to overcome the social, educational, and economic barriers and achieve a college degree by age 30. This phenomenological study will address the lack of transferable knowledge available to help the 98% move over into the 2% category.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological research was to study the experiences of the 2% of women who, despite giving birth as a teenager and facing barriers went on to achieve a college degree by age 30. For this study, teen pregnancy was defined as women who had a baby after the age of 13, but prior to 18 years of age and chose to raise their child. Once gathered, the information was reviewed and synthesized into corollaries designed to provide guidance to help the 98% identify, understand, and eventually overcome the barriers that may be preventing them from achieving academic success. The objective of this study was to gain insight into the events, decisions, and circumstances that allowed these women to overcome the social, educational, and economic barriers surrounding their journey toward obtaining a college degree.
Significance of the Study

In American society, the problem of teen pregnancy is prominent. Empirically, this study will add to the literature because the research on the 2% of teen mothers who obtain their postsecondary education is rare. Previous studies have focused on the women who became teen mothers and the consequences thereof (Hoffman, 2006; Rector & Johnson, 2005). They focused on the fact that teen mothers were more likely to be on welfare (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2012), or that teen mothers were less likely to graduate from high school or continue with their education (Perper et al., 2010). In contrast, this study aimed to focus on the phenomenon of the two percent of women who were successful in obtaining a college degree by 30 after having been a teen mother. By doing so, the other 98% of teen mothers will have a resource which will enable them to self-examine and draw parallels to their own experience and perhaps achieve a similar level of success.

This study is significant because of the societal implications and ramifications associated with this issue. With a staggering 750,000 teen pregnancies each year in the United States (Guttmacher Institute, 2010), society must address the fact that 98% or 735,000 teen mothers will not go on to achieve a college degree by 30, as first reported by Hoffman in 2006. On the flip side, only 15,000 or 2% of teen mothers will graduate from college by 30, as compared to 9% of young women who wait until 20 or 21 to have children (Hoffman, 2006; The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2010, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2012). Not surprisingly, the rate at which women graduate from college increases as childbearing is delayed. The U.S. Census Bureau (2012) reported nearly 20% of all women over 25 have a college degree. This figure is ten times greater than those reported for teenage mothers.
The phenomenon as experienced by these women is unique, and the theoretical implications of the experiences of women who obtained their college degree after having been young teenage mothers is supported by the principles of Vroom’s (1964) expectancy theory. The conceptual framework from this theory encompasses the ideas of valence, expectancy, and instrumentality. Valence is the significance assigned by a person about the expected outcomes or rewards. Whereas, expectancy is the belief a better effort will result in better performance. Furthermore, instrumentality is the belief that if one performs well, he or she can expect a valued outcome will be achieved. This theoretical framework will support and substantiate the data collected from this study.

The practical implications of this study lie within its focus on the two percent who were successful in graduating from college by age 30 and not on the 98% who did not graduate college by 30. By doing so, I was able to examine the phenomenon as experienced by the women in this study and hypothesize that I would discover the similarities which may have contributed to their success. The intent of this research was to uncover, understand, then provide valuable information to other teen mothers who have a desire to continue their own education, but lack the knowledge, strength, or courage to do so.

**Research Questions**

One central and two sub-questions guided this phenomenological study. The central question was, “What are the unique experiences shared by the teen moms who graduated from college by age 30 that accounts for their success?” The literature supports this overarching question by providing evidence showing that teen pregnancy for most girls leads to academic underachievement (Fergusson & Woodward, 2000; Parkes et al, 2010; Sabia, 2007a; Sabia, 2007b; Spriggs & Halpern, 2008). However, this study aimed to understand the experiences of
women who represent the two percent of teen mothers who were able to overcome the barriers and continue with their education and obtain their college degree by age 30.

The first sub-question in this research was, “What are the unique challenges experienced by teen moms?” It is universally expected that having a baby changes the life of any woman; yet for teenagers, having a baby can be divisive. For some, a baby might offer focus and clarity with regard to setting priorities. Conversely, some teen mothers might experience a departure from their goals after becoming pregnant. As a result of pregnancy, barriers are present in the life of teen moms. Understanding what those barriers are is critical in uncovering how the participants overcame them.

The second sub-question was, “What factors in the context of their lives aid teen mothers in continuing and completing their education?” Along the path of continuing their education it is logical to assume some support systems were in place, which aided these women in continuing with their education. For some, these support systems might have included parents, friends, teachers, spouses, social workers, or mentors, yet for others, they may not have had the support systems in place and instead had to independently plot a course of action. Studies have shown specific support systems were viewed to be most beneficial by teen mothers (Brosh et al, 2007; SmithBattle, 2007). This study built upon previous studies as the participants had the opportunity to articulate what possible support systems, events, turning points, or circumstances might have been present as they overcame barriers that were unique to being a teen mom as they journeyed toward finishing their college degree.

**Research Plan**

In order to discover the shared experiences of the participants, this qualitative study utilized a transcendental phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994). The transcendental
emphasis required the researcher to take an objective, epoche approach to gathering the data and then analyze the data using systematic procedures. Each experience is considered in its singularity. This process is called transcendental because the researcher sees the phenomenon “freshly, as for the first time” and is open to its totality (p. 34). The rationale to use phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence (Creswell, 2007). As the researcher, I addressed my own experiences by telling my story, then bracketed or set it aside (Appendix A). This enabled me to concentrate on the participants’ stories and see their phenomenon freshly, as if I had not experienced it. Data was collected through a questionnaire, surveys, and interviews from the participants who have shared the same phenomenon. The phenomenon of this study is teen mothers who overcame social, educational, and economic barriers and went on to obtain their college degree by age 30. After data was collected, I used my own story to act as a filter in constructing validity as I uncovered themes to develop a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals (Moustakas, 1994). As one who has lived through a similar experience as the participants, I was able to use my own experience with the phenomenon to weed through possible inconsistencies or inaccuracies. This type of validity involved deductive reasoning from observations, and is the most difficult validity to establish. However, this part of triangulation, along with coding and identifying themes was an important piece of the data collection process.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations are boundaries and restrictions set by the researcher in order to limit the scope of the research. For the purpose of this phenomenological study, participants were delimited to being women who were pregnant as a teen, and chose to raise their child. For consistency, and in keeping with previous research, the term ‘teen’ was defined as a girl ranging
in age from 13 to 17. Often times, studies and governmental agencies will separate eighteen and nineteen year olds from other teenagers, as they are adults. In addition to the aforementioned delimitations, each participant must have completed their college degree by age 30. The reason for this parameter is the literature on teen pregnancy and educational attainment does not support looking at women older than age 30. However, the participants could be as young as 21, if they attended college at 17 and graduated in four years. Due to the statistical data guiding this study, college degree was delimited to a four-year undergraduate degree from a public or private institution.

The very subject matter of this study is its greatest limitation. For many women, being a pregnant teenager was a very difficult time in their lives. Women may not want to be found and interviewed. They may have achieved a level of success and may want to avoid a trip down memory lane. Furthermore, some may want to forget about the places in their lives they once were (Perrin & Dorman, 2003). Building a level of rapport with these women was critical to obtaining as much data as possible. Creating an interview environment that was both informal and personable facilitated achieving this rapport. Although bracketing out my own experience throughout the interview process was crucial to the research design, my “insiders” view, knowledge, and experience helped me as the researcher during the data analysis process, to identify commonalities among the participants, and construct validity.

Another limitation of this study is the accessibility of the participants. They might be located all over the United States. It would be cumbersome for the researcher to interview all the participants in person. I made every effort to find participants in North Carolina and the surrounding states. However, with snowball sampling, this will be improbable. Ideally, face-to-face interviews offer the most authentic way to gather data. Video conferencing methods such as
Skype™ or FaceTime™ offered alternatives to face-to-face interviews, yet allow visual interaction. This kept with the personal nature of the interview method and subject matter being discussed.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the shared life experiences of women who have earned a college degree by age 30 after having been a teen mother. This chapter begins with the theoretical framework by which I approached this study. This framework provided me the lens through which I was able to examine the lives of the participants. Next, a review of the literature is presented in two main sections, including: contribution to teen pregnancy and consequences of teen pregnancy. Under these two main headings, I discussed factors such as economics and educational attainment.

Much attention has been given to the negative effects of teen pregnancy, however, few studies have identified factors relating to the success of women who were teen mothers, yet went on to obtain a college degree (Perrin & Dorman, 2003). Although this review of the literature delineated previous research on teen mothers, it is the focus of this dissertation to offer insight from the shared experiences of women who were teen mothers and were able to continue with their education.

Theoretical Framework

What motivates people into action is often studied. It is fascinating to watch individuals who have every reason to fail or at the least underachieve, yet go on to accomplish amazing things. Many theories focus on the needs of the individual to explain why they have been able to overcome or accomplish a particular task. Two examples of this are Abraham Maslow’s (1954) Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Frederick Herzberg’s (1959) Two Factor Theory. Both theories attribute motivation to the meeting of a particular need within the individual. Contrary to these
theories, my theoretical framework for this phenomenological research focused on Victor Vroom’s (1964) Expectancy Theory.

The expectancy theory holds that people have different sets of goals and can be motivated if they have specific expectations. Unlike Maslow (1954) and Herzberg (1959), where the concentration is on needs, the expectancy theory focuses on outcomes. Vroom’s (1964) expectancy theory is based on three variables: valence, expectancy, and instrumentality.

Valence is the significance assigned by a person about the expected outcomes or rewards. These outcomes or rewards can be extrinsic, such as money, promotions, and degrees or intrinsic, such as personal satisfaction, improved self-esteem or general self-respect. It is the satisfaction one can expect to receive after achieving their goals.

Expectancy is the belief that a better effort will result in better performance. The strength of a person’s belief about whether or not they can do a particular task or perform a particular job, speaks to expectancy. Certain factors can influence expectancy. These factors may include resources and support. Probabilities ranging from zero (“I can’t do this job”) to 1.0 (“I have no doubt whatsoever that I can do this job!”) help to explain the expectancy of success one may have about a specific job (Vroom, 1964).

Instrumentality states that if one performs well, he or she can expect a valued outcome will be achieved. Instrumentality is affected by many factors. First, the person has to have a clear understanding of the relationship between performance and outcome. Additionally, they must have trust and faith in the person who will make the decisions as to who gets what outcomes and what the outcome will be. Within the expectancy theory there are relationships. For example, the effort-performance relationship assesses the likelihood that the individual’s effort will be recognized. The performance-reward relationship addresses the extent to which the person
believes being recognized for a good performance will lead to the desired results. Finally, the rewards-personal goals relationship identifies the overall appeal of the potential reward to the individual (Vroom, 1964).

The conceptual framework used in this study, based on the Expectancy Theory of Motivation, is illustrated in figure 1. According to the theory, teen mothers who were highly motivated to graduate from college had the confidence in their ability to do the work required to accomplish their goals. They also possessed the confidence that if they put in the work, they would achieve the desired outcome. Additionally, the 2% of teen mothers who went on to graduate from college really wanted the outcome.

One might make the case that the 98% of teen mothers who did not graduate from college by age 30 did not think they could do the work that would be required to accomplish the goal of college graduation. It is likely the barriers or obstacles were insurmountable in the eyes of the teen mother, or perhaps their motivation was low, because they did not think they would get the desired outcome even if they put in the work, or possibly, they did not want the outcome enough to do anything about it.

Arguably, there are different circumstances between the 2% and the 98%. Some of the differences might be significant while others may be subtle. This study aimed to find out what were the unique experiences shared by the 2% of teen moms who had the motivation to graduate from college by age 30. Moreover, this study examined the challenges experienced by the 2%, which might explain why 98% of teen moms are unsuccessful in graduating from college by age 30.
Although it is important to study what motivated these teen moms to continue with their education, it is equally important to examine their experiences while in college. Making the decision to attend college and further one’s education is a daunting task for anybody, however for teen moms the looming responsibility might seem unbearable. With that reality, motivation may simply not be enough. Vincent Tinto (1993) identified three contributors of student departure from higher education: academic difficulties, the inability for students to resolve their educational and occupational goals, and their failure to remain involved in the intellectual and social life of the school. Tinto’s theory states that, to persist, students must integrate into formal and informal academic and social systems. Academic performance and extracurricular activities are part of the formal systems put in place within academia, whereas interaction with faculty/staff and peer-group relations informal.
In 2006, in a culminating effort, Vincent Tinto and Brian Pusser wrote a report describing a model for instituting a plan of action intended to increase student persistence. Of particular concern was that failure to promote the persistence of low-income students. Although, they found that college enrollment among low-income students had increased, which consequently decreased the gap among them and high-income student enrollment, the gap in rates of completion had not followed the same pattern. Therefore, it became imperative to reflect on the circumstances and create and implement a plan of action to remedy this situation.

Tinto and Pusser (2006) looked at the environment of higher education and concluded there were areas that needed improvement in order to promote success among students, specifically underrepresented students. They broke it down into five conditions that must be present for student success: commitment, expectations, support, feedback and involvement. For the purpose of this study, I focused on support and involvement. Support for students at an institution of higher learning is imperative. There are three main areas of support that students need in order to persist in college.

First, students need financial support, whether that is with filling out financial aid paperwork or securing funds to pay for tuition, books, and living expenses. For teen mothers, this is a form of support that might make or break the likelihood of attending college. Not only are they responsible for themselves, they are now responsible for another person while trying to attend college. Another form of support is advising. Whether it is academic advising or employment/professional advising, students often times need someone to help her navigate the world of post secondary education. Next, students need academic support. Students need access to learning and/or tutoring centers, study skill courses, and possible supplemental instruction (Tinto & Pusser, 2006). Many teen mothers may not have had the proper preparation in high
school to make them successful in college (East, 1998; Maynard, 1995; Plotnick, 1992). This might be the greatest barrier that must be overcome. Finally, students need social support. Informal peer relationships are important for teen moms trying to attend college. This sense of connectedness is beneficial for moms trying to find their way within the world of academia. Formal support in the form of mentor programs can also be extremely beneficial for students (Bergerson & Peterson, 2009).

Tinto (1975, 1993) believes the more involved students are while in college, the more likely they will persist in achieving their goals. Specifically, students who have substantial obligations beyond the classroom need to be fully engaged. Given their extra obligations, teen moms as compared to “traditional” college students, are not able to spend time on campus outside the classroom. Consequently, the classroom may be the only place where students will meet peers, and interact with faculty (Pinto & Pusser, 2006). In their action plan Pinto and Pusser (2006) outline what they believe to be the two most important ways to engage students in the learning process within the classroom, which will assist them in persisting. First, cooperative and/or collaborative learning will require students to be actively involved with their peers. This helps to allow the student to not only be engaged, but also have a role in the group, and a stake in the outcome. Additionally, learning communities are another way to help student be engaged. Learning communities are “. . . a kind of co-registration or block scheduling that enables students to take courses together” (Pinto & Pusser, 200, p 15). Again, having a sense of connectedness to the school environment is beneficial for all students. However, for non-traditional students it becomes imperative for their success.

For this study, I employed both The Expectancy Theory of Motivation and Tinto’s theory of school persistence as the theoretical framework. When examining the motivation of teen
mothers who went on to graduate from college by age 30, it was necessary to uncover their experiences while in college. Understanding the motivation for these teen mothers to attend college and persist until graduation will help get to the root of how these women became a member of the elite 2%. Like other teen mothers, the challenges they faced were tremendous, however, they were able to overcome. Perhaps they were able to use their challenges as a source of inspiration instead of a reason for failure.

**Review of the Literature**

This study broadened the scope of the existing body of knowledge already in the field by addressing women who were once teen mothers and went on to obtain a college degree, specifically since the research on the success stories of teen mothers is rare. This research study will fill in the gap in the literature and aid in providing a resource for other women who find themselves in similar situations, but are not sure how to overcome their circumstances.

**Contributions to Teen Pregnancy**

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Center for Health Statistics reported (2012) the teen birth rate was 34.3 per 1000 women aged 15-19 (Hamilton & Ventura, 2012, p. 1). In 2010, the teen birth rate in the United States reached an all-time low since the data began being collected 70 years ago (Hamilton, Martin & Ventura, 2011). Possible explanations for this trend are reduction of sexual activity among teenagers and greater use of contraception (Kearney & Levine, 2012b). Although teen pregnancy has been declining since the 1950s, the United States remains one of the highest in teen pregnancy among industrialized nations (United Nations Statistics Division, 2011).

According to The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (NCTPTP, 2010), two-thirds of families begun by young unmarried mothers are poor. If starting out at a disadvantage
was not enough, approximately one-quarter of teen mothers go on welfare within three years of the child’s birth (NCTPTP, 2010). Forty-one percent of teen mothers live below the poverty line within the first year of the child’s life. As the child matures, this number increases. By the time the child is three years old, 50 percent of teen mothers live below the poverty line, and 52 percent of all mothers on welfare had their first child as a teenager (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned pregnancy, 2012). It is important to note, not all teen mothers who are below the poverty line apply for and/or receive welfare assistance. Although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, nearly all of the increase in child poverty between 1980 and 1996 was related to the increase in teen child bearing (NCTPTP, 2010).

The correlation between teen pregnancy and poverty is inextricable. Many have tried to figure out what came first, teen pregnancy or poverty. However, the research here is clear; poverty is a cause as well as a consequence of teen pregnancy (Kearney & Levine, 2012a). In 2012, economists Melissa Kearney and Phillip Levine reported on a large-scale empirical investigation they conducted to study the role income plays in teen pregnancy. As they looked at teen childbearing from state to state, they discovered variations in income inequality accounted for geographic variation in teen pregnancy. In other words, impoverished teens living in states where there is greater income inequality are statistically more likely to become pregnant as a teenager.

Additionally, their studies have focused on other economic factors, which have generated evidence that teen pregnancy is a symptom, as well as a cause of poverty (Kearney & Levine, 2012a). They investigated whether the current economic climate and high unemployment rates have contributed to the rate of teen pregnancy either positively or negatively. Kearney and Levine (2012b) were unable to find a link between higher rates of unemployment and a change
in teen birth rates. Despite a higher rate in unemployment in the United States over the past few years, teen pregnancy rates continue to decline. However, Schaller (2012) found when women in general experience improved labor market conditions, or an increase in employment, they are less likely to have children.

Kearney and Levine (2012a) cited underlying social issues as the driving force behind the high teen pregnancy rates in the United States. One such issue, according to Kearney and Levine, is the debate over abstinence versus contraceptive use, and the policies associated with and in support of each philosophy. It is evident that the attitude toward contraceptive use in the United States plays a key role in the teen pregnancy statistics. Although American teens are less likely to participate in sexual activity than other developed countries, they are also 15 percent less likely to use contraception when they do participate in sex, which contributes directly to an overall higher teen birth rate (Kearney & Levine, 2012a).

While these dichotomous tendencies found in the sexual preferences of American teens certainly add context to the debate between abstinence vs. contraceptives, one impact of teen sexuality and the subsequent pregnancies not up for debate is the consequence teen pregnancy has on academic performance and achievement (Sabia, 2007b). In longitudinal studies, it was found that decreased educational aspirations were attributed to early sexual debut (Billy, Landale, Grady & Zimmerle, 1988; Schvaneveldt, Miller, Berry & Lee, 2001). Conversely, lower academic performance and educational aspirations lead to sexual behavior, which leads to teen pregnancy (East, 1998; Maynard, 1995; Plotnick, 1992). Additional research shows that sexually active teenagers are more likely to use substances, have lower academic achievement and aspirations and experience poorer mental health than teenagers who abstain (Hallfors et al., 2004).
Since studies have shown that lower academic performance and low educational expectations are precursors to teen pregnancy (East, 1998; Maynard, 1995; Plotnick, 1992), it is important to understand how sexual behavior contributes to academic performance. Schvaneveldt et al. (2001) conducted a longitudinal study over a span of 11 years, and found that teens who experienced sex at a young age underwent a change in attitude, which included a reduced interest in academic achievement and goals. The younger the girl, the more negative the relationship was between sexual debut and academic performance. By contrast, teens with high educational goals and achievement delayed having intercourse because of the potential risk involved (Schvaneveldt et al, 2001).

A United Kingdom study conducted in 2010, found that teenagers who participate in sexual activity by age 16, have lower educational expectations regardless of their academic achievement up to that point, and are more likely to drop out of school (Parkes, Wight, Henderson and West, 2010). According to Sabia (2007a), studies show that students who are more likely to engage in sexual activity are those students who have less to lose from the potential consequences of said activity. These are students with more out-of-school suspensions, unexcused absences, a lessoned affinity for school as well as a lower ambition to attend college, which directly impacts academic goals and achievement (Sabia, 2007a).

According to Billy et al., (1988) sexual intercourse negatively affects the importance placed on going to college among teens. Specifically Caucasian sexually active teens “place lower value on academic achievement as the time approaches for deciding whether to attend college” (Billy et al., 1988, p. 210). Although sexual debut has been shown to have a negative effect on teen educational performance and aspirations, Spriggs and Halpern (2008) conducted a study to determine if that relationship continued beyond the teen years. Their findings showed
that teen sexual debut did in fact negatively affect early adult postsecondary education initiation (Spriggs & Halpern, 2008).

The effects of sexual activity amongst teenagers and subsequent pregnancies have been exhaustively studied. Moreover, many studies have shown that abstinence has a positive outcome for teenagers. One report (Rector & Johnson, 2005) confirmed that teens who abstain from sex were more likely to graduate from high school and more likely to attend college than their sexually active peers, and teens that remained virgins through high school were twice as likely to graduate from college than sexually active teens (Rector & Johnson, 2005). One explanation for this is:

Sexually active teens may become preoccupied with the present; long-term academic goals may have diminished importance. In addition, teenage sexual relationships are inherently short-term and unstable. The collapse of intimate relationships is likely to result in emotional turmoil and depression, which, in turn, will undermine academic performance. (p. 20)

In addition to the previous reason, according to Rector and Johnson (2005), there are other plausible explanations for why abstinence has a positive effect on education. First, abstinent teens are subject to fewer emotional and psychological distractions. Second, they argue that the relationship between abstinence and higher academic performance is likely “fostered by important underlying personality traits” (p. 23). This study did not advocate for any particular agenda, but aimed to provide information on the issues pertinent to this research.

Consequences of Teen Pregnancy

Many studies about teen mothers and their struggles reveal the negative aspects of being a teen mother, such as schooling and labor market outcomes (Bronars & Grogger, 1994;
Hoffman, Foster & Furstenberg, 1993; Hotz, McElroy & Sanders, 2005; Hotz, Mullin & Sanders, 1997; Klepinger, Lundberg & Plotnick, 1999; Rosenweig & Wolpin, 1995). In addition, there is a plethora of statistical data addressing the issues surrounding teen pregnancy. Government agencies and quasigovernment agencies such as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, and The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention all provide data surrounding teen pregnancy and the effects thereof.

The consequences of teen pregnancy are far reaching. The following study was conducted to discover a possible connection between teen pregnancy and economic consequences. Bronars and Grogger (1994) conducted a groundbreaking study that looked at twin births. Using the Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS) of the 1970 and 1980 Censuses, their experimental study compared women who had twins with those who had a single child. A total of 12,374 twin-first mothers were used and 18,309 non-twin mothers were sampled as controls. Their hypothesis was that the difference between having one child and having two children would be comparable to women having no children or just having one child. They took these results and applied their findings to teens that had a child with those who did not have a child. They concluded that being a teen mother significantly decreased participation in the labor force, therefore, contributing to a lower socioeconomic status. However, Hoffman (1998) concluded that Bronars and Grogger had overstated the relationship between teenage childbearing and decreased economic opportunities for teens and that the study contained bias (Hoffman, 1998).

When a teenager has a baby, there are additional consequences. These consequences can include lower educational attainment (Hoffman, 2006; The National Campaign to Prevent Teen
and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2012) and the costs of a possible negative economic status (Bronars & Grogger, 1994; Hoffman et al, 1993; Klepinger et al, 1999). This study sought to examine what role, if any, the consequences of having a child as a teenager played in the lives of these women as they continued to pursue their education toward their college degree. Due to the fact that this study focuses on the two percent of women who were successful in completing their college degree by age 30, it is imperative to understand how they navigated these consequences as to not let them derail their goal of educational attainment.

For some, having a baby might have been a motivating factor. SmithBattle (2000) asserts that mothering has the potential to anchor the self, to foster a sense of purpose and meaning, reweave connections, and possibly provide a new sense of the future. In a longitudinal study, mothering was found to introduce new standards, priorities, obligations and skills for the teenager (SmithBattle & Wynn, 1998). Hotz, McElroy and Sanders (2008) argue that,

The assertion that adolescent childbearing causes the poor socioeconomic outcomes presented above implies that a teen mother was on the same upwardly mobile life course as her counterpart who did not have a child as a teenager but, by having her first birth as a teenager, altered the remainder of her life detrimentally. For these two groups of women to be comparable, teen mothers and the women with whom they are being compared would have to have virtually identical socioeconomic and background characteristics before the age at which teen mothers had their first child. In fact, this is not the case (Hoffman & Maynard, 2008, p. 59, Chapter 3).
The phenomenon as experienced by the participants uncovered how, negatively or positively, the experience of being a teen mother contributed to the culmination of graduating from college by 30.

In another study conducted by Geronimus and Korenman (1992), sisters were compared to each other using the criterion of age at which they had their first child. The sample size consisted of 197 sister pairs, and nearly 400 observations over a period of 20 years were made. They hypothesized that since sisters shared the same family, neighborhood background and characteristics, the difference in socioeconomic outcomes between them would represent the effects of childbearing. They reported the teenage mothers were less likely than their sisters who delayed childbearing to have any postsecondary schooling. However, the economic consequences were less significant (Geronimus & Korenman, 1992). Again, this study was criticized for the over generalization of the two sisters, which rendered overstated consequences of teen pregnancy as it relates to economic outcomes (Hoffman, 1998; Hoffman, Foster & Furstenberg, 1993). Although Bronars and Grogger (1994) and Geronimus and Korenman (1992) conducted revolutionary studies that had substantial impact in the world of social science research, their findings were conflicting.

Studies have concluded that there are adverse consequences to teen pregnancy. However, some studies differ as to what extent those consequences effect teen mothers. More specifically, studies have conflicting outcomes when determining the effects of teen pregnancy on economic factors. Klepinger, Lundberg, and Plotnick (1999) argued that the consequences of teen childbearing support earlier findings. They found that teenage childbearing has “major socio-economic consequences” (p. 443). Whatever the current opinion is, it is widely accepted that teen pregnancy has a negative effect on educational attainment.
Teen pregnancy alters the life of a young woman and negatively impacts her ability to attain educational goals. This dissertation focuses on women who have obtained a college degree after being a teen mother. However, these women are outliers. In fact, teen pregnancy often derails educational attainment. Only 51 percent of teen mothers earn a high school diploma by age 22 compared to 89 percent of women who do not have a teen birth. Young teen mothers, who have children before age 18, are even less likely to graduate from high school. Of these young mothers, only 38 percent will graduate from high school. Most relevant to this study was the fact that less than two percent of young teen mothers go on to attain a college degree by age 30 (Hoffman, 2006; National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2012).

Research has expanded upon the struggle between whether educational attainment is stifled because of teenage pregnancy or do teenagers who become teen mothers already have a low expectation of educational attainment and educational goals. Researchers have found that teenage mothers who place little value on educational goals, often times enter into earlier childbearing (Astone & Upchurch, 1994; Beutel, 2000; East, 1998; Ohannessian & Crockett, 1993). Still other studies support that low educational expectations predict teen pregnancy (East, 1998; Maynard, 1995; Plotnick, 1992). Additionally, Beutel (2000) found that the correlation between lower educational expectations and teenage pregnancy are the same across all racial and ethnic groups.

In a New Zealand study, Fergusson and Woodward (2000) found that teen girls who become pregnant before the age of 18 were at increased risk of poor academic achievement. They also found that teen mothers were more likely to leave school without qualifications, and had lower participation in postsecondary education (Fergusson & Woodward, 2000). Although this and other studies have investigated, and found, the negative consequences of teen pregnancy,
many studies have confirmed that the forecast for pregnant teens is not always doom and gloom. The long-term effects of teen pregnancy were investigated in a 20-year follow up of women from the late 1960s. The results concluded that most former teenage mothers completed a “reasonable amount of education and were economically self-sufficient” (McCue-Horwitz, Klerman, Kuo & Jekel, 1991, p. 862). The women in the study attributed their success to having self-efficacy, supportive social environments, and the experience of participating in a life skills group session. Consistent with the previous study, Hotz, McElroy and Sanders (2005) found that the adverse consequences of teen childbearing are short-lived.

One sure consequence of being a teen mother attending college is the classification of “nontraditional student.” There has been some debate as to what constitutes a nontraditional student. Often age is a defining factor when determining student classification, especially when the student is older than 24. Other factors that typically characterize nontraditional students are race, gender, residence, level of employment, and enrollment status (Institute of Education Sciences, 1996). Others define nontraditional college students as students who had a break between high school and college, attend college on a part time basis, are financially independent, work full time while attending school, have children and/or are single parents, or lack a standard high school diploma (Imagine America Foundation, 2009). In fact, as of 2010 only 16% of college students fit the “traditional student” mold: 18-22 years old, financially dependent of parents, in college full time, and living on campus (Pelletier, 2010). For teen moms attending college, the categorization of nontraditional is a given.

Given their role as a nontraditional student, teen moms regularly navigate college independently. For the 2% who were successful, they were able to figure out what was expected of them, and persist. It might be hypothesized that for teen moms to go on and finish college,
they must have demonstrated prior academic achievement. However, in my case, and in the case of others, this is not the circumstance. In fact, a study was conducted in which it was found that success in college depends less on previous academic performance than expected. Rosario, Pereira, Nunez, Conha, Fuentes, Polydoro, Gaeta and Fernandez (2014) found in order for students to accomplish their academic goals, they must find the “balance between their academic and external commitments that enables them to reach a level of engagement sufficient to achieve academic success” (p. 85). For teen moms, this balance can be difficult. This study uncovered how these teen moms found that balance, in order to achieve their academic goals. For the other 98%, the incompatibility of college and family responsibility forced them to choose between attending college and working or simply focus on caring for their child. They were faced with the question, “Is it worth it?” When the Expectancy Theory of Motivation is applied, they might not have felt they could do what was required of them, lowering their motivation to continue.

Even though being a nontraditional student comes with difficulties, there are additional factors that play into how successful they will be. Nontraditional students who enter college younger, as opposed to a long gap between high school and college, fair better and are often times better prepared for the rigors of higher education (Rosario, et al. 2014). Another factor for nontraditional students is class load. Since teen moms have to juggle school requirements with family responsibilities, it is essential for them to design their academic course to meet their needs. Teen moms, who go on to finish their degrees, are often older and older students tend to take fewer classes each semester, yet these 2% found a way to persist (Cantwell, Archer & Bourke, 2001). According to Cantwell et al. (2001) of all the different types of nontraditional students, older female students had the highest academic performance, despite having greater physical and psychological demands in their lives outside of school.
Research explored if teen mom’s attitude made a difference, or if the teen moms who were part of the 2% have success because they had a positive attitude toward life and school specifically. According to Eppler and Harju (1997) there are two behavioral patterns that help to explain the different underlying achievement goal orientations. Their study is framed around Dweck’s achievement goal theory. They claim, the more optimistic pattern of responding suggests an orientation toward learning goals. This is characterized by a greater desire to gain the problem solving skills necessary to increase one’s competence. In fact, those students who lean toward the learning goal orientation, are often times more likely to persist when faced with challenges, and are willing to employ different strategies when trying to overcome those challenges. Additionally, these students may even enjoy the opportunity to overcome challenges (Dweck, 1986; Dweck, 1988). Nontraditional students, more than traditional students, lean toward learning goals and display greater persistence after facing a setback (Hoyert & O’Dell, 2009).

In contrast, students who are less optimistic reflect an orientation toward performance goals. For these students, the focus is on outcome instead of the process. They are interested in getting praise, rewards or recognition for their performance and avoid negative feedback. Students, who lean toward this orientation, often prefer easier tasks, and have lower persistence and weaker school performance. In fact, this orientation leads to heightened performance anxiety and task aversion (Eppler & Harju, 1997). Within the learning goal orientation is the fundamental belief that effort is a means to success. Similar to the Expectancy Theory there is the belief that one has direct control of her life. This study aims to find out if these teen moms who represent the 2% had the motivation to continue with their education, because they had the confidence in their abilities and the belief they had control of the outcome. On the other hand,
performance goal orientation suggests an inverse relationship between ability and effort. In other words, students interpret the need for greater effort as an indication of lower ability. They may feel their efforts are ineffective and may stop trying to achieve (Eppler & Harju, 1997).

Whatever orientation a teen mom may lean toward, there are risk factors that make the likelihood of teen moms continuing with their education less likely. In a study conducted by Imagine America Foundation (2009) to analyze how institutions of higher learning were able to serve students as measured by several outcomes including retention and degree attainment, it was determined that there were factors contributing to student persistence to a degree. The factors were categorized into three groups: cognitive factors, social factors and institutional factors. Cognitive factors are the academic abilities of the student. According to this study, “... academic ability and preparation, as defined as a student’s academic curriculum, performance and aptitude, are the strongest predictors of degree attainment” (p. 8).

Social factors also contribute to a student’s success in obtaining a degree. The study found the degree to which the student integrates and engages in the schools’ social and academic culture, directly relates to her persistence within higher education (IAF, 2009). If a student has educational legacy, parental support, educational goals, and the ability to handle stressful social situations, they are more likely to persist. For nontraditional students, the social condition is especially important. This study investigated what social systems were in place when the teen moms were attending college.

Institutional factors, policies, and practices of the institution, have a great impact on student persistence. Swail, Redd, and Perna (2003) argue that policies and practices such as recruitment and admission, financial aid, student services, academic services, and curriculum and instruction are essential in supporting students along the path to a college degree. Institutions of
higher education have to make sure they are offering the services necessary to help their students achieve academically. In addition to the 21.8 million college students counting on those services, the 8.7 million nontraditional students need those services to have a chance at persisting to a college degree. This study uncovered the academic environment present while the teen mom was attending college. These discoveries will help to illustrate how these teen moms were able to persist and graduate from college by age 30, making them the 2%.

**Conclusion**

In summary, Campbell (1968) stated: “The girl who has an illegitimate child at the age of 16 suddenly has 90% of her life’s script written for her. . . . Her life choices are few, and most of them are bad” (p.238). Understanding what the contributing factors that lead these girls down this path will undoubtedly help prevent future occurrences with other girls. As Campbell pointed out the consequences of teen pregnancy are dire. However, for these two percent of women, the consequences of becoming a teen mother did not prohibit them from pursuing their dreams. This study attempts to answer why the women were able to expect a different outcome after becoming a teen mother. In the United States, being a teen mother often times comes with a perceived life sentence of lower socioeconomic status and lower educational attainment. However, the women in this study were able to overcome great obstacles and adversity to reach a level of success that many women, teen mothers or not, will not achieve. They were able to work within the confines of higher education and navigate their course toward success. Regardless of the difficulties they faced or the challenges before them, they were able to overcome and prevail. Some might say these teen mothers had intrinsic motivation. In fact, studies have shown that intrinsic motivation to attend college was associated with lower levels of burnout (Pisarik, 2009). This study sought to understand the shared experiences of women who were once teen mothers, yet were able to
overcome their circumstances and obtain a college degree, with the goal of shedding light on possible strategies and solutions for other teens in similar situations.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of the women who earned their college degree by age 30 after having a baby as a teenager. For the purpose of this study, teen pregnancy was defined as women who had a baby after they had turned 13 years old, but not older than 18, and chose to raise their child. Oftentimes, studies and governmental agencies will separate eighteen and nineteen year olds from other teenagers. Consequently, I chose to exclude this demographic based on the disaggregated national data available. Through the use of a questionnaire, surveys, and interviews, this qualitative study discovered, then interpreted the shared unique experiences of teen mothers, who went on to obtain a college degree by age 30. The purpose of the methodology chapter is to present the procedures, research design, and analyses that were utilized for this qualitative study.

Design

This study used a qualitative, phenomenological, transcendental design to investigate the lived unique experiences of women who obtained a college degree by age 30 after having been a teen mother. A phenomenological design was used for this study, allowing a deeper investigation into the stories of the participants and uncover clearer understandings in order to arrive at the essence of the phenomenon shared by the participants (Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas, the objective of phenomenology is to examine the phenomenon as a whole, looking from many angles, sides and perspectives until a “unified vision of the essences of the phenomenon or experiences is achieved” (p. 58). Husserl (as cited in Dukes, 1984) said, “The task of phenomenology is to see the inherent logic of human experience and to articulate that
logic or sense faithfully, without distortion” (p. 198). During the questionnaire and survey process all participants were kept confidential. Additionally, during this stage of the data collection process, participants were unaware of my personal narrative.

There are two main approaches in phenomenological research: hermeneutic phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology. For the purpose of this study, the transcendental approach is the appropriate choice. In order to gain a full understanding of the phenomenon being studied, the transcendental approach required that I was aware of any bias based on my own personal experience by bracketing it out during the interview process. Conducting this research through a transcendental lens brought about a higher level of consciousness, leading to a better understanding of the lived experiences shared by the participants (Moustakas, 1994). An analytical approach was used for the purpose of gathering data and assessing narrative information from the participants through the use of open-ended questionnaires, surveys, and in-depth interviews.

A transcendental approach of phenomenology allowed me to set aside personal bias and bracket out my own story in order to have a fresh perspective of the phenomenon experienced by the participants (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological design was a valid design for this study, because it has guidelines for assembling the textural and structural descriptions, and employs systematic steps in the data analysis process (Moustakas, 1994). This type of design is appropriate to use when it is important to understand the participants’ shared unique experiences with the phenomenon. Understanding how the participants were able to overcome the barriers in their lives and obtain a college degree by age 30 after having been a teen mother led to a deeper understanding about the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The results of this study will offer teen girls who find themselves in a similar situation an alternate reality. It will provide them a
positive pathway instead of the negative one that society has previously bestowed upon them given their circumstances.

According to Moustakas (1994), the objective of phenomenological research is to arrive at the essence of the phenomenon. This is accomplished by understanding the participants’ unique experiences as a teen mother, which constitutes the textural description. Textural descriptions describe what the participants experienced. In this study, the textural descriptions shed light on what it was like for these women to have been a teen mother and what their journey was like as they continued with their education. From textural descriptions, structural descriptions were gathered from the participants’ experiences with how they became a college graduate by age 30 after having been teen mothers. Once these descriptions were combined, I was able to access the essence of the phenomenon, which is the ultimate goal of phenomenological research.

The basic themes of transcendental phenomenology are: intentionality, transcendental reduction, and constitution of meaning (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental reduction occurs when things are “perceived freshly, as if for the first time” (p. 34). In order to achieve transcendental reduction, I had to set aside my own story so I could hear the stories of my participants through their own words and approach the data with a fresh lens (Creswell, 2007). I accomplished this by keeping the focus off my experiences, while engaging in the interview process. Although I related with the participants in the study, I refrained from verbally making those connections with the participants. Instead, I actively listened for the descriptions that allowed me to construct the essence of the phenomenon. Textural descriptions are what participants experienced. Structural descriptions of their unique experiences are how the participants experienced it in terms of the conditions, situations, and context (Creswell, 2007).
According to Moustakas (1994), it is through transcendental reduction, that descriptions and meaning were derived and the essence of the phenomenon was realized.

**Research Questions**

One central question and two sub-questions, listed below, were derived from the literature.

Central question:

- What are the unique experiences shared by the teen moms who graduated from college by age 30 that accounts for their success?

Sub-questions:

- What are the unique challenges experienced by teen moms?
- What factors in the context of their lives aided teen moms in continuing and completing their education?

**Participants**

Participants in this phenomenological study were acquired using criterion-sampling methods. Each participant was subject to different purposeful sampling strategies in order to ensure capturing the highest quality data. These participants assisted me in constructing the reality they experienced. Their perceptions, beliefs, truths, and explanations provided the context necessary to arrive at the essence of the phenomenon. The participants offered information-rich “first-person accounts” of the experience essential to the study (Moustakas, 1994, p. 21). Criterion sampling methods work best when all participants studied represent people who have experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). All participants in this study who participated in the in-depth interviews were women who have obtained a college degree by age 30 after having been a teen mother.
For phenomenological studies, the goal of thematic saturation precludes an established number of participants (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell (2007) indicates 5-25 participants are appropriate for phenomenological study. Dukes (1984), suggests the sample size need not be large, “strictly theoretically, a sample size of one would suffice” (Dukes, 1984, p. 200). However, Husserl (1962) warns of the dangers of cognitive bias, a condition where a researcher only sees what he or she wants to see, or the potential danger of falling prey to the contingent facts of a particular case. For these reasons, Husserl suggests a sample size to include three, five, or even up to ten participants. For this research, I used a sample size of 17 participants. As the researcher, I decided in “the field” when thematic saturation was achieved. An indication of saturation is when themes and descriptions start to become repetitive instead of extending (Mertens, 1998).

One of the few barriers I encountered while recruiting participants was finding participants, whom, due to the fact there are still some social stigmas associated with teen pregnancy, may not want to disclose their life stories. As preparation for this possibility, one method I used was snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a recruitment technique in which participants are asked to assist the researcher in identifying other potential subjects. Women who were teen mothers might know other teen mothers, or other women who have similar life experiences. Once I secured one or two participants, they helped me to find or referred me to other possible participants by providing information about the research to them, rather than giving the researcher their contact information. Prospective participants were referred, either by the participant or by me, to the website where they could give consent and begin the process of participating in the study. This ensured that only women who met the criteria and wanted to tell their stories or wanted to be a part of this study will be included.
A website was established to facilitate this study. Initially, I used Facebook as a means of advertisement. I created a Facebook page that explained the study and the criteria for participation. To ensure anonymity, Facebook only acted as the vehicle by which participants were directed to the website. At no time were participants required to identify themselves on the Facebook page. Interested participants clicked a link on the Facebook advertisement page that took them to a screen in which the study was explained and where consent could be given if they met the criteria.

The next screen on the website explained the various steps of the study and what would be required of a participant. Participants who met the criteria completed the demographic data, filled out the questionnaire and surveys, and then decided whether or not they would like to participate further by being interviewed. If the participant agreed to participate in all phases of the study, she had to provide a phone number if selected for an interview. This contact information remained confidential and only was used if selected. The information gathered from the questionnaire and surveys helped to guide the interview questions as I sought to uncover how the teen moms overcame the barriers that were unique to them.

Table 1

Demographics of Women Who Were Interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Present Age</th>
<th>Age At 1st Pregnancy</th>
<th>Age At Graduation</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lori</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leslie</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristina</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimberly</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alanna</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marrika</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brenda</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mollie</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Setting**

Initially, the setting of this study was online. All participants were directed, either by snowball sampling or by Facebook advertisement, to the website where they began their participation. Conversely, for convenience purposes, it would have been advantageous for the participants to be located in the southern region of the United States. This would have allowed for ease of face-to-face interviews since this is where I reside. Additionally, data from 2011, the most current year comprehensive information is available, shows the southern United States has a significantly higher teen birth rate than the rest of the United States (National Vital Statistics Reports, 2013).

My intent was for interviewees to be from the southeastern United States, however I had to broaden my pool to include women from across the country. Interviews took place by telephone, Skype™, FaceTime™ and in person. Moustakas (1994) urged “researchers to obtain descriptions of experience through first-person accounts in informal and formal conversations and interviews” (p. 21). To help with this and in light of the sensitivity of the subject matter, it was important for the participant to feel as comfortable as possible. It was imperative that each
participant was provided the best environment to ensure a positive outcome. In order to facilitate this outcome, the participant had input as to when and where their interviews took place.

**Procedures**

Once I successfully defended the research proposal, approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was needed (Appendix B). The IRB is a federally mandated body ensuring the ethical treatment of participants in research projects. Eliciting participants can be difficult. To achieve this, I used various methods for recruiting participants.

I contracted with a web developer to design a website that has four main tasks: (1) to describe the study and criteria for participation, (2) to provide letters of consent for the study, (3) to gather demographic data about all participants, and (4) to allow participants to complete the questionnaire, and surveys. If participants volunteered to be interviewed, the participants emailed me with their contact information and then we set a time and place for the interview.

Data was gathered using several methods: questionnaires, surveys, and interviews (Table 1). Information gathered from the questionnaires and surveys was triangulated with the data assembled from the interviews of the participants. All interviews were digitally recorded and sent to a transcription service where transcriptions were made from the interviews and reflexive notes. In keeping with the tenets of phenomenology, I concentrated on the descriptions of experiences provided by the participants, not on analysis (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, the main data analysis procedures utilized were horizontalization of the data, clustering of the meaning units, and developing textural and structural descriptions. Using horizontalization I found statements about what the participants experienced and how they experienced the phenomenon, and then assigned equal value to these significant statements. These statements were then grouped into themes. Finally, I wrote a composite description of the phenomenon encompassing
both the textural and structural descriptions with the intention of constructing the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

**The Researcher’s Role**

Operating from a social constructivist paradigm, I acted as the “human science researcher” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 27), as I gathered data from participants who have experienced the phenomenon of obtaining a college degree after having been a teen mother. As the human researcher, I embraced the rhetorical assumption allowing for a personal and literary format. I did not have a prior relationship with the participants, and I developed interview questions from the questionnaire and surveys that were grounded in the literature, and fully encompassed the phenomenon.

As a college educated mother of six children, I was qualified to be the instrument in this study. Additionally, my personal, professional, and educational experiences provided me with the appropriate credentials to be the human instrument for this phenomenological study. The main factor I used as a qualifier is my experience of becoming pregnant at 17 and still going on to graduate from college at 24 years old. It was through my experience as a teen mother that I gained insight into the phenomenon this study aims to understand. I am among the two percent of women who became pregnant as a teenager, yet I was able to go on to complete a four-year college degree.

Initially, I did not disclose my story to the participants. Participants who filled out the questionnaire and surveys did not know that I was a teenage mom. However, those participants who were selected to partake in the interviews had limited knowledge of my story. They knew that I fit the criteria for the study. However, since I utilized in-depth interviewing, it was imperative that a relationship with the key informants went beyond friendly conversation.
Although the conversation might resemble two friends conversing, the in-depth interviews delved much more into the philosophical why and the analysis of their behavior. Having an insider’s knowledge of the topic being discussed, as well as a depth of knowledge about the matter itself, I was able to establish a rapport with the interviewees that allowed the questions to become more probing into the issues being discussed. With that being said, I knew what my story was; however, I was interested in the story of the women in this study. I asked interview questions based on the participants’ experiences and those generated from the questionnaire and surveys, as well as the literature. During the interview process, bracketing out my own experiences was essential in order to enter into the individual’s “lived-world” and use the self as an experiencing interpreter (Groenewald, 2004, “What is Phenomenology,” para. 4).

My professional background includes 12 years of public school experience, including teaching pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. I have taught in three different states and five different school districts, which have included inner city schools and schools in rural settings. I have taught at affluent, as well as Title 1 schools. I hold teaching licenses in California, Virginia, and from The Department of Defense Education Activity. I am certified to teach pre-k thru 8th grade, and ESL k-12. I also hold a Principal license in Virginia.

My education background includes my candidacy for a Doctor of Education degree in Education Leadership. Additionally, I have an Education Specialist degree in Educational Leadership, Master of Science in Education degree in Crosscultural Teaching, Bachelor of Science degree in Criminology with a minor is Sociology, and finally an Associates of Arts degree in General Studies.
Data Collection

For this phenomenological study, data collection consisted of: questionnaires, surveys, and interviews. To ensure consistency throughout this study, each participant interviewed had to give consent to all phases. For triangulation purposes, it was imperative that I collected all forms of data from the participants.

Questionnaires

As noted in the procedure section, I obtained permission from the IRB to conduct the study. After each participant read the letter of consent, they were able to Agree or Disagree. When they clicked on “Agree,” they were taken to a page and asked to provide demographic information. The demographics page asked the participants the four following questions:
1. Please indicate your ethnicity
2. What is your current age?
3. Please indicate your highest level of education
4. How many biological parents were in your home when you became pregnant?

After they completed the demographic data, they clicked on the “Proceed to Questionnaire” button, which took them to open-ended questions aimed at thoroughly investigating the lives of the participants. The reason for using this questionnaire was to develop an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon being investigated. The answers to the questionnaire and the surveys helped guide me as I developed the interview questions. The following information was gathered through the open-ended question section: (a) information concerning the number of children they have had and when, (b) what their childcare circumstances were, (c) what were the economic strains they may have experienced at the time they became pregnant and then later as they were attending college, (d) if they had both parents
in the home, (e) what support systems were in place to help with caring for her child(ren) and degree completion, (f) did they have any mentors and who, (g) what were their high school achievements, and (h) what barriers did they overcome.

The following is an outline of the questions asked in the open-ended section of the questionnaire:

- **Number of children.** Participants were asked how many children they have had throughout their lives and at what age.

- **Childcare plans.** Participants were asked whether they had “relative-provided childcare,” “friend-provided childcare” or “paid childcare.”

- **Economic strain.** A Financial Strain Survey was administered to each participant (Aldana & Liljenquist, 1998). Participants retrospectively rated the frequency with which their household experienced different economic strains at the time of the pregnancy and again at the time they were in college.

- **Parents in home.** Participants provided the number of biological parents present in the home at the time of the teen pregnancy (0, 1, or 2).

- **Total perceived support.** Participants were administered the Social Support Network Questionnaire (SSNQ; Rhodes, J., Meyers, A., Davis, A., Ebert, L., & Gee, C., 1998).

- **Mentor availability.** After participants were given the definition of a mentor, they were asked to identify an adult(s) in their life, not by name, whom was available for support and guidance.

- **High school achievement.** Participants provided their high school Grade Point Average (GPA) and whether or not they received a high school diploma or equivalent.
Educational aspirations and expectations. The participants were asked to retrospectively answer the following questions: (a) At the time of your pregnancy, if there were no barriers, how much education did you want to complete? (b) When you looked at your life, how much education did you expect to have completed by the time you were thirty?

Challenges to education. Participants were asked to retrospectively answer the following question: What challenges, do you think; made it difficult for you to get all the education you wanted?

Surveys

As part of the questionnaire process, all participants were asked to complete two surveys. The Financial Strain Survey was used to assess the different financial strains felt by the participants as they retrospectively looked at their financial situation at the time of their pregnancy and then later as they were completing their college degree. The survey consisted of five areas of strain: education, relationships, physical, credit card use, and meeting obligations. There are a total of 18 statements that participants rated on a likert five-point scale. The total financial strain score was calculated by adding the responses to all 18 statements. Aldana and Liljenquist (1998) found the sub areas of relationships, physical, credit card use, and meeting obligations all had Cronbach alpha scores above .80, which suggests high reliability. Even the education factor had a Cronbach alpha of .62, which is statistically reliable.

Next, all participants completed The Social Support Network Questionnaire (Rhodes et al, 1998) to assess social support and social strain. The SSNQ is a modification of the Arizona Social Support Interview Schedule. The SSNQ assesses seven types of social support: emotional, tangible assistance, cognitive guidance, positive feedback, social participation, pregnancy-related assistance, and child-care assistance. Participants were asked to identify which individuals were
available to provide each type of support after they became pregnant and to rate on a five-point scale their satisfaction with the support. This identification did not include the specific names of those providing support. The SSNQ demonstrated adequate internal consistency, alpha = .65 (Rhodes et al., 1998).

**Interviews**

After the participants had answered the questionnaire and completed the two surveys, participants volunteered to take part in the interviews. The interviews served as the third leg of data collection and contributed to the triangulation process (Table 1). In alignment to research, the in-depth interviews for this study were fairly lengthy and open-ended (Dukes, 1984). Moustakas (1994) stated, “the phenomenological interview involves an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions” (p. 114). In-depth interviewing also became a way to verify, analyze, and explore knowledge gained and data collected through the questionnaires and surveys. The reflective analysis was constructed by my examination of the data in total, including my own experience.

Interviews were conducted with participants using voice recording to enable transcription at a later time. A digital recording device was used, and a back up MP3 or other digital audio file was created for all digital recordings. I used Patton’s (2002) interview guide approach for these interviews; this is a widely used format for qualitative interviewing. I brought to the interview a list of semi-structured questions for the topics to be covered, but was flexible with word choice and question order. While the tone of the interview was conversational and informal, the questions were comprehensive, semi-structured and based on the literature and information gathered from the questionnaire and surveys. As the human instrument, I possessed knowledge of the topic and knew when to probe for more in-depth responses or guide the conversation to
make sure all topics on the outline were covered. I also saw my role as the researcher in these in-depth interviews as one of a skeptic. Although these in-depth interviews brought clarity to the questionnaire and surveys, I had to be aware that the truth always lies within the confines of the participant and does not constitute empirical data.

Ideally interviews were conducted in person, but if geographic location was prohibitive, then a teleconference or telephonic interview was conducted. If the participants’ geographic location was prohibitive, then interviews were conducted via Skype™ or FaceTime™. Although a telephone or teleconference may be the only method possible, it is not ideal. It does not enable the interviewer to gather data through non-verbal communication. I used an adequate recording device when conducting interviews over the phone (Creswell, 2007) for later use when transcribing the interviews. I utilized my iPhone recorder, which is an application with the capability of recording voice. These recordings accompanied the field notes I kept during the interview process as I gathered my own descriptions and reflexive notes (Moustakas, 1994). The following were possible questions that could be asked during the interviews. These questions were modified and revised based on the information that was gathered during the surveys and questionnaire.

Table 2

Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. Please describe your life before becoming pregnant as a teenager.
2. Prior to you finding out you were pregnant, what was your attitude toward school or education generally?
3. Prior to your parents finding out you were pregnant, how did they feel about school? Did that change when they found out?
4. What was their expectation for you in terms of education?

5. What role did education play in your family? Were your parents/siblings college graduates?

6. What did your family view as being your role as a female?

7. Please describe your experiences from the time you found out you were pregnant to the time you entered your undergraduate program.

8. How did you choose the college you attended?

9. Please describe events, agencies or people in your life that provided initial support.

10. Did you have confidence initially of your abilities or did that increase over time?

11. What were your primary motivations for continuing your education?

12. Please describe the challenges you faced while working toward your college degree.

13. What social, cognitive or institutional factors can you identify as making a difference in your life that made continuing on with your education possible?

14. Did you involve yourself in campus other than attending classes?

15. Did you attend school physically or did you go online?

16. Why do you think you were compelled or motivated to achieve such a high level of academic success?

17. Why do you think you were able to achieve your college degree, yet so many women with similar stories were not?

18. What expectation did you have for your future once you graduated from college?

The purpose of the first six questions pertaining to pre-pregnancy was to gather information about the participants’ life prior to the pregnancy event. It was also important to find out if there was an intergenerational connection of age at first birth (Barber, 2001). Questions
seven, eight and nine were designed to ascertain whether or not the participants received support(s) upon finding out they were going to be a teenage mother. Studies show that having support systems in place for teenage mothers is vital for their educational success (Baytop, 2006; Fergusson & Woodward, 2000; Perrin & Dorman, 2003; SmithBattle, 2007). Questions 10 and 11 were designed to understand how being pregnant either acted as a motivator or a deterrent in obtaining educational success. For anyone working toward a degree, there are challenges. Question 12 addresses those challenges. Studies have shown what teen mothers identified as being supports in their educational journey. However, there is limited information about what women who have obtained higher education deemed to have been the most important supports. Questions 13, 14, and 15 asks the participants to identify specific factors or supports in their lives (e.g., mentors, parents, spiritual beliefs) that made their journey to their college degree possible. Questions 16, 17, and 18 were the essence of the study; they aimed to address the overarching phenomenon. Many teenage girls who suddenly find themselves pregnant also find themselves believing they are no longer capable or even worthy of achieving their academic goals. Therefore, it was important to understand how these women defied the odds and overcame the barriers in attaining a college degree.

**Data Analysis**

The data for this phenomenological study was analyzed over three phases using the strategies recommended in Moustakas (1994). This “modified method” (p. 121) of organizing and analyzing phenomenological data was taken from Moustakas’ modification of methods of analysis suggested by Stevick (1971), Colaizzi (1973) and Keen (1975). I utilized these strategies when collecting, organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing all interview data. Moustakas (1994) specifically laid out the following steps in the data analysis process:
1. Consider each statement with respect to significance for description of the experience
2. Record all relevant statements
3. List each non repetitive, non overlapping statement (meaning units)
4. Relate and cluster the meaning units into themes
5. Synthesize the meaning units and themes into a description of the textures of the experience
6. Reflect on your own textural description. Through imaginative variation, construct a description of the structure of your experience.
7. Construct a textural-structural description of the meaning and the essences of your experience.

From the verbatim transcripts of the experience of each participant, complete the steps one through seven. From the individual textural-structural descriptions of all participants’ experiences, construct composite textural-structural descriptions of the meanings and essences of the experience integrating all individual textural-structural descriptions into the universal essence of the phenomenon (p. 122). To accomplish this, I used data collected from all three data collection sources (e.g., questionnaire, surveys and interviews) in the data analysis process. The questionnaire and surveys were easier to analyze, but the interviews required the lengthy procedure of transcribing. I enlisted the help of a transcription service to transcribe the 11 interviews. Once the transcriptions were completed by the transcription service, I read through each transcription to check for accuracy. I applied the seven steps outlined above to my own interview transcription and then to all 11 of the participants’ interview transcripts. Using the process known as horizontalization, I considered each participants’ statements or responses to the questions as “having equal value” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 118). From these horizontalized
statements, I then recorded the meaning units. The meaning units were then clustered into themes after “overleaping and repetitive statements are removed” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 118). These clustered meanings aided in developing the “textural descriptions of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 118). The textual descriptions specifically addressed what the participants experienced. From the textual descriptions, I was able to analyze the structural descriptions, which referred to how the participants experienced the phenomenon being studied. My goal throughout the analysis process was to triangulate the information collected. Once I established the textual and structural descriptions, I could construct the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Due to my close relationship to the topic, I used a technique known as bracketing to ensure my familiarity and any personal bias minimally influenced the participants, allowing them to express freely their experiences with the phenomenon examined. This was accomplished by disassociating my experiences with that of the participants. Initially, participants were not aware of my experiences as a teen mom. Only if a participant asked, would I have divulged my personal connection with the subject matter. However, during the collection of the data, my experience never became a subject of conversation. Not one of the participants interviewed ever asked me if I fit my own study’s criteria, which allowed me to easily bracket out my own experiences.

First Phase

The data analysis process was conducted in multiple phases of which the first phase included both a questionnaire and two surveys. In this stage of the research, I had 17 participants who filled out the questionnaire and two surveys, however, not all 17 women answered all questionnaire and survey questions. The questionnaire was designed to gather demographic
information. Demographic data informed the researcher as to who the participants were and how they qualified to be participants within the study.

Within the questionnaire there were two surveys to be completed by the participants. The Financial Strain Survey assessed possible financial strains felt by the participants during the time they were attending college. Using SPSS and Excel, I constructed a descriptive analysis to find the percentages of the respondents for each question and category. Because of the link between poverty and teen pregnancy, this information was critical to the study. It was important to see if there were themes between the participants pertaining to SES factors. The Social Support Network Questionnaire was a survey that assessed which support systems were in place during the time between becoming pregnant and graduating from college. Possible emerging commonalities or themes shed light as to what factors contributed to the success of these women who were able to graduate from college after having been a teen mother.

**Second Phase**

Once all questionnaires and surveys had been completed, participants volunteered to be interviewed. In this stage of the research, 11 women volunteered to participate in a one-on-one interview. These interviews were guided by the answers to the questionnaire and the surveys. The answers that were gathered from the questionnaire and surveys helped me to reexamine and revise the interview questions to allow an organic interview to occur. For example, if participants mentioned parents as being their greatest source of help, I was able to delve deeper during our interview to extrapolate how this relationship positively affected their experiences. I was able to get specific details and not just overarching answers. These interviewees participated in the in-depth interviews and become my “key informants.” According to Johnson (2001), “the most
helpful informants are those who can describe a scene or setting or activity, those who can provide thick descriptions, but not necessarily those who analyze or theorize” (p. 111).

**Third Phase**

In the third and final phase of the analysis process, the transcripts generated from the interviews conducted with the participants, as well as transcripts of my own reflections and reflexive notes were prepared for analysis. Once transcripts were prepared, I applied the aforementioned techniques to analyze the data in order to highlight the essence of the phenomenon. To begin with, I developed a full description of my own experience of the phenomenon (Appendix G). With the verbatim transcript of my own experience, I employed the data analysis techniques along with the data from the other participants. Using the verbatim transcripts of each of the participants, I followed steps one through seven. Once all the textural-structural descriptions had been completed, I “construct[ed] a composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122).

In looking at the data from each of the collection methods, I compared and contrasted the clusters of meanings that were gathered within each phase, as well as across the phases. Data from the questionnaires were compared to data collected from the surveys and then compared to the interviews. All data was collected at roughly the same time, which assisted in the validity. I used interviews, qualitative data, to assess the experiences of the teen moms while also gathering data from a questionnaire and survey instruments, quantitative data, which offered other pertinent information about the participants. The qualitative data built directly on the results from the quantitative data. Consequently, the quantitative results were explained in detail through the qualitative data collection. This allowed for a side-by-side comparison, in which I looked for the “ring of truth.” The two types of data validated each other, and created a solid foundation in
which to gain a full description into the lives of these participants. Both textural and structural descriptions were generated from the interview answers, and the replies to the open-ended questionnaires. These results were synthesized to arrive at the essence of the experience.

Many tools can be utilized in the analysis process. The use of computer-assisted analysis is one option. It is relatively new in the field of qualitative research and somewhat controversial. According to Jones (2007), the research community views the effects of digital intervention as possibly problematic in a “fundamentally human enterprise” (p. 8). Although computers are proficient in analyzing numbers, it is far more difficult for computers to create categories, segment, code or duplicate, making them merely a tool that can assist researchers in these tasks. Some analysis software will only retrieve text; other software can retrieve and code the text, while others will assist in retrieval, coding, and theory building (Jones, 2007). After much consideration, I decided to use a transcription service called Rev.com to transcribe all 11 interviews, and then I analyzed the finished transcriptions. I used computers as a secure location to store files to ensure confidentiality. All Personal Identifiable Information (PII) was redacted to protect the participants’ anonymity. However, for the purpose of identifying cluster meanings, it is still a human endeavor.

**Trustworthiness**

In order to establish trustworthiness, I employed various validation strategies. In all qualitative research, trustworthiness is essential for establishing a strong study. It incorporates credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One strategy I used to establish credibility is triangulation. Triangulation is the process of using multiple data sources and then triangulating the data (Creswell, 2007). In order to achieve the highest possible level of integrity, the information gathered was subjected to data triangulation.
Data triangulation requires the incorporation of many reliable and proven techniques. By utilizing organized data collection procedures as well as analytical methodologies, corrobororation of information from all sources was achieved. I used the information gathered in the questionnaire and compared it to the information generated from the surveys. This allowed me to check the accuracy of their stories, as well as in finding commonalities among all the participants. It also aided in painting a full picture of what these women lived through as they experienced this phenomenon. Once I compared the questionnaires and the surveys, I was able to use the information to establish a chronological order as I transcribed the interviews.

Member checking was another strategy used to increase credibility. Member checking is the process of asking the participants to review the transcripts for accuracy and credibility (Creswell, 2007). This practice whereby “the final report or specific description or themes” are taken back to the participants (Creswell, 2009, p. 191) to give them, “an opportunity to provide context and alternative interpretation” (Patton, 2002, p. 561) of the transcript ensures greater validity. This was accomplished by sending all participants who were interviewed a transcript of their individual interviews, so they were able to read through and check for accuracy and credibility. Only two women responded with corrections. In both instances, the participants made corrections due to inaudibility of the digital recording. Lincoln and Guba (1985) believe this to be “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314).

As a researcher collecting narrative data, I had to constantly be aware that participants were telling their stories from memory, and not as they occurred. Atkinson (2002) argues that “historical reconstruction may not be the primary concern in life stories; rather, it may be how the individual see themselves at given points in their lives, and how they want others to see them” (p. 127). In Connelly and Clandinin (1990 & 2000), verisimilitude is cited as an important
criterion that can be utilized to judge the validity of narrative inquiries. Verisimilitude is the quality of seeming true or real. According to Connelly and Clandinin, in order for my study to have trustworthiness, it must “ring true” and be believable. This is where being an “insider” was most valuable as I conducted this study. I was able to use my own narrative as a filter when I analyzed the data and constructed the validity.

Participant testimonies provided textural and structural descriptions that were used to increase transferability through the use of rich descriptive data. These descriptions of each participant’s narratives served to define the essence of the phenomenon and provide the foundation for transferring the data gathered in the context of this study to another study.

Consistency was achieved by establishing mechanisms for dependability and confirmability. All participants were subjected to the identical processes throughout this study. Critical to ensuring a clean and consistent study was the continuous monitoring of the research process. To facilitate this, I performed a written audit trail along each step of the research. The integration of an audit trail process served not only to keep the research pure, but also helped to provide a template for other researchers to replicate or continue this study to its intended conclusion.

**Ethical Considerations**

Due to the sensitive nature of this research, maintaining the highest degree of ethicality was essential. Therefore, anticipating ethical concerns was important and monitoring for any violations was compulsory throughout the research process. To ensure confidentiality, only first names were used for all participants. This allowed the participants to be forthcoming with their experiences without fear of judgment or retaliation. To further ensure confidentiality, all transcriptions were kept in password-protected files on the computer. Finally, participants may
be in need of further assistance by mental health professionals. Since participants were likely to be located in different geographic locations, I was unable to provide referrals to specific health care providers. However, if participants are in need of immediate mental health services, they were encouraged to contact a resource in their area or dial 911 for help.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents the results from the data analysis of this study. Data was collected using a confidential questionnaire and two surveys of all participants. Participants who volunteered to be interviewed participated in a one-on-one interview with the researcher. All participants met the criteria of being a woman who graduated from college by age 30 after having been a teen mother. Data was collected from participants during an interview and all interviews were transcribed. Seidman (1998) explained that the interviewer must come to the transcripts “prepared to let the interview breathe and speak for itself” (p. 100). However, Seidman continued by saying, “it is tempting to let the profiles and the categorized, thematic experts speak for themselves . . . another step is appropriate” (p. 110). Consequently, the analysis began with the various voices of the data and was held up against the research concerning teen pregnancy and personal motivation.

During the interview and data collection process, I kept reflective notes to assist me in the process. It helped me to identify potential problems with interview questions and how I may delve deeper in subsequent interviews. On the other hand, my reflective notes helped me to stay focused on the interview questions and not let the interview go in different directions. The interviews brought out genuine emotions, which produced living data. As the interviewer, I had to capture the common themes that surfaced and then view them with a fresh lens as I organized and tied them together. Finally, the data was held up to itself, using both quantitative data and qualitative data to look for confirmation. The stories of these women were used to analyze the data collected from the questionnaire, The Financial Strain Survey, and The Social Support Network Questionnaire (Appendix J). It was this moving between quantitative and qualitative
data that permitted a comprehensive analysis of these women’s lives. The findings have been presented in this chapter.

The one-on-one interviews took place over several months and used several methods and settings (Appendix K). Two interviews were face-to-face, three were over the telephone, one used FaceTime® and five used Skype®. All interviews were done individually. The interviews consisted of 11 women. Seven of the women identified as white, three were Hispanic, and one was African American. All women were teen mothers with the average age at first pregnancy of 16. The mean age of the interviewees was 35.6. The mean age at graduation from college was 26.7. All 11 women met the criteria exactly, except one woman was 31 at graduation. See Table 1 for a description of these women.

Talking with these women elicited many emotions and responses from the participants. Many of the women became tearful as they remembered and recounted events in their lives. Although I could easily relate to what they were saying and had personal connections with their stories, I did not indicate that to the participants. I allowed them to talk about their experiences without interjecting my own story. I understood that my own feelings and emotions were shaped by my experiences and from researching the topic. It was important for me as the researcher, to come to these interviews with a fresh lens. In conducting these 11 interviews, not one woman asked me if I was a teen mother. Not one woman gave any indication they knew I met the criteria of the study. On the contrary, they were just happy to finally tell their own story.

**Participant Portraits**

In the following section, I unpack each woman’s narrative and allow the data to show just how complex their stories truly are. I will use portraits, however, I will use my own narrative to string together sequence of events from the transcripts that illustrate the unique challenges each
of these women faced within their individual lives. The transcripts, in their entirety, are in Appendix L.

Lori

The first woman I interviewed was named Lori. She was a 44 year old Caucasian woman who had her first child at 18 and graduated college at the age of 28. Lori’s story began in a small town. Her pregnancy rocked her family and the plan laid out for her by her parents. She attempted to do the ‘right thing’ by marrying the father of her baby, which turned into a series of unfortunate events. Lori was one of the oldest teen mothers I interviewed. She had already been accepted into a junior college when she found out she was pregnant. She continued on with her plan to attend college once she found out she would be able to live in the dorm while pregnant. She was nearly able to finish her first year of college prior to the birth of her daughter. After much persuasion, Lori reluctantly married the father of her baby. That relationship was abusive and short lived. It was then that Lori was finally able to change the trajectory of her life.

Lori was unable to continue on with her education once her daughter was born, due to lack of support from her first husband and parents. She did not have very many friends and felt like an outcast in her town. Financially, Lori’s parents followed the Biblical principle of ‘leave and cleave.’ After her divorce, Lori met and married a man who was 16 years her senior. It was not until Lori met her second husband that she was able to continue with her education. He was educated and supportive of her going back to school. Although her new husband was supportive, there were new obstacles to face. A second baby and new household responsibilities made attending school very challenging. Lori’s husband had his own business that was oftentimes feast or famine. Finances were a continual hindrance, as Lori’s new husband also had five children from his previous marriage that would eventually live with them. Lori did receive some help
from her parents at different times throughout her education, although their help often times came with conditions. However, her parents were more supportive as time went along. Managing a large family and a business while trying to complete her education was difficult, but together they were able to scrape the money together, without student loans, to pay for her education.

During her time in school, Lori also had a support system that offered help along the way. She and her husband established a supportive group of friends at church and at the Kiwanis Club in which they were involved. They were also blessed with great neighbors who would offer to help with childcare or just a place to blow off steam. Lori recognized that without this help, she might not have been able to finish her degree.

Leslie

Leslie, a 30-year-old Hispanic woman, graduated college at age 30. Leslie was one of the youngest teen mothers at the time of her pregnancy that I interviewed and perhaps experienced one of the more difficult paths to college graduation. She became pregnant at 15 and shortly thereafter married the baby’s father who was eight years her senior. That relationship proved to be very abusive and her husband was very controlling. His insecurities made it impossible to continue with her education. Although the relationship was unhealthy, a second baby came along. With looming financial struggles, Leslie had to work to provide for her family. Although she worked her way to a decent job that provided their basic needs, Leslie felt like it would be impossible to work with two children and go to school. The idea of a college degree was put on the back burner for some time. In the midst of her difficult life, her father and greatest supporter was diagnosed and succumbed to cancer.

Although, she ultimately separated from her husband for good, the effects of an eight-year on-and-off relationship had taken its toll. Following the death of her father, Leslie felt it her
responsibility to move back home and help her mother. Financially, she was spinning her wheels and knew something had to give. With a renewed spirit and supportive people in her life, Leslie began to take classes. She struggled throughout to make ends meet, but she qualified for financial aid to help with school. Although she only went through the tenth grade, Leslie found success in her college courses. Due to her lack of schooling, she had to start at the bottom in some core subjects, but she learned and studied to stay up with her peers. She began attending college with the promise of support from others. Although going to college was a totally new experience for Leslie, she received help in navigating through the process. She sought the help of her college counselor and financial aid office. However, ultimately it was her new boyfriend that made the difference. He had been to college himself and was able to direct her in the ways she needed the most. Although her children’s father was not a good husband, he did step up and become a good father. He also supported Leslie’s desire to go to school by offering childcare assistance when needed.

First she attended and graduated from a community college, but felt confident enough to transfer to a four-year school. Perhaps the greatest help to Leslie was the resources offered by the school. Although she was intelligent, Leslie had some ground to make up in her education. She did not finish high school and needed some remedial help in order to be successful in her college courses. During her more difficult classes, Leslie remembers always being on campus seeking help in the tutoring center. Her professors were helpful and cared about her success. Although she tried to attend classes online, Leslie soon realized that being present in the classroom provided the support she needed. With a great support system in place, Leslie was able to persevere and graduate college at age 30.
Kristina was a 38-year-old Hispanic woman who graduated college at the age of 29. Kristina was one of the more fortunate women to have a support system to assist her in the difficulties associated with being a teen mother. While in high school, Kristina was able to have her baby attend an onsite daycare at the school. Initially, her mother was not as positive about Kristina’s future, but she had the option to move to another state with her father who was more than willing to help her continue with her education. Her family helped her by providing daycare for her son and paying for her college tuition. She was able to live at home while working and attending school. Working full time and going to school full time was a struggle, however, with her support system, she was able to do it.

Kristina began her college career at a community college for the first two years and transferred to a university where she met her husband. Although the financial support ended from her parents when she got married, she and her husband were able to meet their financial obligations and qualify for financial aid. She and her husband had two more children. It was at that point when Kristina transferred to an online university where she would be able to work full time and attend school around the needs of her family. One of the greatest struggles Kristina faced was the guilt of having to work full time and the time away from her children to go to school or work on school assignments. Making sure she was a good mother for her children was always a priority for her. She felt that her son did not ask to be born to a teenage mom, so she had to do everything she could to make sure he was her main focus. Although she had to take breaks in her education and finances were a burden at times, Kristina also had a job that contributed to her school tuition, which decreased the amount of student loans needed. Kristina
was able to stick with it and she graduated from college at 29. She has since earned two masters
degrees.

**Kimberly**

Kimberly, a 38-year-old Caucasian woman, graduated college at 26. Kimberly’s life was
headed in the wrong direction even prior to her becoming pregnant. She had dropped out of
school in the ninth grade and then attended an alternative high school for a short time, until she
was kicked out. Although she had educated parents who were supportive, she did not take
advantage of their knowledge or experiences, and decided to move into her then boyfriend’s
house at the age of 15. After the birth of her son, she decided to get serious and graduate from
high school. After marrying her son’s father, Kimberly’s husband joined the military, which
offered new stress to their young relationship. Once their marriage ended, Kimberly decided she
needed to continue with her education. She began taking classes at the local community college.
Kimberly took advantage of benefits such as WIC, food stamps, daycare assistance, and
Medicaid. These resources, along with the continual support of her parents, made it possible for
her to continue going to school.

After some time, Kimberly transferred to another school due to commuting issues and
time taken away from her son to attend school. Kimberly was the only woman interviewed who
attended college primarily online. This afforded her the time she needed to be the mother she
wanted to be for her child. Additionally, it was necessary that she work in order to financially
provide for her and her son, so she was not able to take as many courses as she would have liked.
The slower pace of college attendance was a struggle for Kimberly at times, and added to the
difficulty of completing her college degree in a timely manner. Although she struggled as a
single mom with a full time job and family responsibilities, Kimberly graduated from college.
Alanna

Alanna was a 31-year-old Caucasian woman who graduated college at the age of 30. Alanna was a challenging teenager. Admittedly, she was into alcohol, drugs and partying. She moved out of her family home at 15, and had two children 11 months apart by the time she was 18 years old. Her relationship with her children’s father was strained, but the ultimate blow came when he was involved in a serious automobile accident when they were 19. The effects of the accident were significant and played a role in the termination of their relationship. The children’s father did not recover fully from the accident, which contributed, to his lack of support of the children. Although Alanna had a turbulent upbringing, her family stepped up once she became a young mother of two children. Over the next few years, Alanna and her children moved back and forth from state to state and lived with various family members. Finances were always a struggle, but she had her family to help her piece together the money needed to provide for her children. At one point, Alanna gave custody of her children to her mother for a time while she tried to get herself in a better situation.

At the age of 26, with the encouragement and full support of her new boyfriend, Alanna began attending college. Without having to worry about finances or working, Alanna was able to finish her degree in four years. Alanna’s biggest struggle while in college was her challenging class load. Although she struggled at times with having enough time for her children, they offered her the support she needed to focus on school. With the goal of attending graduate school, Alanna became involved in extracurricular activities at school and became a Teaching Assistant for one of her professors. Additionally, two professors became her mentors, recognizing her capabilities and pushing her to fulfill her potential. With a strong sense of
feminine pride and intrinsic confidence, she was able to use the resources offered her to complete her education, graduating with a 3.97 GPA.

**Angela**

My next interviewee was Angela. Angela was a 44-year-old Caucasian woman who graduated college at 26. Her upbringing was also unstable, due to frequent moves and her mother’s eight marriages. With the help and encouragement of a couple people in her life, Angela managed to obtain a GED. Not fully able to support herself and her young son, and unwilling to accept the same fate as her mother, Angela joined the military. For a time, while she was in the military, Angela was able to make ends meet. However, when her time in the military ended she was faced with decisions about which direction her life was headed. With the encouragement of a long time friend, Angela enrolled in college. She had to take five remedial courses before she was ready for college level courses, but that did not derail her.

While in college, there continued to be struggles in Angela’s life. For example, she and her young son lived in unsafe public housing. She always had to be conscious of where she was and who was around. She was unable to make friends in her neighborhood or rely on neighbors to help with childcare. It was a struggle to have enough money for food and the necessities for school. She did work as much as possible and did receive financial aid, but money oftentimes ran out before all their needs were met. Since she did not have transportation, Angela rode a bike with a baby seat on the back to and from work, school, and the daycare. This routine continued until her son started school full time, which made it easier for her to go to work and attend school.

Perhaps the greatest challenge Angela faced was self-doubt. Angela had many people who believed in her and knew she could do whatever she put her mind to, however, she was not
living up to her fullest potential and she knew it. She needed people in her life to offer support, guidance, and encouragement. Initially that came from a couple of teachers in high school who noticed that she was underachieving. Later, she was mentored by her commanding officers in the military. There were many times she felt as if she would not make it. She was afraid to take out any student loans to help financially, because she was afraid she would not finish school and would not be able to pay them back.

Slowly she began to gain the confidence she needed to go back to school and attain her college degree. The final push came when she was shown a great example by a friend who was achieving their dreams and Angela wanted to experience the same. Not only would this friend become an inspiration, but her friend’s mother also took a special interest in Angela’s success. With their support she was armed with the confidence to step out on faith. While in college, there were many resources that made a difference. Help with childcare was one significant source of help that made it possible for Angela to go to school. Again, her close friend offered help with childcare while she attended class or she took her son to school with her. Additionally, she was also able to receive financial aid, which paid for most of her schooling needs. It was an accumulation of resources that made it possible for her to continue with her education and through perseverance she succeeded. Even after Angela finished her four-year degree and was married to a supportive husband and had a beautiful home, she still doubted her abilities to further her education by going to graduate school. Through sheer grit and determination, Angela overcame that self-doubt, and graduated in 2014 with a Doctorate in Education.

Samantha

At 22, Samantha was the youngest woman I interviewed. She recently graduated from college, so the memories of the events surrounding her pregnancy and college experience were
still fresh. Like many of the other woman interviewed, Samantha tried to make the relationship work with her son’s father, but it proved to be negative and confrontational. With zero support from the baby’s father, Samantha relied heavily upon her family. Unlike many of the other women, Samantha was a good student in high school and always had the expectation of attending college. Additionally, while in high school, she had teachers make special arrangements to get her work to her after the birth of her baby. She was allowed to participate in an independent study program and began taking college courses. This helped prepare her for success in college. With the help and support of her family, she began attending a university close to her home where she could get help with daycare while attending class. Samantha was determined to not let her pregnancy change her life for the negative, so she pushed herself while in college. Except for one summer, she did not take any time off from school. She attended classes during the summer and Christmas intercession and had no less than 15 and up to 24 credits a semester. Even though her family helped her financially, Samantha worked at least one job throughout college in order to contribute to the care of her son.

Samantha’s greatest struggle while in college was time. Time to do the homework and assignments required from her challenging classes, time to spend with her young son, and time to be young and carefree. Samantha admits she did not have very many friends or time to socialize while attending college. She was focused on her goals, which did not leave time for such frivolous things. Samantha graduated from college in three and a half years at the age of 21 with an accounting degree and is currently preparing for her CPA exam.

There is no doubt that Samantha worked hard to achieve her goals. She did not let her pregnancy get in the way of her desire for a college education. She made a game plan and stuck to it. While in college, her retired grandmother watched her son for the first two years Samantha
attended school. She lived at home and continued to receive support from her extended family. Although she worked while in college, her main focus was on completing her education, so she could provide for her child. Her parents recognized her hard work, effort, and dedication, so they were willing to do whatever they could to help her.

Marrika

Marrika was the eighth woman I interviewed and the only African American. She was 34 years old and graduated college at the age of 27. An educated single mother, who attended a prestigious university and worked in administration with a government agency, raised her. Marrika had family pressure to do well in school; however, she did not see the value of education. Her attitude toward school was that passing was good enough. She was not trying to excel. Many of Marrika’s extended family members attended college, but she just took it for granted. College is just what you did, but she did not put much thought into it or her future. Marrika’s low motivation and lack of foresight contributed to her risky behavior. After one sexual encounter with a particular young man, Marrika became pregnant. Little did she know, her pregnancy would be extremely difficult and a real hardship upon her and her mother. After many hospital visits due to Hyperemesis Gravidarum, Marrika knew the toll it was taking on her mother, so she decided to leave home and move into a maternity home for teen girls. She was able to graduate high school on time, but not with her peers she had known for years.

After a rocky start in their relationship, Marrika and her daughter’s father were able to make their relationship work for a time. They moved out on their own and eventually married. It was during this time that she began attending classes at a local community college. For a short time, her mother was not working and was able to assist with childcare while Marrika was attending classes. However, that was short lived and daycare became a significant struggle. She
found a baby sitter for only $40 a week, but the babysitter would leave her child in her car seat all day. Marrika felt terrible about the situation, but she knew that is all she could afford. She also knew she had to persevere in order to provide a future for her and her family.

One of Marrika’s greatest struggles was the necessity to apply for and rely on public assistance in order to make ends meet. She related how she felt embarrassed about having to get welfare and how she was treated horribly at the agencies. Although she only received welfare for a short time, that experience had left an indelible mark on her. In fact, Marrika became a social worker in order to help other women who stood in need of services. Although, she took many breaks in her education due to work or family responsibilities and conflicts, she defied the odds and graduated from college at 30 years old.

Brenda

Brenda was a 44-year-old Caucasian woman who graduated college at the age of 29. Of all the women I interviewed, Brenda’s story is the most difficult to depict. A 15 year old kicked out of her house and living on a park bench. Brenda was raised in a mostly typical working class family. Her mother suffered from bipolar disorder and was, at times, abusive towards her. She knew when she became pregnant at 15 that her parents would not take the news well, and she was right. She was told she had two options: have an abortion or move out. Brenda packed her bags that fateful day and never looked back. She spent the first three days sleeping on a park bench before hitchhiking to a neighboring state where she was able to stay at a church, sleeping in their basement, until the birth of her daughter. It was the generosity of the church that started her on the course to success. It was during this time that Brenda did not allow her circumstances to get the best of her. She began to work and did everything in her power to help herself. She worked her way up and was able to get a small one-bedroom apartment for her and her child. She
met her ex-husband who turned out to be more abusive than her mother, and ended up having two more children. At 23, Brenda was diagnosed with cancer and went through treatment. It was then that she took and passed the GED.

Feeling empowered, Brenda applied for financial aid and was awarded. She began taking college courses and worked at night. While in college, Brenda struggled with some of her courses. She contributed her success in math to a friend she made. He sat next to her and helped her through each assignment until she felt confident in her own abilities. She also remembers her professors being very understanding. Not only did they know and allow her to bring her children with her to school, but they were also helpful and supportive of her when she had difficulty with assignments. After she finally divorced her husband, she continued to go to school. She was determined to finish. Dealing with issues of trust, Brenda did not allow anybody to watch her children, so she would take her children to school with her. The children would sit in the classroom next door while she went to school. She admits there were days she wanted to quit, but she did not give in to those feelings of insecurity or fear. Amazingly, the only welfare assistance Brenda ever received during the time she was in school was Medicaid and assistance with public housing. Brenda did not wait for others to help her first, she did her part first and then welcomed any help she received.

Other huge obstacles Brenda faced were self-doubt and guilt. There was no one in her life giving her support or encouragement. She even faced ridicule and discouragement from her family who mocked her for going to school and becoming a teacher. The time taken away from her children in order for her to work and attend school made Brenda feel incredibly guilty. Not having a relationship with her own parents, Brenda desperately wanted to be a good mother to her three children. However, she knew that an education would be the only way to accomplish
her dreams for them. Brenda graduated at 29 and went on to obtain her Masters and Educational Specialist degrees.

**Mollie**

Mollie was a 35-year-old Hispanic woman who graduated college at the age of 31. She was another very young teen mother. Mollie became pregnant at 15, while in junior high school, and had her son the summer before her freshman year. She was raised as an only child with a single mother. In addition to an extremely supportive mother, there were other resources in Mollie’s life that made going to school possible. For example, her mother registered her for a ‘Teen Mom’ group offered by the YWCA. This program picked her up from school in the afternoon and provided daycare assistance. The program offered classes in life-building skills and school and study skills. There were guest speakers, including other teen mothers, who offered encouragement and success stories. She was continuing with her high school education after the birth of her daughter, but it became too difficult when Mollie became pregnant again at 17. It was then she decided, with the help of the teen program, to get her GED and begin taking college courses at the local community college. The baby’s father was not interested in being involved and was not supportive. That time in school was short lived, because it was too difficult to attend school and take care of two small children. Mollie got a job working at the preschool her children attended, so she could work and still be near her children. That arrangement remained until her second child began going to kindergarten.

Like most teen mothers, Mollie had several obstacles to overcome. One such obstacle was financial difficulties. Mollie benefited much from government assistance programs such as Medicaid, food stamps, housing, financial aid, and daycare assistance. She explained that it was very stressful to figure out everything and make everything work. Another struggle was finding
balance in her life. Juggling work and trying to find time for the kids often times was overwhelming. Once she had less childcare concerns, Mollie returned to school, however, she was not eligible for financial aid. Mollie became aware of a religious based charity that had a scholarship opportunity in which she might qualify. Thankfully, Mollie did qualify for the scholarship that paid for her education. Along with many other government assistance programs, Mollie was finally able to reduced her work hours and complete the A.A. degree she started years prior. With support and encouragement from her mother, she transferred to a university and graduated with her four-year degree. Mollie has since married and had two more children. She has obtained a Master’s degree in healthcare management.

Jamie

Jamie, a 33-year-old Caucasian woman, was the last woman I interviewed. She was 15 years old when she became pregnant, and although her parents were upset with the situation, they remained supportive and by her side. Without the involvement of her baby’s father, Jamie continued high school and graduated with her peers. She did well enough to get into a university where she could live at home while attending. However, needing to contribute to the support of her daughter, Jamie began working full time. After deciding that it was too difficult to work and attend college, Jamie took time off from school. During that time, Jamie was married and shortly after divorced. She moved out of her parents’ home, but they remained supportive and helped with daycare for her daughter. After a series of work changes, Jamie was able to reduce her hours at work, move back home, and devote the time needed to finish her education.

Like most women trying to go to school after having a child at a young age, the two biggest obstacles in Jamie’s life were time and money. Jamie was a hard worker, which translated often times into receiving less financial aid from the government. However, having to
pay for her own educational expenses lead to financial hardships. Lack of money greatly contributed to the slower pace she experienced in trying to complete her degree. There were many times Jamie could have taken an additional course, but lacked the money to do so. Conversely, there were times when she had the money, but was simply unable to fit another thing on her plate. Although Jamie was frustrated and discouraged at times, she stuck with it and, after 10 years, finally graduated with her four-year degree.

Themes

As I conducted the interviews, common themes began to emerge among the shared stories. I found their stories to be consistent, that is they were similar to each other, but oftentimes varied in the way they self-reflected or analyzed the events. Four prevalent overarching major themes emerged from the interview data. Under each major theme were subthemes. These subthemes, although not relevant to each participant, offered significant insight into the women’s lives. The first and second major themes related to the research questions implicitly. The first major theme was that these women faced challenges and obstacles as teen mothers specifically and then while they were attending college. This theme directly answers my first sub-question within my research questions: What are the unique challenges experienced by teen moms? All of the women discussed how they had to face challenges head on and not let those challenges deter them from their goals. Although their journeys were varied, the end results were similar.

The second major theme is how these women were able to capitalize on the help offered to them. This second theme answers sub-question two: What factors in the context of their lives aided teen moms in continuing and completing their education? Although the help was wide-ranging, these women were able to use that help to benefit them and their child. They spoke
about setting aside their own needs to ensure they were able to provide the basic needs of their child, while at the same time looking to the future and doing their part to make that future better for themselves and their child.

The following two major themes emerged outside of the research questions specifically. However, they do help to address the overall central research question: What are the unique experiences shared by the teen moms who graduated from college by age 30 that accounts for their success? The third major theme was more difficult to draw out from the women at times. The theme that emerged addressed a turning point in the lives of these teenage mothers. Every woman talked about a time in which “things got real.” There was a moment in which each young woman had to take a look at her life and make some hard choices. For some, it was when new people came into their lives or when people exited. For others, it came when life dealt a blow, such as losing a job or changes in living situation. Still for others, it was the moment when they realized their future was entirely in their hands and they were responsible for the outcome.

The fourth major theme tied into the theoretical framework of this study. The theme was the motivation to continue with their education that the women discussed. They discussed their feelings about being a statistic and how they had to fight society’s ideas about teenage mothers. Additionally, they had to face their own fears and sense of inadequacy in order to find the motivation to continue and be successful.

I will present the four themes in the form of portraits along with my thoughts and narration, which will allow me to “construct a composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experiences, integrating all individual textural-structural descriptions into a universal description of the experience representing the group as a whole” (p. 122). In all cases, the portraits are only part of the conversations. It was also important that these
women’s stories were told in the participant’s language and implications were to be, by virtue of it being in their language, they therefore held the ultimate control of the information. Discerning fact from fiction is the responsibility of the researcher and the reader; therefore, I included the complete transcripts in Appendix L to allow the complete story to be kept for the validation of this research and to ensure the integrity of the data. Moreover, it provides a historical documentation of a particular time in history for these unheard voices to have a voice. All PII has been redacted to protect the participants’ anonymity.

**Theme 1: Challenges Faced During Pregnancy and Subsequent College Attendance**

Of the 18 questions that comprised the open-ended interview, only one question asked specifically about challenges. However, all of the interviewees mentioned challenges they faced during their pregnancy or as teen mothers and while they were attempting to finish their college degree. The women I interviewed became more open in discussing their lives and the challenges they had experienced as the interviews progressed. Imbedded within these challenges were painful memories, which often times led to additional recollections. I divided theme one into subthemes with subheadings underneath that supported the subthemes. For ease of the reader and to distinguish between each participant’s direct quotes from their transcripts, I indented and used their first names. Not all women were quoted in every section in view of the fact that some of the challenges may not have applied to them.

**Academic underachievement.** Academic underachievement was a challenge many of the participants experienced. During the interview phase, many of the women admitted they were under performing in high school before they became pregnant. They often times did not value education and certainly did not value it in their life or see it as something of great importance. However, this was inconsistent with the questionnaire data. Participants were asked what their
approximate high school GPA was upon completion. Of the 15 participants who responded to this question, 13.3% had a GPA less than 2.0, 6.7% had a GPA between 2.0 and 2.5, 13.3% had a GPA between 2.5 and 3.0, 33.3% had a GPA between 3.0 and 3.5, while 33.3% reported having a GPA higher than a 3.5. I cannot account for this discrepancy except to say that perhaps high school GPA is not the only indicator that depicts performance or achievement.

Leslie

My dad spoke to the principal to let him know I was pregnant and if there was any way I could continue to get home school. He kicked me out, he said no. I was a bad influence for the rest of the girls there.

Kimberly

I hated school. I despised it. I dropped out of school in 9th grade, went to an alternative school in 10th grade, got kicked out and that was all before I got pregnant. It was just; I didn’t like school at all. I was not a school person. I was not studious. I didn’t want to be there. I didn’t have very many friends. I went to the school that I graduated from and it was very discouraging because the high school counselor actually tried to convince me and talked me into getting my GED and didn’t think I belonged at school.

Alanna

I pretty much did whatever I wanted. I skipped school a lot. I was into everything, drugs, alcohol, partying, that kind of kid.

Angela

No one was beating me over the head with sticks and stones, no one was ever home. No one ever really cared how I was doing in school, so I frequently did not
do well in school. Lots of absences. The year my son was born I had 63 absences, but it wasn’t that uncommon for me being absent.

**Marrika**

I just thought you had to go and pass. I wasn’t trying to excel or anything. I just thought, “If I pass, that’s good enough. Maybe my mom will get off my back.” I had a few friends, not too social, didn’t do too much. I would skip school sometimes.

**Mollie**

I had my son in the 9th grade. . . . Then when I was 17 I got pregnant again with my daughter and I was a senior in high school then I did end up dropping out of high school. After that I got my GED right away.

**Jamie**

I really wasn’t giving it my best. I didn’t really think about college a lot. It wasn’t a real high priority with my parents. It wasn’t really something I thought about doing. I kind of did the bare minimum in school. My grades were ok.

**Low parental expectations.** The data showed one of the biggest challenges faced by the interviewees was lower parental expectation. For many of the women, their parents, often times their mother, did not expect them to be any better than teen moms, or did not have any expectations for their future. For many, their role as wife or mother was the only expectation of women within their families.

**Lori**

I realized that there were not a lot of expectations for me because in a town that size you could either get married and start having babies or if you wanted to go to
school and be a schoolteacher that was a good job for women. My dad hoped I
would become a bank teller. That’s a good job for a woman. . . . “Honey, you’re
just going to end up being a stay at home mom anyway. The best you could do is
being a school teacher and you can go back and do that after your kids get out.”

Leslie

My mom was more about, “Let’s see if you get a high school diploma,” kind of
not really talking about me being greater than that . . . her expectation is there
were none, if you graduated high school, that’s good but if you didn’t, yeah.

Kristina

My dad, he loved me to death, but his thinking was I was just a girl and I have a
twin brother so he put a little more inspiration onto him. She [mom] no longer
cared if I went to college. She didn’t really care at that point if I had graduated
from high school . . . . Her expectation was for me to get on welfare and start
collecting welfare checks.

Alanna

She actually kind of in a weird way expected it to happen to one of us. She
figured it would probably be me, because I was so much trouble.

Angela

She [my mother] said my choices are one, put this baby up for adoption or, two,
quit school and get a job, because I have this baby to support. In her mind she
couldn’t see where those two things could happen at the same time.

Brenda

The female were basically baby making machines and housekeepers.
Unstable life after pregnancy. Teenage pregnancies often times bring unstable life circumstances for the young woman. Many of the participants were involved in unhealthy relationships, dealt with lack of support from their families or the baby’s father and some even experienced abuse. The data collected from the SSNQ corroborated these findings. Respondents were asked to identify people they could expect to make them angry or hurt their feelings. These would have been people they argued with or upset them in some other way. Of the 15 to respond, 60% identified their significant other, 46.7% said their parent(s), and 33.3% said they expected their extended family to upset them or hurt their feelings. When asked which of these same people actually hurt their feelings or made them angry, 46.6% said their significant other, 40% said their parent(s), and 33.3% said their extended family.

The following portraits illustrate some of the more difficult experiences by each of the participants after they became pregnant. For all the participants, there were several experiences that produced significant challenges.

Abortion or adoption. Across the board, abortion was not an option for the women I interviewed. However, some of the women were approached with the idea of getting an abortion and/or possibly placing their baby up for adoption. Consequently, many of the relationships these women had were negatively affected by the suggestion. Although, that may have led to an easier path toward a college degree, none of these women considered having an abortion or placing their child up for adoption. Instead, they analyzed their situation and devised a plan to reach their goals.

Lori

My mom came to me and asked me if I had considered having an abortion and would that be something that I would consider. . . . My parents would never
support abortion but faced with the prospect of our whole little tiny town knowing that now their daughter, upstanding, prominent little family shamed the whole family because of this. Is there any way we could get out of this? Mom proposed that and I said no. I said no, I’m not going to.

Angela

At that juncture, my mother was like, “See? You just have to give the baby up for adoption. Oh my gosh, you need to put this baby up for adoption. You’re never going to make it.”

Brenda

I went home and my dad was at his job, and I told my mom. I was scared. She told me I had two options, abortion or get out. I went in my room, sat down and cried more, packed a bag, and walked out. I slept in a park bench for three days, hitchhiked to Virginia, stayed at a church, and went to work.

Jamie

He [baby’s father] asked me . . . he said, “Are you sure it’s mine? Are you sure you want to keep it?”

Unhealthy relationships. One subtheme that emerged was the presence of unhealthy relationships in the participants’ lives. For many of the women, these relationships included distant family members or family members of their child’s father. As a teen mother, it proved to be difficult, for these women to establish themselves as adults and be treated in a like manner. For many of these women, these relationships were usually short lived, however, they greatly contributed to the challenges of being a
teen mother and oftentimes followed them as they tried to work toward their educational goals.

**Lori**

It was a very tough year because my parents were upset with me, my sister was furious with me because I had obviously done this on purpose so I could have a baby before she did and steal the thunder and the limelight of the first grandchild and while everyone should have been fondling over her that they are dealing with the fall out of me.

**Leslie**

I tried not to leave the house as much and then, to everyone’s surprise, my boyfriend gets arrested and goes to jail for the next six months. I was already about three months pregnant, at the time when I found out. . . . He was deep in drugs, and when he came out we got married. My dad said, “Are you sure you want to do this?” He said, “It’s a love baby.” At that time, when he asked me, “Are you sure you want to do this?” I wanted to say, “No! Please no!” But I felt like I have to. He’s part of the consequences that I have to deal with this. He’s like, “Okay!” So we got married.

**Kimberly**

I eventually ended up moving in with my boyfriend, my son’s father at that time. I didn’t know, now looking back, whether we were joking about it or whether we were serious about it but we had talked about having a baby at age fifteen and of course inside, I just sat there and go, “What the heck was I thinking?” Then I
eventually ended up marrying my boyfriend, his father . . . I was 17 . . . He joined the military and after boot camp, we moved with him.

**Alanna**

I moved out of my house when I was almost 15 years old. Most of my teenage life was actually living with my kids’ father. Really, no structure. I guess that I wasn’t a teenager very long before I got pregnant.

**Angela**

I was 16, I was looking into getting my license and I knew that I was pregnant. He [the father] got into some drugs and I played around with it too. Thank God I got pregnant because then it was like I did not want a child to experience the same life that I had.

**Marrika**

She [my mom] basically said she would stand by me whatever my decision was. I figured I was almost an adult so I could take care of it and I said, “I’m going to have the baby.” I didn’t realize that I’d get a condition called Hyperemesis Gravidarum which means you cannot eat, you can’t drink, you can’t hold down anything. I had to be hospitalized several times. I had to transfer schools in the middle of my senior year, transfer to a different school. No friends, like I would just leave campus and just go eat by myself on a bench somewhere. It was just horrible.

*Lack of familial support.* Although, the data from the questionnaire, surveys and interviews confirmed that parental support was the most beneficial resource, for some of the women, parental or familial support was scarce or missing completely. In fact, nearly 50% of the
women who responded to the SSNQ said they would have liked more help and support with their pregnancy. For some, the help was there, but attached with conditions. The following women had very little if any support from their families, which greatly increased the challenges of trying to attend college while caring for and raising their child.

**Lori**

When I got married, I lost all of that financial assistance [from family] with going to help pay for college and books.

**Angela**

My boyfriend I was so in love with, his mom came over and said, “Here’s where we stand. He is not ready to take care of himself much more of a baby.” Our position and this is what they said to him is, “You can stay with her and raise this baby but you’re not going to drive your car.” I would sleep in my car thinking, “Oh my gosh, here it is, I’m going to have this baby and I’m going to have this baby by myself.” I did. I finished high school barely . . . trying to be an adult at 17 was hard after he was born.

**Brenda**

I just sat down and didn’t want that life and I just had to figure a way to get back to school, but I had to work because McDonald’s doesn’t pay. I was I think 23 years old and I got cancer, went through chemotherapy and all of that. I survived; so I said I wanted to do something better for myself and for my kids. That’s when I went and took the GED test.

**Lack of support from child’s father.** Having the support of a significant other can make a huge difference for mothers trying to accomplish a goal. However, for these teen mothers, the
lack of support from their child’s father made their situations all the more difficult. Some of the women I interviewed tried to make their relationships work with their child’s father, but immaturity and unstable lives meant the demise of their relationships, and with them, went the support. This data is consistent with the SSNQ data in which 60% of respondents said they could expect their significant other to make them angry or hurt feelings. The following women had experiences that directly related to the challenges that come from lack of support by their child’s father.

**Leslie**

My ex-husband already knew that he was going to go back to jail. He just wanted to put me aside, basically; make sure that I was married and no one else was going to come and sweep me up. At one point, when my daughter was four, we decided to have another child. It was my decision because I saw my daughter was very lonely, very independent, and I figured, “You know what? I know I don’t love this guy I know this is not maybe who I’m going to spend the rest of my life with, but my daughter’s alone and . . . I was with seven brothers and sisters and I don’t want my daughter to be by herself.” We decided to have another child. He bailed; he decided that that day he just didn’t want to have anything to do with me, and I was pregnant. So my next pregnancy, I spent it alone and I struggled a lot. I was making like nothing and I had to pay my rent, my car payment, and put myself through school to get my broker license. I was about twenty-one. We started working things out again. My dad told me, “After you have that child he’s coming back.” We started working things out; it was not even six months, seven months, again, he decided it wasn’t for him. He left again.
Kristina

We tried to work things out for about 10 months after I had my son and he was in and out. It was very sporadic when he was around so I moved out. He never provided any financial support.

Marrika

I told him [my boyfriend] and he really didn’t want to have anything to do with me, denied it the whole time. We didn’t have any support from him. Six weeks after she was born, he finally stepped up and became a part of her life. We were together every day after that. I was 23; so it was five years. . . . I didn’t plan to move out with him. I planned to get my own place and he kind of moved in with me after I moved out.

Jamie

I was 15. The father was not ready . . . we broke up before I found out I was pregnant. He wasn’t really interested in being a part of it at that point. He was almost four years older than me.

Lack of partner/spousal support. For some of the women interviewed, there was a time when they received support from their child’s father; however, those same people were not supportive spouses or partners. This is consistent with the SSNQ data, in which 46.4% of the women who responded said their significant other actually made them angry or hurt their feelings. In the following examples, the women were married, living with their child’s father, or in a committed relationship, but they did not have the support needed to attend school or continue with school.
Lori

My husband was not supportive of anything. Because of my lack of support system I think, because of being ostracized, by the time I finally married him I was emotionally, psychologically low because everyone told me how I was a leper.

Leslie

I tried to go to continuation school, take a home study program, but my husband at the time, he wasn’t having it. I tried going [to school] and signed up, but no. “You’re going to meet someone there, no no no!” He [my husband] was 23, I was 15. He was very manipulative and like, “No, no, no school for you, you’re done. You’re going to be a mother now.”

Alanna

We still lived with his dad’s parents. Things were okay. His dad [my boyfriend] cheated a lot. Eighteen-year-old guy, he cheated a lot. Tough to have the kids hearing all this. I’ve never really kept it from them. I guess that’s okay. At one point we broke up. Then I found out I was pregnant again. They tell you to wait six weeks. On my six-week checkup, I was already pregnant with my daughter.

Samantha

I think he [baby’s father] was always sort of angry about everything. I remember crying a lot when I was pregnant. . . . I had the baby and he wasn’t able to be there right then. Then I think my son was three months old when I just said I couldn’t do it anymore. I broke up with him. I told him it was the best thing for us. I guess I was 17 at that point.
Abuse. Unfortunately, for four of the women I interviewed, abuse was a part of their story. In listening to them recall the circumstances surrounding their experiences, it was evident the feelings associated with these events were still present in their minds and hearts. Although these events do not define who these women are, it did contribute to the women they became.

Lori

He became physically abusive, but I stayed because who else would want a pregnant girl or now a girl with an infant child? One night my ex-husband got very angry and he was physically violent and he held me at gunpoint and told me that he was going to kill me.

Leslie

During the time he was out it was constantly fighting, very constant. He was very jealous, very possessive. . . . It was horrible. It was a nightmare. It was bad. He would get upset and kick me out; you know, grab my stuff, put it in plastic bags and throw it outside. Mine and my daughter’s. His daughter’s. It was like that for the next eight years. It was constantly break-up to make-up, break-up to make-up. . . . It was a lot of mental abuse, saying like, “Oh, you’re a slut, you’re a whore and you’re this, you’re that.” If it wasn’t with me it’d would be someone else. “You’re blah, blah, blah. You’re this; you’re that. Your family is this; your family is that.” Yet, my family takes care of him. My family took care of me and his child.

Alanna

The kids’ father came out and we tried it again. I only lasted for 2 or 3 more months and I realized there was no point in trying again. He was a very different
guy [since the accident]. There was one night when he got mad at me for something. I kind of pushed it, and he hit me. That’s when I knew, “Ok, absolutely then.”

**Brenda**

I met my ex-husband . . . not the baby’s father. He’s the father of my other two children. He turned out to be worse than my mother was. He was an alcoholic with a hand problem.

**Divorce or abandonment.** Of the 11 women I interviewed, not one of them stayed with their child’s father past a couple years, including those women who married their child’s father. For many of the women, divorce was a painful experience; yet for some it offered the relief from a difficult situation that allowed them to change the trajectory of their lives. Conversely, some of the women did not make the choice to be divorced. Instead, they were abandoned by their spouses or significant others. Again, these circumstances were difficult, but these women showed their tenacity and bravery as they endured and attained their goals.

**Lori**

I finally divorced him at 19.

**Kristina**

We saw him probably twice from 10 months old until when my son was three and that was the last time that we saw him.

**Kimberly**

I divorced him by age 20.

**Marrika**

We’re divorced now.
Brenda

I divorced my ex-husband after he was arrested for breaking my ribs.

**False starts.** For many of the participants, the desire to continue with their education was there. However, attending college without having to take a break proved to be a great challenge for many of the women interviewed. When asked within the questionnaire how much education they expected to complete by the time they were 30 years old, 64.7% expected to complete graduate school, while 23.5% expected to at least complete a four year degree, and fewer than 12% had little expectation to attend college or no expectation at all. However, due to various obstacles and challenges, many of the women were unable to finish their education the first time they tried. I am calling this experience a “false start.” Names of colleges and universities have been removed to assist with the anonymity of the participants.

**Work responsibilities.** One of the biggest contributions to false starts was work responsibility. For many of these women, they had no choice but to work and support their child without the help of their child’s father. Although, most of the women had the help and support of their parents and families, it did not completely alleviate their responsibility to provide for their own child. Unfortunately, this fact contributed to many false starts in the participants’ academic journey.

Kimberly

I started to take some classes . . . and just thought that it was just too hard for me to work full-time. Having to work a full-time job, that definitely left less time for me to be able to go to school, having my family, having my son I knew that I couldn’t work full time and then go to school full time and still expect to be a full
time mom, or a good full time mom. I’m not saying that there are not women out
there that can do it all; it’s just that I knew that I couldn’t.

Marrika

I was always having to work. I’ve never just been able to be a student. I’ve always
had to have a full time job, sometimes a full time and a part time job, and
working.

Jamie

At that time I was working full-time as a manager in a food court. I was working
60-, 70-hour weeks and I signed up for four classes. I bit off more than I could
chew.

Academic missteps. Other challenges contributing to false starts were academic missteps.
Although these 11 women have demonstrated they had the ability to complete a college degree,
the road to completion was often times plagued with challenges. As shown by the interview data,
time and balance were very difficult to remedy as these women were trying to continue with their
college degree. Consequently, some of the women did not perform their best in their courses.
Many of the women had to retake courses or take breaks along the way in order to regroup.
Nonetheless, these women found ways to persevere and complete their academic goals.

Lori

My grades were good but honestly with the junior college I was always an A
student. I was taking calculus and analytic geometry the semester that I had her. I
ended up having to drop that course because being gone for a week and I only
miss classes for one week after having her. Being gone for a week and calculus
and analytic geometry I couldn’t catch up.
Alanna

I did try. She [my mom] supported me and pushed me in my first effort. I had two kids way too quickly and it didn’t work out.

Marrika

I’ve taken a lot of breaks from my education even though I did graduate before 30. There are a lot of breaks in there. I got my bachelors at 27 and my associates at 23. Every time I graduate I take a couple of years off and it’s not because I can’t go to school, it’s like mentally I just need a break.

Mollie

I think I went for a half year of college and did figure out that it was too hard to take care of the 2 kids and go to college and try to work so I quit and worked for quite some time.

Jamie

The first semester I got like two B’s and two C’s I think, it really wasn’t that bad. Then the second semester is when it started to wear in on me a little bit. So I dropped a class or two. . . . My GPA was like two-point-something, I was on academic probation. Talked about finishing. I didn’t do a lot; I just wasn’t finishing enough of them. I ended up taking a year off at one point.

Family responsibilities. For all of the women, trying to find balance within their family life was difficult. Ironically, most of the women cited their family for the reason they were continuing with their education, however it was also one of the greatest challenges they had to overcome in order to complete their degree. Many of the women had to take breaks during their college programs in order to meet the needs of their families. Fortunately, all of the women
interviewed were able to figure out how to balance their family responsibilities and the requirements of college.

**Lori**

At the point of the birth, it was around spring break of my first year. Then, I moved in to the house. Our own house and at that point I would just need to get a job and start working because school was done.

**Kristina**

Once I graduated from high school, I immediately started taking classes and I attended community college for two and a half years. Then, I transferred to the university and I attended for 2 years. That’s how I met my husband now. I took some time off from school and we got married and we had two more kids.

**Kimberly**

I needed a break, I just took about probably a year, maybe a year-and-a-half off between high school and college . . . then I finally got my associates degree. I knew that it was more important for me to be at home with him than it was for me to finish school in a shorter amount of time. I knew that I would get there eventually but I knew that I also needed to be at home with him instead of going to school. You know, being a full time employee and full time mom, those definitely contributed to my challenges to going to school.

**Alanna**

I know that the kids probably would have liked more time with me. I got pretty selfish at times. “I’m doing my homework, leave me alone. I’ve got school work to do.” They put up with a lot from me in that sense.
Marrika

I felt like I wasn’t being a mother. I mean, I knew my goal was to provide for her a better life, but I felt like I wasn’t being a mother and being there for her.

Financial struggles. Consistent with the literature (Bronars and Grogger, 1994), financial challenges plagued most of the women I interviewed. For some, it was a struggle to support their families, yet for others, they struggled to find the money to pay for their education. Although most of the women received some sort of financial aid, it did not completely alleviate the hardship they experienced. During the interviews, it was apparent that those financial struggles left an indelible mark on these women, and for many the pain experienced in those times is still evident. This data was consistent with the data gathered from the FSS. Respondents were asked if they were ever unable to sleep well due to financial worries. Of the respondents, 35.3% reported as always/often, while 58.8% said rarely/sometimes and 5.9% reported never having difficulty sleeping because of financial worries. However, an increased percentage, 41.2%, did report they always or often got headaches from worry over money matters, and 53% reported having tense muscles when bills were added up. Conversely, 23.5% said their financial situation caused them to feel physically ill. Additionally, the FSS asked questions dealing with meeting financial obligations while in college. Fifty-nine percent of respondents said they paid their bills on time, notwithstanding, 64.7% found it difficult to pay their bills, and 23.5% reported that many of their bills were past due.

Lori

There were times that I really thought about quitting forever. I remember choosing some of my classes because you talk to other people and Dr. Professor
didn’t require books. The library did have a set of textbooks . . . trying to rush to the library to see if you could be that one to have the textbook that year.

**Leslie**

Money. I had to find a way to make ends meet with financial aid and it was just that. I had to save enough gas to be able to get to school. I’m very independent; I don’t like depending on other people. I need this, I need that. I learned how to get my books for less money.

**Alanna**

It was tough. I would say my job probably wasn’t paying my bills every month . . . you learn to just juggle them so that even if they’re late, they’re only a little late here and there.

**Angela**

Goodwill is a great place you can find good stuff for two bucks, but when you don’t have two bucks, I mean come on. I told him [my father], “I’m not asking you for money, I’m not asking for a hand out, I’m asking you to take my kid and buy him some clothes. He got more clothes than I think he’d ever had in his whole life. That was a huge blessing.

**Mollie**

I couldn’t afford to go to school anymore. I mean, being in class all day long, I was not able to work that much. I decided to attend a different school because it was an all-online program. I think the biggest thing for me was being financially dependent on the state. Medicaid, food stamps, just all that was really stressful for
me; even just housing. It was just keeping up with all of the agencies to be able to get, to make sure that everything was still ok.

**Jamie**

Money was always an issue. There were a couple semesters I probably could have squeezed in another class if I would have had the money to do it. I tried not to go into debt for a while. I eventually gave up on that, that wasn’t working.

**Daycare concerns.** For the majority of all women, daycare costs can be a challenge. However, for young mothers, whose monetary means are minimal, daycare costs can be prohibitive. Many of the women I interviewed had to be creative in order to attend school while their children were young. For some, it was the kindness of another that made all the difference. However, for the majority of the participants, their parents and extended family members stepped up and provided the valued service. This data was consistent with the questionnaire data. Participants were asked to identify their childcare plans initially and then while they attended college. Initially, 35.3% said a daycare would provide childcare, but that number jumped to 47.1% while the participant was in college (Figure 2). Friends were identified by 11.8% as providing childcare, but that number declined to 5.9% once the participant was attending college. Parents were said to provide 47.1% of the childcare and that number remained steady once the participant began attending college (Figure 2).
Figure 2. Childcare Options While Attending College

Consistent with the questionnaire and interview data, the SSNQ asked respondents whom they could go to for help in taking care of their child/children. For instance, who could they rely on to watch their child/children in an emergency or if they just needed a break? Of the 15 respondents to answer this question, again parents were the greatest response with 86.7%, followed by extended family with 40% and 26.7% cited friends. Only 6.7% identified daycare, church, or no one respectively. Nearly 70% said they received help from the people listed more than once a week and 71.5% felt good or very good about the childcare they received. Additionally, 53.3% of the respondents said the amount of daycare help they received was about right. However, 46.7% would have liked to have more daycare help. Consequently, when asked how important the help with childcare was for these 11 women, 100% said very important.

Lori

I had another baby and there were two kids now. I was having a friend babysit and she was charging me a very low amount. I was paying $100 a week to watch both our girls while I took classes.
Kimberly

After I had my son, I continued to go to school and she [my mother] would watch him while I went to school and eventually I got daycare assistance and so that made it a little bit easier.

Angela

A lady at the church helped me with childcare. She didn’t mind babysitting and I didn’t pay her much . . . I know it wasn’t more than maybe $35 a week. She took good care of him. After high school my grandmother had him and then I went into the military. After the military, my friend helped babysit. She helped babysit or he went to school with me that kind of thing.

Samantha

She [my grandmother] kept [babysat] my son the entire time for the first two years. When he was two he started going to daycare once a week and then twice a week and then three days a week.

Brenda

I brought my kids with me to school. They sat in the classroom next door and I went to school. I couldn’t go to school without them, because I didn’t have a sitter. I couldn’t trust anybody.

Balance. In today’s world, most mothers can speak to this challenge. However, for these women, being balanced had the potential to make or break them. Respondents were asked to identify what things made it difficult to get all the education they wanted (Figure 3). Consistent with the interview data, time and finances were the greatest obstacles for 41.2% of the women, respectively. Having to work full time, having other family obligations, and having no support
were reported as being an obstacle by 23.5%, respectively. Fortunately, these women were able to find that delicate equilibrium that allowed them to continue with their education.

![Figure 3. Challenges to Completing the Desired Level of Education](image)

**Kimberly**

Being a full-time employee and a full-time mom, those definitely contributed to my challenges to going to school . . . money was never a big factor or a big challenge for me, I would just say mainly time.

**Angela**

Study time because when we would come home he [my son] was little and he needed play time, he needed a safe place to play.
Marrika

I’ve never just been able to be a student. I’ve always had to have a full time job, sometimes a full time and a part time job. I felt like I wasn’t being a mother.

Brenda

It was hard because I would go to school during the day because you’ve got to take teaching courses during the day. I would go to school during the day, get out at 3:00 and then have to be at work at 5:00. Then I would get home midnight. It was challenging for me and then it was guilt because of my kids.

Mollie

Time, you know, time between work and time between school, and then time with kids, you know, just finding that balance of everything, Your children come first, but then you have a paper that’s due tomorrow morning that you’re just like . . . It’s very stressful trying to figure out how you’re going to do everything.

Jamie

Probably mostly time and money . . . time and money were the biggest things.

Self-doubt. In a world where everybody doubts your ability to succeed, it is vitally important that you believe in yourself. For these women, self-doubt proved to be a difficult challenge they had to face and overcome in order to reach their goals and fulfill their greatest potential.

Angela

I was always afraid to take out student loans because I was afraid I would not finish school then I would not be able to pay them back . . . even then, remarried,
a beautiful home, a beautiful family, successful in terms of way society would define success, I still said to him [my husband], “I’m afraid I won’t make it.”

**Marrika**

I thought it was bad that I got my degree at 27, it should have happened at 22. To me, I felt bad that it took my so long.

**Brenda.**

I want to say I had confidence, but I had a lot of self-doubt. It was more of, “I got to do this.” I failed math twice in college, but I was determined. I teetered on self-confidence. It was the hardest thing I had to do, days I wanted to quit, days I just said, “I couldn’t.”

**Theme 2: Resources Available During Pregnancy and While Attending College**

The data confirmed that being a teen mother is not an ideal situation. It is often riddled with obstacles and challenges. For many of these women they were able to overcome many of those obstacles without any help. They faced seemingly insurmountable conditions, but found a way to triumph. However, all women received aid or help in some way. Some of the women had resources afforded to them that others did not. In this section, I will summarize some of the help the women received when they found out they were pregnant and then while they were attending college.

All the women interviewed were able to identify specific help during the time they were either pregnant or after the delivery of their baby. Many women had parents who helped with financial support, childcare help, or needed baby items. Extended family members were oftentimes on hand to help with childcare or financial support. These findings were consistent with the SSNQ data were respondents were asked who of the people they knew would lend them
or give them something they needed or pitched in to help them with something they needed to do. These would be people who would have run errands for them, lent them money, food, clothing, or drove them somewhere they needed to go (Figure 4). Of the 15 respondents to answer this survey question, 73.3% said parent(s), 46.7% said extended family, 33.3% said friends, and 20% said significant other. Only 6.7% said government, boss, church, or no help received respectively. However, most significant to this research was the help received by the women as they were attending college. I will describe the different help, aid or resources that were available for the women as they progressed through college.

![Q27 Who of the people you knew lent you or gave you something you needed or pitched in to help you with something you needed to do?](chart)

**Figure 4. Network of Support**

**Parental support.** For many of the women, their parent or parents were the greatest source of support. Parents offered guidance and encouragement in a time when the world was telling them they would not amount to anything. This data was consistent with the SSNQ. Respondents were asked to identify whom they would talk to about being pregnant or get some other type of help related to their pregnancy (Figure 5). Sixty percent of the 15 respondents to answer the question identified their parent(s), followed by friends with 26.7%. Again, less
significant sources of help were extended family, church, agencies, and information they may have gained through their own research. Nearly 50% said they would have liked to receive more support with their pregnancy.

![Figure 5. Preferred Pregnancy-Related Support Provider](image)

Additionally, parents were there for logistical matters such as childcare or providing a place for the young women to live. To what degree parents provided help varied from woman to woman. The following portraits illustrate times when parents were supportive and helpful during the participant’s pregnancies. However, this data does not reveal consistency in the way their parents were always supportive or that the help provided them was significant or enough to make a real difference in their lives.

**Lori**

It [school] was paid for, it was a done deal . . . I would come home and do some laundry. At that point, my parents supported me leaving him. They understood that this was not where I was supposed to be and I ended up divorcing him . . . mom would babysit. I didn’t have to take her to daycare or somewhere.
Leslie

My parents took care of me the whole pregnancy.

Kristina

When I first started going, my parents paid for me to go to school but they paid only until I stopped going. . . . My family helped pay for daycare for my son and watched him at night while I worked.

Kimberly

My mom was and did anything that she could to help out. Went to the doctor’s appointments with me, helped me get information later on and helped me get daycare assistance.

Samantha

My mom said no, you won’t. You won’t be happy that way. You’re going to go on to college and get your degree. That’s the only way you’ll be happy in your life.

Marrika

She [my mother] always told me, “If I could do it, you can do it.” . . . She basically said she would stand by me whatever my decision was.

Mollie

She [my mom] was very positive about school as well, because she got her bachelor’s and master’s degree, so I call that just the “positiveness” that’s school and how important it is. It was my mom the entire time. She was honestly the biggest support, bought everything that my first one needed.
Jamie

He [my dad] was supportive from that moment forward . . . my family’s support was amazing. My parents were strict before; they were even stricter after. They would never, until years later, babysit for me to do anything other than work and school. They always did that. I could always count on them for that. They’d always figure it out.

Social or institutional supports. Most of the women I interviewed were recipients of some form of financial or emotional help from agencies or institutions while they were pregnant and/or while they were attending college. All of the women were very grateful for the help they received and acknowledged it often times making the difference of whether or not they were able to continue on the path toward a college degree. However, this form of help only accounted for a small amount of overall help received by the women. To illustrate this, participants were asked within the SSNQ to identify whom they would have gone to if they needed information or advice (Figure 6). By and large, parent(s) were identified by 50% percent of the 14 respondents to answer this question. Extended family and significant other were cited by 21.4%, respectively. Friends or researching the answer by themselves was cited by 14.3% of the respondents, respectively. Conversely, other sources of advice and information were college advisor, boss, church or no one with 7.1% of the respondents, respectively. Respondents were then asked how they felt about the advice or information they received, 33.3% said they would have liked to have more advice or information. For some of the women, different resources were made available at separate, distinct stages in their lives, which they comment on individually below.
Figure 6. Preferred Source of Advice and Information

Lori

Really, they [neighborhood kids] would travel in herds and so if you had all of the children at your house, you had every child for a two blocks at your house playing . . . as moms we were all friends with each other and I could call some of them and say, “Can you please keep the herd down there for a little bit and I can take care of something.”

Leslie

Oh! Tutoring. I used a lot of their resources. I was taking five classes a semester, sometimes six, so I was always there. I was taking the tutoring for Chemistry. I was always on campus; always at the computer lab, I was always there.

Angela

I went to school, I went to the library, and I sat at my professor’s door. No joke, I would sit by my professor’s door and wait for them to come so I could ask
questions during the day, because I didn’t have time to go sit in a philosophy
circle and ask questions.

Samantha

He [high school teacher] brought all my books and all of my work and made
arrangements with all of my teachers for anything I needed. Then I started twelfth
grade that fall. I did classes, an independent study through that same teacher.

Samantha

There was a Christian Outreach Support Pregnancy Center when I was pregnant.
They did some counseling sessions and I think I met with them six times over a
period of four or five months. They ran a little thrift shop and at the end of the
time they asked what I needed that I didn’t get from the baby showers and they
sent me home with a duffel bag full of stuff. Everything that I didn’t have or that I
may need down the road.

Marrika

I found a maternity home that would take me, so that way, she [my mother]
wouldn’t have to take me to the doctor and take me to all those things, and they
would do it. They made us go to this teen group, teen support team, and support
group every week.

Brenda

They [the school] told me they would pay for the first year of financial aid, so I
got financial aid and I worked at night.
Mollie

I was in a program called Teen Moms and it was at the YWCA. That program, they picked me up after school, I think two times out of the week and I worked there and they provided daycare, but we did life-building skills and I guess school-building skills, mostly.

Mollie

Within a church based program, the scholarship helped pay for my school that I couldn’t pay for out of pocket until I was able to get my financial aid back. If it wasn’t for that program and the scholarship that I got, I would have never been able to do it, like to go back to pay for that semester by myself, and they helped me with my books and all that stuff.

Jamie

The guidance counselor at school was immensely helpful. She got the principal to let me leave at lunchtime. I had my daughter in a nearby daycare, so I could go breastfeed. She was really supportive.

Jamie

I finally got a job in HR and I was able to take evening classes. They let me go early a couple days a week so I could make it to my classes. I did that for a year or so. I was feeling pretty good about it. They were always helpful in me getting my classes.

Government assistance. All but a few of the women I interviewed received government assistance. Although this assistance was essential to these women being able to live and support their families, it also added to the stress they experienced during this difficult time in their lives.
Having to apply and keep up with agency requirements proved to be another obstacle experienced by these women.

Leslie

There was a lot of financial aid; if it wasn’t for financial aid, I wouldn’t have been able to go to school.

Kristina

When I went back to school, I was able to get some financial aid but most of it was student loans and my work paid for some of it.

Kimberly

I did get WIC assistance. I did get food stamps as well as a little there, also daycare assistance.

Angela

When I wasn’t in school, I was working . . . childcare, public housing and food stamps. You cannot use food stamps to buy diapers. You cannot use food stamps to buy toilet paper or toothpaste or a hairbrush or any other hygiene product. You learn where those kinds of resources are.

Marrika

I got accepted to the community college and I could get a Pell Grant since I was a mom. I didn’t have to use my mother’s income. That was good.

Brenda

I got public housing, but I had to pay rent. My kids were on Medicaid. Medicaid paid for when I had cancer too.
Jamie

I qualified for programs . . . they paid and let me get unemployment and go to school full-time.

Self-reliance and internal resolve. Having reliance on one’s own judgment, resources and capabilities can be a scary thing for anybody. However, when another human depends on your judgment, resources and capabilities, the task can be daunting. These women had to dig deep. They had to look within themselves and find that resiliency that perhaps even they did not know they had.

Leslie

The school counselors; I went to them and saw they really weren’t helping me as much, as I had to get my own road map and figure it out . . . and I ended up guiding a lot of my fellow students.

Angela

There were paper checks, with monetary denominations on them. They don’t tell you that you can sell these for 70 cents on the dollar because it’s a lot. . . . While I don’t encourage families to do that you can at least acknowledge that those things are going on.

Marrika

I felt really depressed that my actions had caused her all of this trouble, so I took it upon myself to look for other options. She [my mother] didn’t want me to go, but I saw the toll it was taking on her, so I decided to be there [the maternity home].
Brenda

When I first set out, it was I want a better life for my kids. They’re not going to grow up in the projects. I want a house. I want this. Then eventually, it turned into I did it. Let me help someone else do it. That’s why I continued on.

Theme 3: Turning Points Experienced by Participants that Changed Their Course

The third theme that I found in the data showed that for many of these women who were experiencing a hardship in their life, there came a point when they recognized that things must change in order to improve their situation. Sometimes this was a subconscious realization, while other times some were searching for it. For many of these women, they may not have recognized it as a turning point until they looked back at the situation. In many cases, what may have seemed like a negative event was described as a “blessing.”

End of a relationship. For Kimberly, Samantha, and Brenda, the end of their relationship with their significant other offered the turning point they needed. Kimberly did marry her child’s father and together they made an effort to make their family work. However, they just had too many things working against them. After a couple years of marriage, it ended in divorce. It was at that time, she realized that she needed to take responsibility for her own life. She knew she wanted to provide a good life for her child and having a higher education was integral to that plan. Although Samantha seriously thought about marrying her baby’s father, she ultimately knew their relationship was not headed in the direction that would be best for her or her child. Similarly, Brenda also knew she must obtain a college degree if there was any hope for her to provide a good life for her children. After her divorce from an abusive husband, she knew changes had to be made. Although she was afraid and felt inadequate at times, Brenda knew she had to step up and makes things happen. When faced with such heartache at a young age, these
three women showed tremendous courage and fortitude. It was those character traits as well as others that carried them toward their college degree.

**New relationships.** Shortly after Lori’s first marriage ended at the age of 19, she met a man who was 36, a chiropractor and a father of five. He offered her the stability she needed to even possibly consider returning back to school to finish her degree. He was very supportive of her and, she admits, that was one reason she was drawn to him.

**Lori**

It just fit and he was very supportive of education. I think that’s one of the things that he wasn’t from around there and he said, “My gosh, have you ever thought of being something other than a school teacher or a mom?” He showed me there was more out there and I thought, “Oh my gosh, there’s somebody that thinks like I do.”

Similarly, the turning point for Leslie came when a new relationship began in her life. Although Leslie chose not to marry her boyfriend, the decision did not diminish the impact the relationship with her boyfriend had on her life. He was extremely supportive of her desire to return to school. In fact, he was the one who brought the idea to the forefront.

**Leslie**

He’s like, “Well, why don’t you go back to school?” I’m like, “Why would I go back to school? That’s over. That’s it, I’m done. That was when I was young.” He’s like, “What? No it’s not. You’re really smart, you should go back to school.”

**Loss of a job.** Although the idea of going to school sounded appealing to Leslie, she just could not figure out the logistics. She knew that financially it would be difficult. At that point she was working full time, but felt like she was not living her dreams. However, unexpectedly,
Leslie lost her job. Although she was concerned about the loss of her job, it was needed for her to return to school.

Leslie

At the time I had lost my job and I was trying to get unemployment and he was like, “You know what? Don’t go back to work, go to school. You go to school, I’ll help you.” I’m like, “What do you mean, you’ll help me? I have bills, you know?” At that time I have to leave my house; just a house I was renting, but I ended up having to go back to my mom’s house. He was like, “I’ll help you. Don’t worry.” He’s like, “I’ll help you. I’ll pay whatever it is, I’ll help you, just go. You can do it.” I was like, “Are you serious? Really?” He’s like, “Yeah! Come on, you can do it. You can do it.” I’m like, “Okay.”

Likewise, Alanna was not working in the field she wanted. She was working in a job that provided the basic necessities of life, but it was not challenging her in ways that she needed or wanted. When she met her boyfriend, she was in a transition period in her life. After some thought and discussion it was decided that it was time for her to make some changes.

Alanna

I was like, “This is not the route I want to go.” I talked to him. I was like, “I’m still going to go back to school,” He supported me. He was all for it. I had so much support and pretty much Carte Blanche to do it. I wasn’t expected to get a job or anything like that. It was pretty much, “Do what you need to do. Finish school, we’ll support you,” just from my kids and my boyfriend, and that was enough.
Although these three women had to do the hard work required to complete their degree, they acknowledge they owe a debt of gratitude to the men in their lives.

**Unexpected chance.** For Mollie the turning point came when she was awarded a scholarship. She admits that if it were not for that scholarship, she would not have had the means to finish her degree. She felt like her education was being pushed back without any way to combat it. Just when she was feeling all was lost, she was contacted by an agency that was able to provide the means to help her fulfill her goals of a college education without the burden of student loans.

**Forced changes.** The turning point for Kristina and Angela came when circumstances, often beyond their control, forced their lives to change. Kristina admits that during the time she became pregnant and in the time after she had her baby, she was living in an unhealthy environment with her mother. It became apparent, that if she were going to be able to finish high school and continue with her education, she would have to move to live with her father in another state. Although leaving her friends did not seem appealing to Kristina, she decided it was a necessary step in her life.

**Kristina**

My biological father still lived in California and his plan at that point was for me to move back home with him because I had actually lived with him up until the eighth grade. His goal was for me to come back to California and he would help to make sure I graduated from high school and went on to college.

For Angela, the turning point came when she got out of the military. She had five years of reserve time owed to the military. Armed with new skills she learned while serving in the
military, Angela embarked on a new journey. Although she had doubts in her abilities, she took it one step at a time until she realized her goal of a college degree.

**Angela**

For me there was always a backup plan, but it wasn’t going to be enough to sustain myself and my child and so a friend’s mother said, “Why don’t you go to college?” I burst out laughing. I barely made it through high school what are you talking about? College and they would laugh at me and there’s no way I could ever do that and she said, “No, that’s what somebody told you but that’s not what I see.” She said, “Watching you graduate from high school was a very proud moment for me and I wished that I could be your mom.”

**Unpredictable employment.** For Marrika and Jamie, the turning point came when they realized employment could be unreliable. Marrika had just returned home to live with her mother after the birth of her baby. It was at that time that Marrika’s mother lost her job in the economic downturn. Two weeks after Marrika had her daughter she began to waitress in order to contribute to the family finances and help her mother during this difficult time. It was this experience that made her desirous of more. She felt like she needed and wanted to do something that would give her piece of mind knowing she would always have options. Marrika knew she had to continue with her education.

Jamie’s turning point came when she least expected it. She was working full time for a company that supported her educational plans. They allowed her to adjust her schedule and offered some tuition assistance. Things were progressing, albeit slowly, when an unexpected event happened. The company closed its doors and moved to another country. Jamie was devastated because she thought that might have been the end of her educational goals. Little did
she know, at the time, this would prove to be a great turning point in her life. By not working full time, Jamie qualified for financial assistance for school as well as unemployment. These benefits made it possible for her to live at home and provide for her family. Additionally, she was able to increase the amount of college courses she was taking per semester, in order to finally finish her degree. Jamie credits this event for her eventual success in attaining a college degree.

**Theme 4: Motivation to Continue When so Many Did Not**

Merriam-Webster (2014) defines motivation as the act or process of giving someone a reason for doing something: a force or influence that causes someone to do something. For these 11 women, motivation came in many ways. For some it was the feeling of needing to prove others wrong. For others, it was to prove to themselves they were capable and still for others, motivation came in the form of a tiny baby.

**Prove to others.** The ability to show their worth was a motivating factor for many of the women I interviewed. As teen mothers, these women were often times looked down upon and dismissed by society. Some were told by those they thought they could trust that their lives were over or they might as well give up since they were pregnant. For these women, that was not an acceptable frame of mind. They knew their own potential and set out to show others what they were capable of achieving. Consequently, Kimberly’s initial motivation came from her desire to show her abilities to the naysayers.

**Kimberly**

I think that they gave me more drive and ambition to get my high school diploma sort of, “Oh, I’m going to show you” type of thing. I was a bad student in high school. I didn’t do well, I was just happy to graduate, and I knew eventually my goal was to graduate with honors in college. I guess maybe I felt like I had
something to make up for, and when I graduated, I did graduate with honors. I
graduated with a 4.0. I’m very proud of that.

Given Brenda’s tragic situation, it is not surprising she had many motivating factors
contributing to her success. At the basic level, she just wanted to show the world she was
somebody, that she could be somebody.

**Brenda**

They were telling me that in the hospital when I had my daughter. Your world is
over. Give her to another family. Let them take care of her because you destroyed
yourself. It’s not a good thing. Most girls, they believe it. I think it was just this
self-determination. Being told that day after day, I just got angry. I got angry at
the world. I was like, I’m doing it.

Unlike some of the other women who had to think what motivated them, Mollie was
certain of her motivation. She asserts that she always wanted to prove those stereotypes wrong.

Mollie was the only woman interviewed to have had 2 children before turning 18, so perhaps she
felt a greater responsibility to do so.

**Mollie**

I just know that even some people that, you know, if you take a female that’s
pregnant at a very young age and lives in a home that things are instilled in their
brain as far as, “You’re going to do this. You’re going to do that. You’re going to
go to this school. You’re going to graduate from this school” . . . then they
become pregnant at that time. I think society, or even their parents might even go
to them like, “Now you’re not going to amount to anything,” but if that person has
their own motivation to prove them wrong like, “No, I still can do this. I can do X, Y, and Z. Maybe not what you want me to do, but I am going to do it.”

**For their children.** As a mother, protecting and providing for your children is a primal instinct. For these women this responsibility often times fell completely on their shoulders. Many of them came from less than desirable circumstances themselves, yet they yearned for more for their children.

Both Leslie and Kimberly were motivated to change their situations. They had overcome many difficulties in their lives, but knew there was more, more for them and more for their children.

**Leslie**

How can I encourage her [my daughter] to go to school? And my fear was for her to ask me for help and for me not to be able to help her. In math, I remember, I don’t think I ever learned how to divide! How can I teach my daughter? So it was my daughter. She’s really, really smart and a lot of it was showing her, “Look, I can do it. I’m expecting you to do it. You have to do it.”

**Kimberly**

He’s [my son] actually been my only motivation, that I knew that if I didn’t finish college and didn’t have some kind of education that I could struggle financially, and I didn’t want that for him. You know, like I said my dad went to college, so we grew up in a fairly well off financial status, I guess if you will, so I guess maybe he’s also been a little bit of my motivation as well. I just wanted to be able to give my son whatever he needed and wanted, just like my father was able to give to me. I didn’t want to be one of those moms that struggled and couldn’t
make ends meet and couldn’t pay bills and had to take McDonald’s jobs and stuff like that. I just was not going to do that. I refused to work fast food to be able to support my son.

Equally important was the realization of what the role of being a teen mother meant in Marrika’s motivation.

**Marrika**

I think if I didn’t have my daughter, I don’t know if I would have pursued a lot of that stuff. I probably would have taken like a five-year hiatus after high school. I had zero motivation at all to do anything. I mean, it was bad situation but the timing worked out. I don’t know if I would have been able to graduate high school if I had her while in high school. I had her like two weeks after graduation. I think things worked out pretty well and she really motivated me because I knew I want to provide at least the level of income that my mother did, if I couldn’t at least give her the life that I had, I want to give her more than that, but that should be the minimum to at least give her the life that I had. I just knew it was something I didn’t want my daughter to say, “My mom has a high school diploma.” I was able to say, “My mom went to college.” I didn’t want her to . . . I think that was my main thing like for her to be proud of me, to kind of correct the situation like, “Even though I had you as a teenager, see how much I’ve done and you should have no excuse.”
Brenda

My first thing was I’ve got to make a better life for my kids. I didn’t want them to experience what I did, so it was more I’ve got to make a better life for them. You always want better for your kids.

For Jamie, the motivation was simple. She wanted to make her daughter and her parents proud of her. Although she desired to have a good job to support her daughter and to be financially independent, she wanted to set an example her daughter could follow.

Jamie

Definitely my daughter. I felt like I needed to set that example for her and be able to provide for her without depending on anybody else. I’d say that was the most and I wanted to make my parents proud as well.

A better life. If asked, most parents want a better life for their children than they had, but for many of these women, a better life was their main motivation. Many of the women I interviewed experienced very disruptive childhoods where abuse and turmoil was rampant. They desired to provide for their children what they lacked in their own upbringing.

Lori was highly motivated to change the path on which she was headed. Although she initially did not have the support she yearned for, Lori did have many reasons to do something in order for change to happen. Once that support was in place, coupled with her motivation, there was no stopping her.

Lori

I think I have more to offer than just being a mom and working at a department store for minimum wage and being somebody’s punching bag. I think I have more to offer than this. It was that moment of, “This is not where I want to be. I can
change it, right here and now.” I knew that there was never going to be a better life without that education.

**Leslie**

Make it easy, and a lot of it was as I was going in I would push other people like, “Come on! One semester at a time.” It was basically, that’s how I see it: One semester at a time. When I noticed it like, “Oh my God, that’s it! I’m done. I’m done! I have to apply for graduation. It’s over! Oh my God!”

In some ways, Kristina’s motivation came from wanting a better job. She wanted her education to afford her the choice of doing what she wanted to do for a living rather than what she had to do in order to make ends meet. She realized that her son did not ask to be born to a teenage mother, so her main goal was to make sure she could work and support him. However, in view of the fact she would have to work, she wanted to be qualified for the better paying jobs. Nevertheless, Kristina’s children also motivated her.

**Kristina**

I also knew that I did have three kids and I wanted to show them you need to go to college because you want your kids to go to college. I was really pushing for my son saying yes, I’m a teen mom and you are the product of a teen parent but I went to college, you need to go to college. I want my girls to know that they need to go to college even though you might make choices along the way, you still need to live up to your potential.

During her interview, Kimberly came to the realization she also had an additional source of motivation other than her son; money.
Kimberly

I see how, for instance my brother does not have a college degree, he’s not in college and he struggles. My ex-husband, he does not have a college degree. I see how he struggles. I see my dad and he’s got a college degree and I see how well off he and my mother are, so it was, I guess now that I think about it, it’s hard to say, but I guess money’s the motivator.

Extrinsic motivation. As some point others motivate most people. For these women, they were able to find a source of motivation through people or circumstances that provided the additional push they needed to succeed at their goals. For some it was their family members or friends and for others it was the desired end result. Still for others it was the possibility of helping others achieve their goals.

Lori

We have our moments of, “Oh my gosh,” but we all knew that there was no way in this world that we were ever going to have a better life unless we got an education.

Leslie

I want to be able to help people, but at the same time, I need to accomplish that law degree. I need to have that under my belt because I said I was going to do it. I told my dad I was going to be a lawyer and although he’s not here anymore, I feel like it’s something I have to do. I have to do it for him.

Alanna attributed her motivation to her relationship with her boyfriend. She felt, in some ways, she needed to prove her suitability as his partner. He was always supportive of her and she
felt he deserved to have somebody that had the credentials behind them to support him. Additionally, Alanna was motivated by her desire to establish her role as a woman.

**Alanna**

I felt like it was the time to make myself that person that I wanted to be for him. But also I realized that I didn’t want to lose that part of me. I didn’t always want to be known as a Mom, or as the girl who became a Mom young and, “Oh, well yeah, she didn’t go to college, but she had kids young,” that kind of thing. It came from me being tired of not being as good as I thought I could be. And as good as the people around me thought Kevin deserved. That was part of it.

Like all of the women interviewed, Marrika did not just have one source of motivation. In fact, she was motivated in many ways to overcome her circumstances, to live up to the potential her loved ones knew she had. With a family of professionals, Marrika knew what was required of her in order for her to be qualified for the higher-level positions she desired.

**Marrika**

When I apply for a job, I always wanted to know that there were no barriers in me getting that job. If I had an associates and they said they needed a bachelors, I was like, “I need to get my bachelors.” If they said they need a masters, I need to get my masters. If that’s the job I want, I want to get it and I don’t want anything to be in the way of that especially because I know I’m capable. It’s not like I can’t do it and I had enough support, just enough to be able to get it done, so why not utilize those people while I could.
However, Brenda could not focus on herself, she had the weight of the world upon her at such a young age. Even though Brenda had every reason to be angry or to give up, she persevered, and understood her responsibilities.

**Brenda**

Then it became if I could do this for my kids. My kids, they understood. They saw. They suffered. I could help someone else so that they won’t have to do it. When you’re pregnant, you feel like, and everybody tells you that, the world is over. You destroyed your life.

**Intrinsic drive.** Some might argue this is truly the main source of motivation for these 11 women. They faced seemingly insurmountable obstacles and challenges, yet they were able to persevere. Their intrinsic motivation is not quantifiable, however, the source of strength it provided cannot be denied. Even though some of the women interviewed may not have initially been clear what their motivations were, Angela knew exactly what motivated her. When I asked her to identify her motivation, there was zero hesitation from Angela. It was apparent to me that she had thought about this question prior to me asking it.

**Angela**

Initially to provide for my child. Make a better life initially. At the master’s level to prove to myself that I wasn’t stupid. At the specialist level, I really think that I should have gone ahead and just done my doctorate then but even then I didn’t think I could.

It cannot be denied that Samantha was motivated to excel in life. She took full responsibility for her actions and then held herself to a higher standard, because of the mistakes she had made. She had set goals for herself and was not going to give herself an easy out.
Samantha

I would never let myself live it down if I didn’t. Like I said, it’s always been something I’ve wanted to do and now I think after I had Dylan I just knew that I didn’t want to waitress forever and be one of those people that is always just so unhappy to wake up and go to work in the morning.

Mollie understood that her situation was temporary. She was motivated by the fact that things would change; they would get better if she worked hard and made things happen.

Mollie

I also knew that I did not want to be, once again the statistics though, you know, teen moms being on welfare for the rest of their lives and Medicaid and food stamps kind of thing. That was not going to be me. I pretty much had a huge attitude I guess. I was just so proud of myself that day when I didn’t have to be on housing anymore and then didn’t have to be on food stamps anymore, didn’t need the daycare paid for anymore, didn’t need food stamps and also my children didn’t need Medicaid. That was like a huge success/goal that I had in my life, so that was a very exciting time for me.

By and large what emerged was a validation of Vroom’s Expectancy Theory. This theory holds that people have different sets of goals and can be motivated if they have specific expectations. In the questionnaire, the participants were asked how much education they expected to have completed by the time they were 30 years old. Just over 88% expected to have at least a four-year degree; specifically, 64.7% expected to have completed graduate school. These women did not stop at expectancy; they knew that effort was required in order to achieve the desired result. They clearly had an understanding of the relationship between performance
and outcome. The rewards-personal goals relationship identifies the overall appeal of the potential reward to the individual woman. In this case, the reward was a college degree and the hope for a better life for themselves and their child. Of the 17 women to complete the questionnaire, all had obtained a bachelors degree in order to meet the criteria for the study, however, 64.7% went on to achieve the graduate degree they had expected for themselves.

This data is consistent with the interview responses from the women. For the women, the desired outcome was their main motivation. Consequently, they evaluated the outcome and knew exactly how much effort would be needed. In this case, the desired outcome was a college degree. How much importance each woman placed on the degree or desired outcome was different. Additionally, the reasons for wanting a college degree varied, but for many it was the ability to prove to themselves and others they could do it. This was apparent in several of the interviews.

**Brenda**

You feel degraded on the inside, but you can’t tell people. It’s hard for people to say I made a mistake. I did this. Then if you don’t have the help that you need, the smallest words of discouragement stick with you more than encouragement. It’s challenging. If you don’t have someone to trust to watch your kids, you don’t have the money to do it, it’s hard. It’s not an easy route to take so it’s easier to sit back. With the welfare system the way it is, it’s easier to sit back, but you’ve got to have self-determination. It’s a hard road. I can understand why people wouldn’t do it. They don’t see the future. They don’t see, but I don’t think it’s because they don’t want to. It’s because they’re always put down. I believe that society, not just their parents, not just families, society. You tell them I’m 15 and pregnant. They
look at you like, “Oh my god, what a ho.” You sleep around a lot. That’s just not the case. Then you get embarrassed. Then you don’t want to tell people. I’m not ashamed of it because it made me who I am today, but there are people that are ashamed of it. In the beginning, there were times where I was, “Do I want to tell them?” I had my kid six days after my 16th birthday. It’s the hardest thing. Then you don’t get it. You get looked down upon. It’s more of a stereotype, what a bad person you are.

**Alanna**

. . . I knew that I am worth something to some degree somewhere. That I just needed to show that to people. I think for a long time, it was starting to really wear on me that I was just a Mom. I had the drive to be something different. I think with a lot of teen Moms, they don’t realize that drive can go somewhere. They don’t get the support that I got that made it easier for me to be kind of foolish. I guess almost reckless, not having a job and just going to school. I would say that you also find kind of this medium. I know there was a point in my life where I was paying my bills on time, maybe saving a little bit of money and if it hadn’t been for someone coming into my life that I wanted to be better for, I probably would have continued on that path for a long time, or maybe permanently.

I think it was a combination of environment, relationships that I was building in my life, and then my own personal desire to just be better than who I had always been, and to show the people in my life that I might have been that black sheep.
My mom always said that if she made a checklist of anything that she never wanted us to do, I checked them all off twice and added things that she never thought of. I wanted to show them that wasn’t who I was. That I was a brain inside and not just a bum.

**Lori**

I always knew this was not where I was supposed to be. I always knew that. I could not understand that disconnect and I kept, every day I thought, “How did I get here?” Because I don’t think this is the life I’m supposed to be living. I felt like there was more. I could do more. I felt like I was a bright girl that now is barefoot and pregnant or now barefoot with a baby and I thought every day I would go through this. How did I get here? What am I supposed to do to get out? I couldn’t figure that out. At that point yes, I thought about my life, I felt like what have happened to me there was certain expectations that were placed and I didn’t have a lot of choices. There was always some relationship that whether it was parents or ex-husband that would dictate but at that moment it was me taking control. I had control of my own destiny and I knew I had to have an education to make changes or I would be working in a department store or in a grocery store for minimum wage for the rest of my life.

In contrast, the data did not fully support Vincent Tinto’s theories on what contributes to educational success. Tinto’s theory states that, to persist, students must integrate into formal and informal academic and social systems (Tinto, 1993). Moreover, to promote success among students, there must be five conditions present: commitment, expectations, support, feedback, and involvement. In regard to support, Tinto believes there are three forms of support required
for success: financial, academic, and social. The data did show that financial and academic support was essential in the success of the participants. However, for all of the participants, social interaction and outlets were lacking. Nearly half of the women in the SSNQ said they only got together with others to socialize about once or twice a month, and the same percentage would have liked more opportunities to get together with people to have fun and relax. During the interviews, most of the women discussed their lack of social life once they became mothers and specifically during the time they were attending college. As can be seen, having social support was not imperative for the academic success of these women.

Similarly, Tinto believes the more involved students are while in college, the more likely they will persist in achieving their academic goals (Tinto & Purser, 2006). For the vast majority of participants, attending classes was difficult, getting involved on campus was impossible. To support this idea, the questionnaire asked what made it difficult for the participants to get all the education they wanted and time was the top answer. During the interview, all of the women reported time as a substantial obstacle in going to school and attaining their college degree. These women did not have the time to do anything other than go to school, work, and fulfill their family responsibilities. They did not have the luxury of getting involved in clubs or organizations. Under those circumstances, it is clear that the lack of involvement in extracurricular activities did not keep the participants from attaining their desired result.

**Conclusion**

In looking at the data gathered from the questionnaire, surveys and interviews, I was able to compare and contrast the clusters of meanings that were assembled to gain a full description into the lives of these women. Both the textural and structural descriptions generated from the
questionnaire, surveys and interview open response questions allowed me to synthesize the answers and arrive at the essence of the phenomenon.

The phenomenon this study aimed to address and understand is how these women went on to graduate college by the age of 30 when so many others in similar situations were unable to do the same thing. The data collected throughout this study and discussed within this chapter answered the overarching research question and the two sub-questions. The central question was, “What are the unique experiences shared by the teen moms who graduated from college by age 30 that accounts for their success?” This study aimed to understand the experiences of women who represented the two percent of teen mothers who were able to overcome the challenges and continue with their education and obtain their college degree by age 30. For the 11 women I interviewed, the answer to this central question is complicated and often times painful. One specific experience felt by most of the women I interviewed was a turning point. A point in their lives in which they took a hard look at their life and asked themselves if they wanted more and how could they achieve more for themselves and their child? The answers to these questions led to action for all the women I interviewed. They understood more than anybody that they were totally responsible for the trajectory of their life.

The first sub-question in this research was, “What are the unique challenges experienced by teen moms?” The list of challenges experienced by the participants in this study is exhaustive. They experienced instability after the birth of their child. Some lacked support from their families, while others received no support from their child’s father or their significant others. Many experienced abuse at the hands of those they loved. This abuse most often led to unsafe living conditions and ultimately abandonment and divorce. All of the women experienced hardships such as financial struggles and daycare concerns. They struggled to find balance in
their lives and perhaps their greatest challenge they experienced was self-doubt. Yet, through all of this, these 11 incredibly tenacious women persevered until they reached their goal of a college degree.

The second sub-question was, “What factors in the context of their lives aided teen mothers in continuing and completing their education?” Thankfully, for most of these teen mothers, they had supportive families. This support was not always timely or enough, but the women I interviewed were grateful for the support received from their families. Some of the women did receive some help from social agencies or religious institutions. Although this help was far and few between, the assistance they received was instrumental in helping the women in achieving their goals. Most of the women I interviewed cited financial aid, to help pay for school, as a vital resource for them in graduating from college. Without grants, scholarships and student loans, these women would not have been able to continue on their journey toward a college degree. The data collected from the distinctive sources addressed these three questions and will be discussed in this chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Summary of the Findings

In 2006, the United States showed a slight increase in teen births, after reaching the lowest point in more than 30 years the previous year. African American and Hispanic teenagers had the highest pregnancy rates of 126.3 and 126.6 out of every 1,000 births, respectively (Kost, et al., 2010). However, the overall teen birth rate had decreased precipitously between 1991 and 2010. During that time, teen pregnancy fell 17% (Stewart & Kay, 2012).

In this phenomenological study, these women attained their college degree by age 30, which on its own could be considered a great academic achievement. They surpassed the expectations of society, their friends and family, and, quite possibly, themselves. These women looked at their lives and the situations they were in and knew something had to be different if they were going to make it. Of course there was a need for change, but at the heart of it, they expected change was possible. They understood intuitively what it took to make a better life for themselves and their baby. Unlike working a job where sometimes the outcome is unknown, going to school has a definite beginning and ending. There is a structure. Beginning students know what classes are needed for a particular degree program, when the classes begin, and their duration. These women were motivated because they had a desired result in mind. They also knew if they performed well, they would be rewarded. In this case, the rewards were grades, a degree, and, ultimately, an improved personal and socioeconomic status.

The value associated with continuing on to college would be the expectation of a better life. By continuing on with their educational goals, young teen mothers would have a college degree and, consequently, a career in which they could care for their child in addition to meeting their own needs and wants. These women had, from the beginning, an expectation of achieving
their goal. They had faith in their own strength. They had a clear understanding of the relationship between performance and outcomes. This study identified what obstacles were present and what supports were present that assisted these women in continuing with their education until they attained a college degree.

Accordingly, young women who become teen mothers are often portrayed in a negative light. The social stigma against unwed, teenage mothers is linked with low income and dependency on government assistance, lower educational attainment, and low motivation to improve living conditions for themselves or for their families (Duncan, 2007). Using a questionnaire, surveys, and an open-ended interview, I was able to gather rich, descriptive data from 11 women who met the criteria by demonstrating their personal resilience, against all odds, and completing their college degree by age 30 after having been a teen mother. Data from the collective interviews were member-checked for accuracy and I applied the procedure of triangulation to guarantee that each participant’s experiences were recounted truthfully in the narrative. By the time of the sixth or seventh interview, I began noticing patterns in these stories. With the themes consciously emerging in my mind, I noted the consistencies in their stories. Subsequently, it was my job, as the researcher to provide the joint construction of meaning from the data. A total of four themes came to be consistent and recurring from the interviews conducted and data collected. These four themes were: (1) Challenges faced during pregnancy and subsequent attendance at college, (2) Participants identify what aids, help and resources were available to them while they were pregnant and again when they were attending college, (3) Turning points experienced by the participants that changed their course and (4) Motivation to continue when so many did not. Chapter 5 includes the discussion of the findings in relation to the literature and the theories used in this dissertation.
The introduction of this study began by stating that there are 1,700 new teenage moms between the ages of 15 and 17 each week in our country. By listening to these women’s stories and analyzing the common themes that emerged from their stories, many things were learned not only about these particular women, but about how teen mothers can be successful in continuing with their education. Although each woman had a unique experience, there were many similarities that emerged. In fact, as I was listening to the various stories told by the interviewees, I could connect them to other women and their stories. The heartache and shame felt by these women was real. They knew how hard their life was going to be once they became pregnant, but these women faced those challenges and were nothing less than courageous. There were many times I had to fight back tears and refrain from being emotional as I listened to them recount their lives. These women do not advocate for teen pregnancy, however, they truly are remarkable in the way they handled the adversity in their life.

Discussion of Findings

The literature concluded that girls who become pregnant most likely demonstrated lower academic performance prior to their pregnancy and had lower educational expectations (East, 1998; Maynard, 1995; Plotnick, 1992). However, the data for this study did not support those claims. Inconsistent with the literature was the fact that only 13.3% of the women surveyed admitted to having a GPA upon completion of less than a 2.0. In fact, 33.3% reported having a GPA of 3.0-3.5 and 33% reported having a GPA of 3.5-4.0. Of all the women who completed the survey, 70.6% graduated with their peers, and only 29.4% received a GED.

Consistent with the literature, all of the teen mothers had financial difficulties that made continuing on with their education tough (Bronars & Grogger, 1994; Hoffman et al, 1993; Klepinger et al, 1999). Across the board, the Financial Strain Survey showed the women felt they
lacked the understanding and experience needed to manage their finances effectively. Most prevalent was the effects the financial problems had on the women. Most of the women cited having headaches, muscle tension, and worry about money and bills. The majority of the participants admitted their bills were past due and they did not have enough money to pay them. Consequently, during the interviews, money or the lack thereof was credited as the biggest obstacle when trying to complete their degree.

Second to money, daycare concerns were a huge obstacle for the women as they tried to finish their degree. In both the questionnaire and the SSNQ, the participants reported their parents were the greatest source of support when it came to childcare. Parents provided or assisted with childcare when the women initially had their baby and while they attended college. During the interviews, the women unanimously talked about the difficulties they had with childcare while they attended college or tried to work to support themselves and their child. For some, the childcare issue was prohibitive when trying to complete their degree. It was not until a change in circumstances happened that made finishing possible.

The greatest consistency that emerged from the interviews was the presence of supportive parents or family members. Although, there were women who did not have supportive families to help guide them along the process, for the majority, there was that resource. Parents and family members offered financial support in the way of college tuition assistance, daycare assistance, and monetary help. In the SSNQ, participants were asked to identify who provided the most tangible assistance, 73.3% said parents and 46.7% said extended family. In the Financial Strain Survey, participants were asked if their financial problems caused them to argue with others about money, or if financial problems affected or hurt their relationships with others. Overall, participants said that financial problems did not hurt their relationship with others and
since the relationship was most likely with their parents or extended family members, I conclude these teen mothers were open to advice and help with money matters.

Additionally, families offered emotional stability in an often times hectic situation. Although, many of the teen mothers may have rejected their parents’ guidance at first, most of them soon realized they needed their parents and were willing to concede to the rules in order to receive the help they required. In fact, when asked in the questionnaire if they had a mentor that might have aided them in the process of graduating from college, the majority of the participants indicated their parents and extended family, followed by friends. Conversely, in the SSNQ, participants were asked who they would turn to if they needed to talk about something personal or private, the majority of women said their friends. Therefore, I concluded that when the women needed emotional support in the form of conversation, they turned to their friends. However, if they needed emotional support requiring actions, they turned to their parents and family.

This study adds to the current literature by looking at the 2% of women who were successful in completing their college degree. Traditionally, studies focused on the other 98%. It conducting the literature review, it was clear that teen motherhood was not ideal. There were various studies that looked at the circumstances, which contributed to teen pregnancy, such as social economic conditions or lower educational expectations. Additionally, many studies focused on the consequences of teen pregnancies; however, very few studies concentrated on the success stories of women who were teen mothers. This study also looked at the consequences of teen pregnancy within the context of these women’s lives, but it also focuses on how these women were able to turn their lives around for the better. The women interviewed during this study were able to use their stories to provide hope and a possible ‘how to’ for other young
women who might be teen mothers themselves with nowhere to turn for a possible example. Consequently, this study fills that gap in the literature.

**Implications**

The data gathered from this study exposed the fact that these women, once teen mothers, are incredibly strong and resilient. In fact, society would have us think that teen moms are a drain on the economic system and resources, but these 11 women deserve to be seen as role models. The literature shows that social policies encouraging resiliency in teen mothers proves to be effective (Brindis, 2006; Rosenthal, Ross, Bilodeau, Richter, Palley & Bradley, 2009). With data gathered from this study, I hope to help women who have become teen mothers. However, many may not be aware of other women who have been in similar situations, yet were able to reach their dreams and fulfill their potential. With my help, I want to make them aware that there is hope. Teen pregnancy is difficult and not an ideal way to bring children into the world, however, the lives of these teen mothers is not over. I hope to start a non-profit aimed at education awareness and assistance. My goal is to help young girls who are pregnant or who have had a baby while in their teenage years to continue with their education. I want to assist them in identifying their goals and help them to access the resources available to them. With my help, I believe we can increase the 2% of women who go on to achieve their four-year degree.

I would like to garner the attention of policymakers who have written these women off. I want to change the climate of social programs that, for many years, have been seen as superfluous in our society (SmithBattle, 2009). I understand that politicians might view this issue as unimportant, but it is imperative that these girls be offered some guidance through this process. If we do not look at resiliency after a teen pregnancy as something that can benefit or help to encourage others, we will continue to see this as an epidemic in our society. I agree the
aim should be to prevent teen pregnancy, however, we cannot give up on these women who, for various reasons, did become a statistic. We must address how we can change their circumstances before they become part of other statistical data such as: welfare, abuse, divorce, and poverty.

Some recommendations for policy makers include simplifying the process, rules and requirements for teen mothers to get financial assistance. Oftentimes, teen mothers do not qualify for assistance, because their parents make too much money. However, due to strained and sometimes estranged relationships, teen mothers should not be turned down for assistance because of their parents’ financial circumstances. Department of Social Services (DSS) workers need to be educated and trained on what services, requirements and programs are available to teen mothers who want to continue with their education. A possible position should be created within DSS to assist teen mothers specifically. When a pregnant teen applies for Medicaid or financial assistance, they are treated like any other applicant, however that needs to change. Immediately, they should be assigned to a “liaison” that will monitor and facilitate referrals and recommendation to agencies or non-profit organizations that focus on helping teen mothers find resources in order to continue with their education.

For families, dealing with teen pregnancy can be very overwhelming and emotional. More often than not, families want to be supportive, but may lack the knowledge or experience to effectively help the teen mom in her difficult situation. Families need to be able to form partnerships with DSS and schools in order to facilitate the greatest access to resources. Usually, teen mothers are still in high school upon pregnancy, so high schools need to have a list of programs and resources readily available to assist teens and their families. Families should have access to outreach programs or support groups to help them navigate the various agencies and resources available, while at the same time offering the emotional support that is oftentimes
needed. DSS can also partner with schools in offering counseling services or social services needed by families with teen mothers. Additionally, families and schools should work as a team to ensure education of the teen mother is not interrupted by the pregnancy or the birth of the child. One important way this is accomplished is to assist the teen mother with daycare assistance within the school setting. Every teen mother should have the options of attending a publically funded high school with on-site daycare facilities. This will assuredly reduce the dropout rate for teen mothers.

Educational institutions play a vital role in increasing the 2% statistic as well. Colleges and universities need to make sure their class offerings are inclusive of all students. In order for teen mothers to get assistance with daycare, they may have to take courses at non-traditional times. There should be equally distributed class offerings during the days, evenings and weekends. There should be online classes offered as well as condensed classes. Additionally, all public universities should have daycare facilities on campus that are available on a drop-off basis and charge on a sliding fee scale. Most of the women interviewed identified daycare and financial strains as the two main challenges they faced in trying to complete their education. Universities have the power to eliminate or at least reduce those obstacles in order to facilitate teen moms in obtaining their educational goals.

Perhaps the greatest revelation from the data was the lack of support or resources from churches and/or social organizations for teen mothers. This lack of help exposed a great need and opportunity for churches to step up and provide a central role in changing the trajectory of girls who find themselves pregnant. Churches can and should create outreach programs to help young women who are struggling with the challenges of teen pregnancy. This will in no way encourage others to become teen mothers themselves; instead it will provide an alternate reality for teen
mothers. A reality where families most likely consist of a mother and father who are mutually engaged in the rearing and nurturing of their children. These support groups and outreach programs should be available during the pregnancy and after the birth of their child. Teens should feel welcome in a non-judgmental environment aimed at the welfare of both the mother and child.

Additionally, churches can assist teen mothers with their financial needs, specifically daycare assistance. Most large churches have on-site preschools or daycare facilities. They could create a trade-off system. Teen mothers can use the daycare facilities while they attend classes. In return, teen mothers can work in the daycare as a trade off for the assistance they received. It would be a win-win situation for both sides. This partnership will create a sense of community often lacking in a teen mother’s life. This sense of belonging will not only benefit the teen mother, but also will ultimately benefit the child and perhaps prevent generational problems such as teen pregnancy.

**Study Limitations**

A limitation of this study is determining whether or not the challenges experienced by these teen moms were in fact unique to teen moms. A question not answered by this study is: Would all mothers trying to finish college after having a baby experience similar obstacles? This study does examine specific obstacles experienced by the participants, but what is not clear is whether or not these obstacles are unique to women who finished their degree after having been a teen mom.

Another limitation of this study is identifying specific character traits the participants may have possessed that may shed some light on how or why these women were successful in completely their educational goals. I did not use any instruments that measured or assessed
personality traits or characteristics. I simply looked at their individual situation and gathered data that would offer insight into the obstacles they faced and resources that were available that might have aided these women in attaining their college degree.

An additional limitation is the fact that the answers to the questionnaire and surveys were kept confidential and anonymous even from the researcher. I was unaware what specific answers specific participants gave; consequently triangulation among the data on an individual basis was not possible for each participant. Instead, I looked at the questionnaire and survey data as a whole, which enabled me to look at group percentages. This data was then compared to the data compiled from the interviews of the participants. Given the fact that there were only 17 women who completed the questionnaire and surveys and 11 women who were interviewed, it is safe to conclude the use of group percentages was closely correlated to what individual answers may have been.

Perhaps the greatest limitation of this study is the lack of answers in terms of the ‘why.’ This study does not attempt to answer why these women became pregnant or why they chose to keep their baby, or why they chose to marry or not marry their baby’s father. Those answers are not important to the purpose of this study. The purpose of this research is to study the experiences of the 2% of women who, despite giving birth as a teenager and facing obstacles, went on to achieve a college degree by age 30.

**Future Research**

The purpose of this study was to find out more about the lives of the women who represent the 2% of women who, despite becoming a teen mother, were able to continue with their education and graduate college by age 30. The study focused on three questions:
1. What are the unique experiences shared by the teen moms who graduated from college by age 30 that accounts for their success?

2. What are the unique challenges experienced by teen moms?

3. What factors in the context of their lives aided these women in continuing and completing their education?

Throughout the data collection and analysis processes, each of these questions were answered, implications were made, and more questions came to the surface. A study of this design cannot claim to uncover a defining conclusion about the complex lives of these women. However, it can add to the dialogue of how best we can help others in similar situations. For this study, I concentrated on women who attended college in order to improve their circumstances, but what did the other 98% do? How many of them attained a two-year degree or attended a vocational program? Perhaps it would be beneficial to study those women who went on to attain a master’s degree, doctorate or other terminal degree. The focus of this study was on the 2% who graduated college with a four-year degree by the age of 30, but there are many ways to be successful and attain financial independence and a study designed to look at that information might be beneficial. Additionally, a longitudinal study or case study looking at parents and children of teen mothers could offer some insights as to what the outcomes are for those family members with teen mothers.

Conclusion

As I interviewed these women, I was able to keep my personal experiences with the phenomenon at bay. There were a few times when something was said, in which I had a feeling of nostalgia or connection with the experience. I immediately recognized those feelings and continued to be diligent about bracketing them out. Once all the interviews were transcribed, I
then reflected about them and compared them with my own experience with the phenomenon. I soon discovered that I shared similarities with every single woman.

Looking back on my youth, I now see how my parents’ low expectations of me contributed to my behavior and choices. Alanna and Kristina also had a parent or parents that did not expect much from them. Due to the lack of parental involvement, they both made decisions that impacted their life negatively. Like Lori, a parent too asked me about the possibility of getting an abortion. I was always raised that abortion was wrong, yet when faced with the disgrace of a pregnancy, abortion did not seem so bad to my dad. The perceived shame for what I thought I did to my family was an emotion I was ill equipped to handle and something I dealt with for years.

Similar to Jamie and Angela, I had a guidance counselor at school that offered advice and high school teachers who were very supportive. In fact, one teacher even told me that no matter how much work I did or did not do in her class, she was not going to fail me. She told me that having a high school diploma was too important in the world today. Like Mollie and Marrika, I attended class for pregnant teens, which was offered by my church. However, unlike these women, I did not find it beneficial in the same way they did. For me, that class helped me realize that I was not like ‘those girls.’ I had things I wanted to do. I was not ok with being just a mom. I walked away from that experience feeling like I was capable of so much more. Comparatively to Leslie and Kimberly, I did marry by baby’s father. Fortunately for me, that marriage still stands strong after almost 22 years. They were not so fortunate, but the lessons they learned from those experiences were invaluable.

Comparable to Brenda, I had three children in my early 20s. I was married and trying to figure out how I could go to college. I, too, had to bring my children to school with me some
days. I did not have anybody to watch my children or was unable to pay them. This was not a frequent occurrence, but a challenge that I had to overcome.

Finally, I matched Samantha in sheer determination. Like her, I was not going to let this baby keep me from what I wanted to do in life. In fact, having a baby at such a young age gave me direction, focus, and motivation that I might not have otherwise had.

This study attempted to look at the lives of women who overcame challenges to graduate college by age 30 after having been a teen mother. These voices have been overlooked by society. Due to this fact, a group of women, often defined by this one fact, remained silent. For some, it remains a source of shame and guilt, however, for most, this study allowed their voices to be heard. By documenting these voices, I intended to help these women feel the power that comes from telling their story and, more importantly, their successes. Additionally, by documenting these unique voices, a historical account of their lives has been made. Perhaps society has not changed over the last few decades; however, maybe some light has been shed on the road to change.
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APPENDIX A: My Whole Story

It was December 1992, and I was a 17-year-old senior in high school living in California where I had grown up. At the time I was barely passing the 12th grade. I was living a lie. On the outside, I seemed like I had it all together, but the reality was, I was failing school. I was in a lower math class, because I could not pass geometry, but needed another math credit. I was a cheerleader, but I knew I would be made ineligible to cheer as soon as my 1st semester grades were posted. I was having trouble at home with my parents. I did not understand their lack of support throughout high school. They never attended any performances or events put on by the school. My parents made it very clear that they did not value education. I felt like all my friends had parents who were there for them, but I was navigating life on my own.

I had just begun dating Russ; he was a junior, and also just turned 17 that same month. We knew we liked each other, but we were in for a real test in our new relationship. It was not long before we learned that we were going to have a baby. Once the news broke that I was going to have a baby, people started treating me differently. I could feel the stares as I walked through the halls at school. I was aware of the judgments and opinions of people surrounding me. My ‘friends’ and even teachers treated me differently. Why could they not see how much I was hurting? Did they not know how embarrassed I already felt? The baby’s father and I discussed our options over a period of weeks. Although we never considered abortion, adoption seemed like a responsible choice to us. We met with social workers and school counselors, trying to figure out what we should do. We were on our own with this difficult decision.

In February, one month after my parents found out that I was pregnant, my parents told me that the best thing for my unborn child and me was for me to move out on my own. Where would I go? I called Russ and told him of the situation, but he did not know how to help since he
had not even told his mother yet. In fact, I had not even met her at this point. Later that day, I
went to their house and we all discussed the possibility of me moving in. After her initial shock
and anger, she agreed for me to move in. Russ took me back to my house and I packed my
things. I was allowed to take my dresser, my twin bed, and my clothes. Two weeks prior to my
18th birthday, I was pregnant, living in my boyfriend’s house, with no job, no money, and no
idea what I was going to do about the baby I was carrying. The first night at Russ’ house, I cried
like I had never cried. I was scared for my baby, for me, and for this boy who was in way over
his head. I had never felt more alone in this world.

I did not know much at the time, but I knew that I did not want to be a single mother. I
wanted my baby to have two parents to love and raise it. By March, we had decided to keep our
baby and get married. I think people were more shocked about our decision to marry than by my
pregnancy. We were not supported in our decision by most of our family and friends. Neither
one of us had jobs, but we did have a place to live rent-free. We rearranged rooms in the house
making an “apartment” for us and our baby boy, who was due in September. On April 10, 1993,
we drove to Las Vegas, NV, and were married by a justice of the peace. Standing by my side on
that day was one friend. Not one member of my family attended the ceremony.

Soon after we were married, my new husband tested out of high school. He took the
California High School Achievement Test. He worked at several places of employment, never
making more than $8.00 an hour. We decided, since I was a senior, it did not make any sense for
me to stop going to school. However, by this time I had missed more than 40 days of school. My
GPA had dropped under 2.0. Due to the kindness of my school counselor, and some forgiveness
on the part of some teachers for missing assignments, I was able to pass all my classes. In June
1993, I barely graduated high school, six months pregnant, with my husband by my side.
We soon realized that staying in California was not a good idea for our future. The cost of living was high, and we needed to get away from family and friends. In the first 16 months of our marriage, we moved four times. We lived with various extended family members in three different states. We ultimately settled in Denver, Colorado. Russ took a job making $7.80 an hour at a warehouse. We wanted me to be home with our baby, but we needed to make more money. I took a paper route at one of Denver’s largest newspapers. It was not an easy job. It required me to get up at 3:00 a.m., 7 days a week, 365 days a year. I remember those cold Denver mornings, when my eyelashes were frozen. I made approximately $700 a month. I loved doing that paper route, because it afforded me to stay home with my baby. However, I had no idea I would keep the paper route for the next four years. We finally were able to get our own apartment for the first time. We felt grown up.

The following year, we had a baby girl. I remember delivering the papers the morning she was born. I was 20 and Russ was 19 years old. Russ received a promotion, and was now making $10.80 an hour. We did not have much, but our family of four had all we needed. Two months after our daughter was born, Russ was hospitalized and was critically ill. He was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes. This was a shock for him and it greatly impacted our family. Dealing with a major disease seemed very overwhelming at times. The cost of diabetes was a very big burden on our finances. To combat this, I took on a second paper route. It meant that I had to be at the distribution center earlier, so that I could have enough time to deliver my papers before the 6:00 a.m. target. It was at this time I began feeling like I wanted to go to college.

College was a new thing for me. I did not have any examples in my family. I was the first person to graduate high school, let alone go on to college. I just thought that I would take it one semester at a time. In January 1996, I began going to a local community college near our home. I
felt so good about myself. I felt like I was going to make a better future for my children. I had an incredibly supportive husband, who was willing to take up the slack at home. Halfway through my program, I gave birth to our third child. I remember taking my books with me to the hospital, so that I could study for my midterms. I graduated in May 1998, with my A.A. degree. Although I never thought this would happen to me, the education bug bit me. With the encouragement and support of my husband, I transferred to a four-year college upon graduation. I graduated with my B.S. degree in December 1999. I was a 24-year-old mother of 3 and I had already been married for 6 years.

Although we loved living in Denver, we both felt like we were supposed to move back home to California. Two weeks after graduation, we moved our family of five West. My undergraduate degree was in Criminology. I wanted to go to law school. After looking into possible law schools, I did not feel like I could make the commitment needed to be successful. I was substitute teaching and had three very young children. The most logical choice was to become a teacher. I felt like it was the best ‘mom job’ for me at the time. I began my career in teaching in 2000. In 2002, I decided that I wanted to go back to school to obtain my Master’s degree. I began taking courses while working full time and trying to meet the needs of my family. Although I tried to help my husband see the value of college, it was difficult, because he was able to work his way up to a nice wage without a college degree. In 2004, I graduated with my M.Ed. degree in Cross-cultural Teaching. At that time, I felt like I had just accomplished an amazing feat. I was so proud of myself, and of us. I could not believe that two 17-year olds were able to accomplish so much. However, I knew that I was not finished with my educational pursuits. I wanted to earn my doctorate.
In late 2004, our family moved again, this time to Idaho. We did not have any family or friends there, however, that quickly changed. Russ’ mother and brothers had all moved to Idaho as well. Although it was nice to have family near, things changed for the worse. Russ’ younger brother had a history of criminal activity. We attempted many times to help him and his family, but it was never enough. In July 2006, Russ’s brother lost his children to the State of Idaho. Russ and I decided to step up and become the children’s foster parents, never imaging that this would become a permanent situation. At the time the twins were two and the baby was seven months old. When we brought them home, all they had was what they were wearing. Although I was glad that we were in a position to help, I was disappointed that I had to quit my new class that I was taking. I had just been admitted to the M.Ed. Administration program. Due to their special needs, I had to put my career on hold to stay home with these young children who had been so neglected. We went from having three children to six in one day.

With a family of eight, it became apparent that we needed to make more money. Since I had more education, we decided that I would start looking for federal jobs. It did not take long before I was offered a federal position working in the state of North Carolina. In the summer of 2008, we packed up our house and moved 2,000 miles away. Again, we had no family or friends nearby, but that soon changed. A few weeks after arriving in North Carolina, my father passed away. My mother was ill and unable to take care of herself, so we took her in.

In 2009, I began taking doctoral courses at an online university, but I could not handle the demands of working, raising six children, and attending school, so I quit after one class. Russ had also expressed an interest and began attending school, so I felt like I needed to support him. Finally, in the spring of 2010, I began taking courses at Liberty University. Our children then ranged in age from 4 to 16. Russ had also caught the education bug. In December of 2010, Russ
graduated with his A.A. degree from our local community college. Russ runs a small business repairing and restoring baseball gloves. Russ is currently working toward a B.S. degree at American Public University with an anticipated December 2015 graduation. I have completed all course work toward my Ed.D. degree, and will defend my dissertation in early 2015.

I tell this story not to boast or inspire, but as a human instrument. Twenty plus years ago, we were two teenagers, living in poverty, expecting a baby, terrified of our future. Fast forward: we have owned many homes, we are parents to six children, happily married for 22 years, and educated. There were many turning points throughout my journey to my doctoral degree. Many people in my life have supported, encouraged, inspired, and challenged me to continue along my path. Through this study, I want to learn about the stories of other women who have lived a similar story. Women who were impoverished themselves, and trying to raise a baby, yet had the resilience, resourcefulness, and fortitude to change the trajectory of their lives. How have some women overcome the issues of poverty and teen pregnancy, when most girls are unable to do so? What was present in them or in their lives that made this possible? It is my desire to help other teenagers who are teen mothers to know that they can go to college, because others before them have done it. I want them to know what was helpful and what worked for those women before them. Being a pregnant teenager is a scary situation and I want them to have every opportunity for success.
APPENDIX B: Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 27, 2014

Jena Kerry Salazar
IRB Approval 1901.062714; Teenage Mothers Who Go On To Earn a College Degree:
A Phenomenological Study

Dear Jena,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the
Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection
proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to
human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms
for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the
requirements for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be
included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your
research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054

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APPENDIX C: Participant Consent Forms

Questionnaire & Survey Consent Form

Teen Mothers Who Go On To Earn a College Degree: A Phenomenological Study
Jena Kerry Salazar
Liberty University
Education Department

You are invited to take part in a research study: Teen Mothers Who Go On To Earn a College Degree: A Phenomenological Study, which explores the experiences of women who graduated college by age 30 after having been teen mothers. You were chosen for this study because you identify yourself as a woman who has graduated with a four-year undergraduate degree after having been a teen mother. This form is part of a process called “informed consent,” and its purpose is to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

A researcher named Jena Salazar, who is a doctoral candidate at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this transcendental, phenomenological study is to examine the lived experiences of women who have earned their college degree by age 30 after having been teen mothers.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Provide demographic information (excluding name and contact information, unless you are willing to be interviewed)
- Complete an open-ended questionnaire
- Complete 2 surveys (Approximately 45 minutes for both questionnaire and surveys)
- Possibly participate in an in-depth, open-ended, face-to-face interview that will be recorded by the researcher using a digital audio voice recorder.

All participants will provide answers to 4 demographic questions: ethnicity, age range, highest education level attained, and how many biological parents were present when you became pregnant. Then the questionnaire consists of 10 questions. Following the questionnaire, you will fill out 2 surveys. The 2 surveys are the Financial Strain Survey and The Social Support Network Questionnaire. The total time for completing the questionnaire and surveys is approximately 45 minutes.

At the conclusion of the questionnaire and surveys, if you are interested in being interviewed, you will need to email the researcher at jsalazar3@liberty.edu and provide your contact information. The researcher will contact you to set up a time and place for the interview. All measures will be taken to try to conduct interviews in person. If geographic location prohibits a
face-to-face interview, then a telephone or videoconference interview will be scheduled. All interviews will be audio recorded and last approximately 1 hour.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

As a participant in this study, you will have minimal exposure to any psychological or physical risk. There are no direct benefits to participation.

**Compensation:**

There will be no compensation for your participation in this study.

**Confidentiality:**

Any information you provide will be kept private. In any report of this study that might be published, the researcher will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records including the audio-taped interviews will be kept in the locked home of the researcher with the researcher being the only person who will have access to the records for a period of three years. Three years after the date of the interview, the tapes will be destroyed. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be in the study. No one at Liberty University or will I, the researcher, Jena Salazar, treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during the study. If you feel stressed during the study, you may stop at any time.

**Withdraw from the Study:**

You may, at any time, withdraw your participation from this study. If you would not like to continue with the study, please contact the researcher and all identifiable data collected to that point will be erased and not included in the study or data analysis. No identifying personal information will be kept on file.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher, Jena Salazar, at 910-635-9365 or via email at jsalazar3@liberty.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call (910)635-9365. You may also contact Dr. Gable, the research chair, via email at lfgable@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.
Interview Consent Form

Teen Mothers Who Go On To Earn a College Degree: A Phenomenological Study
Jena Kerry Salazar
Liberty University
Education Department

You are invited to take part in a research study: *Teen Mothers Who Go On To Earn a College Degree: A Phenomenological Study*, which explores the experiences of women who graduated college by age 30 after having been teen mothers. You were chosen for this study because you identify yourself as a woman who has graduated with a four-year undergraduate degree after having been a teen mother. This form is part of a process called “informed consent,” and its purpose is to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

A researcher named Jena Salazar, who is a doctoral candidate at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this transcendental, phenomenological study is to examine the lived experiences of women who have earned their college degree by age 30 after having been teen mothers.

**Procedures:**

Participate in an audio-recorded interview that should last approximately one hour. All measures will be taken to try to conduct interviews in person. If geographic location prohibits a face-to-face interview, then a telephone or videoconference interview will be scheduled.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

As a participant in this study, you will have minimal exposure to any psychological or physical risk. There are no direct benefits to participation.

**Compensation:**

There will be no compensation for your participation in this study

**Confidentiality:**

Any information you provide will be kept private. In any report of this study that might be published, the researcher will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records including the audio-taped interviews will be kept in the locked home of the researcher with the researcher being the only person who will have access to the records for a period of three years. Three years after the date of the interview, the tapes will be destroyed. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research.
project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be in the study. No one at Liberty University or will I, the researcher, Jena Salazar, treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during the study. If you feel stressed during the study, you may stop at any time.

**Withdraw from the Study:**

You may, at any time, withdraw your participation from this study. If you would not like to continue with the study, please contact the researcher, and all identifiable data collected to that point will be erased and not included in the study or data analysis. No identifying personal information will be kept on file.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher, Jena Salazar, at 910-635-9365 or via email at jsalazar3@liberty.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call (910)635-9365. You may also contact Dr. Gable, the research chair, via email at lfgable@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

*Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature: ___________________________________________ Date: ________________

Signature of Investigator: _______________________________ Date: ________________
APPENDIX D: Questionnaire

Section 1:

If selected, what preference do you have for the interview location?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What is your preferred interview method?

a. Face-to-face
b. Videoconference (e.g., Skype)
c. Teleconference

Section 2:

Demographic Information

1. Please indicate your ethnicity
   a. African American
   b. Asian
   c. Caucasian
   d. Latino
   e. Native American
   f. Other
2. Please indicate your age range
   a. Under 25
   b. 25-35
   c. 36-45
   d. 46-55
   e. 56-65
   f. 66 and over
3. Please indicate your highest degree level
   a. Bachelor’s degree
   b. Master’s degree
   c. Education Specialist degree
   d. Doctoral degree
   e. Other
4. How many biological parents were in your home when you became pregnant?
   a. 0
   b. 1
   c. 2
Section 3a:

Questionnaire

5. How old were you when you became pregnant and decided to keep and raise the child?

_________________________

6. How many children have you had and at what age were you at the time of the birth(s)?

________________________

________________________

________________________

7. What were your childcare plans when you initially had your baby, and then while you were attending college?

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

8. What was your approximate high school GPA upon completion?
   a. 3.5-4.0
   b. 3.0-3.5
   c. 2.5-3.0
   d. 2.0-2.5
   e. less than 2.0

9. High school achievement
   a. High school diploma
   b. GED

10. Can you identify any mentor(s) in your life that might have aided you in the process of graduating from college? Please explain how they contributed to your success.

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

11. At the time of your pregnancy, if there were no obstacles, how much education did you want to complete?
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

12. When you looked at your life, how much education did you expect to have completed by the time you were thirty?
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

13. What things, do you think, made it difficult for you to get all the education you wanted?
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

Section 3b:

Please complete the following two surveys:
APPENDIX E: Financial Strain Survey

This appendix for the Financial Strain Survey has been removed for publication purposes.
APPENDIX F: The Social Support Network Questionnaire

This appendix for the Social Support Network Questionnaire has been removed for publication purposes.
APPENDIX G: My Own Transcript

J.Salazar: My name is Jena Salazar, J-E-N-A. I am answering the open-ended interview questions that I wrote in correlation with a study that I am conducting for my dissertation. There are a total of 18 questions, and I will number the question, read it, and then answer it.

Interviewer: Question #1: Please describe your life before becoming pregnant as a teenager.

J.Salazar: My life was pretty normal. I had a mom and a dad, although he was my step dad. He adopted me and was in my life from the time I was four and a half, so I don’t have any memories without him present, so he is my dad, by all accounts. I had a sister, six years younger than me, and a brother who was thirteen years younger than me. I was the oldest of three. We lived in a middle, probably working-class neighborhood. My father was an electrician. He had his own business. My mother ran his business for the majority of my life, for the most part. We lived in the same house from the time I was in 4th Grade through my Junior year of high school.

My friends were pretty consistent throughout that time. We attended church on Sundays. However, the choices oftentimes during the week were often not consistent with our beliefs and religious teachings that we received on Sunday. There were some inconsistencies there that played into some family turmoil. My father had a gambling problem and a substance abuse problem, as did my mother at times.

I was an average student. I was very involved in school. I was in Ensemble, which was a singing group. I swam in high school. I was a cheerleader my senior year. Probably what I was known most for was my singing talent, my singing ability.

Interviewer: Question #2: Prior to you finding out you were pregnant, what was your attitude towards school or education, generally?

J.Salazar: In my house education wasn’t a priority. My parents did not graduate from college. I was the oldest, but even still, there were no cousins or aunts and uncles, grandparents, anybody, that attended college. My attitude was it just didn’t occur to me that I would go on to college.

My senior year, prior to finding out I was pregnant, I had a friend who, of course, was talking about applying to different schools, and she lived in Utah, and I lived in California, and it was at that point that I thought maybe I could go up to Utah with her and stay at her house and go to school with her. Before that I’d never really thought about it. It wasn’t discussed. It was what other people did. Other people went to college.
My grades in high school were terrible. As far as academic courses, I always seemed to do just enough to pass the class, but my overall GPA wasn’t as bad as it might could have been had it not been for extracurricular things that brought up my GPA, such as choir and sports and different electives. I was smart, and I knew that I could do it, but my attitude towards school was I just didn’t care about it academically. I thought of it more of a social environment and treated it as such.

Interviewer: Question #3: Prior to your parents finding out you were pregnant, how did you feel about school? Did what change . . . Did that change when they found out?

J.Salazar: Prior to my finding, my parents finding out I was pregnant, they didn’t necessarily put a lot of priority into school either. They didn’t encourage college. My father valued work. He worked hard. He was a hard worker. He owned his own business, and I remember him being up at four or five in the morning and working til dark. I knew that was something that he valued. My mother also was a hard worker. As far as education, they did not . . . They never asked me if I did my homework. They didn’t attend school functions very often. Even though I was very involved in different activities, they were rarely there. They did not ask about my plans after high school, ever, that I can recall. We did not have a discussion as to filling out college applications.

I think their attitude was more of if it was something that I wanted to do, then I would just have to do it, by myself. It was something that I would have to figure out. They didn’t feel, I don’t think, that it was their responsibility. Once I turned 18, their attitude was their job was done. The idea of paying for college or helping your child prepare for college wasn’t a part of my family structure.

When they found out I was pregnant, I don’t think that changed, the idea of college changed. If anything, if I were to guess, they never said so, but I would think they probably would have thought that that ship had sailed, that having a baby and choosing to raise that child meant that you wouldn’t go to college, that you wouldn’t have that opportunity. I’m pretty sure that had I gone to them and asked them for help, they probably would have been a little bit reluctant about that.

Interviewer: Question 4: What was their expectation for you in terms of education?

J.Salazar: I think they expected me to graduate from high school, and then that’s it. I don’t think that there was any idea or thoughts that I would continue. They didn’t. Extended family members didn’t. It wasn’t a part of what our family did. In fact, to my knowledge, on my mom’s side of the family, I was the first person to graduate from high school. She didn’t. My
grandparents, great grandparents, cousins. Nobody that I’m aware of had graduated from high school. I think that she thought that a high school diploma was already a pretty great accomplishment because I would have been the first.

On my dad’s side, although, he was my step-dad, he had one brother who went to college and grad school, but he was not really close . . . He wasn’t a part of the family. He was estranged. Outside of him, again, grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles, I am not aware of any college, or excuse me, high school diplomas either on that side. I believe I was the first person. Now, because I wasn’t biological to the family, they didn’t put much importance on that. Nobody attended my graduation or anything. The expectation is that if I graduated high school, then that was awesome. That was already exceeding what they thought anybody in our family would ever do.

Interviewer: Question 5: What role did education play in your family? Were your siblings, parents college graduates?

J.Salazar: No. My parents, my mother dropped out of high school when she was in 10th Grade. Her family moved quite often, and she felt that she didn’t have any friends or any connection. She was failing school. She wasn’t doing a good job, and she herself did not have a very stable upbringing. My grandmother, who was married five times, also did not have any thoughts that education was an important endeavor, so my mother, consequently, didn’t get that message.

My father dropped out of high school at the age of 15 to marry his first wife. They were married for 20 years and had six children prior to him meeting and marrying my mother. Those six children, none of those . . . Excuse me, I’m sorry. One, the sixth child, did graduate from high school eventually. That was it. None of his extended family did.

Again, no importance was placed on education. Education in our family was not valued. Work and hard work was valued. That was the way that you were going to accomplish things in life. That was the message that I was taught.

Interviewer: Question 6: What did your family view as being your role as a female?

J.Salazar: In my family I didn’t get a chauvinistic message or anything like that. My mom had a voice in our home. She had an opinion. My father listened to her opinion and her advice. At the same time, they were traditional. My dad was definitely the head of the household. When he would make a decision, and if my mother disagreed, ultimately we did what he felt the family should do, for the most part.
For me, I think the expectation is that I would graduate from high school, find a husband, get married and have babies, hopefully in that order, and then most likely be a stay-at-home mom with those babies. We never talked about careers or ideas as far as what I wanted to do. I do not ever remember a conversation in which my mom said, “Hey, what are you interested in?” Or, “What are you thinking about doing when you graduate from high school?” Or “What are your goals or dreams,” or anything like that. It was not discussed. I know that traditional family roles were probably, is what they were thinking, is that I would marry and have children and be a mom. I don’t know that they thought beyond that.

Interviewer: Question 7: Please describe your experiences from the time you found out you were pregnant, to the time you entered your undergraduate program.

J.Salazar: I was a Senior in high school. I had recently broken up with a long-term boyfriend. I began casually dating Russ, and we had only dated for a few weeks when I found out I was pregnant. I was 17. I was a senior in high school. Russ had just turned 17, but he was a Junior in high school. We had not dated for long. We did not know each other very well at the time I became pregnant. Neither of us had met each other’s parents. We were not viewed or considered boyfriend and girlfriend. We had simply gone on a few dates. We were partners in a singing group, and that is how we began to connect.

When I found out I was pregnant, I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t know how my parents were going to take it. I didn’t know if they were going to kick me out or . . . I remember being so afraid. My father was very strict, and I didn’t know what to do.

In January, about a month after I found out I was pregnant, he had a feeling something was wrong. I had come home from a winter dance that night, and he woke me up in the morning, and he questioned me. He said that he could feel something was wrong with me and that he wanted me to tell him. So I did. I confessed that I was pregnant. He, of course, asked who the father was and if it was this boy that I had recently started talking to, and I told him it was.

I remember my father sitting there crying and being so disappointed and sad. The thing that surprised me the most is our religious upbringing would dictate that abortion was not an okay option, but one of the questions that he asked me during that conversation is if I had ever considered abortion. I remember being so surprised that he would even ask me that. I said to him, “No, I haven’t considered that, and I wouldn’t consider that,” that that wasn’t an option for me. After a few minutes, he . . . My mother wasn’t there. She had gone off to church early for a meeting, so he said, “Well, we will tell your mom after church.”
We went to church, and I couldn’t believe that he knew and that we would have to tell my mom soon and it just was an awful time. I was scared, and I was surprised the way he handled it. He was in shock. He didn’t say anything mean or say I had to move out. He just said, “We’ll figure this out.” I was so relieved in the way that he handled it, I thought, “Okay, maybe this isn’t going to be the worst thing ever. We’re going to get through this.”

We told my mom after church, and she was so disappointed in me and cried and was mad and all the emotions to be expected by a mom. She felt so bad for me. It was at that time that she said things like . . . She was questioning me a little bit as far as, “What are you going to do now? Are you going to go to school? Are you going to get a job?” I didn’t have any answers, and we had never had those discussions before, so I didn’t know what my answers were at the time. We left it at that. She took me to the doctor over the next few days and to verify, of course, that I was in fact pregnant and when my due date was and those sorts of things.

It was a few weeks later, just shy of my 18th birthday, my mother called me in on a Saturday, and she said . . . And by this time, my father’s attitude had changed drastically. He was quite negative, calling me names and telling me that I had ruined my life, and that he was not going . . . If I had this baby, that he was not going to allow the father anywhere near the child, and these kinds of things. Making it as most difficult as he possibly could for me over the course of that following month.

One Saturday morning my mom called me in, and she said, “You know, Jena, your father is not going to allow you to enjoy this pregnancy.” She said, “I am sad that you’re pregnant, and this is not an ideal situation, but I also feel that you should have the right to enjoy this process and prepare to have a baby in peace.” She said, “But that’s not going to happen. Your father’s not going to allow that. So why don’t you think about moving out?” I didn’t know where to go. I agreed with her. I think I knew that was also the best thing to do, but I didn’t have any plans as to where I should go.

I called Russ, the baby’s father, and I told him what she had said, and he said, “I haven’t even told my mother yet.” I said, “You might want to.” He said he would talk to his mom and call me back. He called me back a couple of hours later and he said, “My mom said you could come here if you want to. We can’t live together, but you can live in the other room.” That’s what I did. I literally, that day, packed my things. My parents let me take a bed, my bed, and my sheets, of course, and my own clothes, and that’s it. I moved out of my home that night.
I remember . . . I remember the first night in Russ’s house. I had met his mother that day. I had just moved out of my home. I was 17 years old. I barely knew this boy. I was having his baby. There I was, sleeping on the couch and completely alone. It was probably the scariest night of my life.

It didn’t take long before Russ and I exhausted our options as far as what we were going to do. We met with adoption counselors to discuss the possibility of giving the baby up for adoption. We ruled out abortion. We talked about marriage and about raising the baby. We talked to his father, his mom, my mom, friends, church leaders, and we decided that we would get married. If we were going to keep the baby and not place him for adoption, that we were going to stay married, or stay together, and try to have a family and do what we think was right.

About a month and a half later, on April 10th, Russ and I were married. We had Aaron, our first son in September of that year, and two years later, we had another baby. It was after the birth of that baby. She was born in ‘95, and that January in ‘96 I began taking classes. I didn’t know what I was doing. I started . . . I literally remember thinking, and I told my husband, “I don’t know what I’m going to school for. I don’t know what I’m doing. I don’t know anything about this. All I know is I’m going to take one semester. I’m going to take four classes, one semester, and then we’ll see where it goes.” He was totally supportive of it. He said, “Sounds good. You can do it.”

I didn’t work full-time, I stayed home with the children, and Russ worked full-time. That’s what I did. I was 20 years old, and I began taking classes at a local community college in January of 1996, and I had a 4-month old and a 2-1/2 year old, and that’s where my college life began.

Interviewer: Question 8: How did you choose the college you attended?

J.Salazar: Initially, I attended the community college that was closest to my house for many reasons. Number one, they had a really good selection of courses. I could pick classes that worked best for my family dynamic. It was the least expensive. Also, I didn’t do well in high school, so I didn’t have the grades to go to any sort of four-year university. I had never taken the SAT or ACT, so I didn’t have that to apply, and I was afraid of those tests. I didn’t know what to expect as far as those kinds of standardized tests, so I didn’t want to take that. I knew that if I went to community college I could bypass those standardized tests. I didn’t need to have good grades in high school in order to start taking courses. It was very close to my house. The scheduling worked out the best. And financially it was the best option. That’s where I began going to school.
After two years, I graduated with my Associate’s degree, and my GPA was a 3.5, or 3.49, something like that. It was at that point, I had earned some scholarship money. We were low income enough that I qualified for Pell grants and a state grant.

When I transferred from community college to a four-year school, again, I went to one that was near my home where I could go to school at night. I went to school in person, and so I had to stay at home with the children. By this time, I had a third baby. Before I transferred to the four-year university I already had a third child. At 21 I had three kids. When I transferred to the four-year school, it was important, financially, it met the needs. Geographically, it wasn’t too far from the house so I could do that. It had the major that I was interested in, so that was important to me. They have classes at night. That was helpful for me stay home and then go to school once my husband came home from work. It was for those reasons why I attended those two schools.

Interviewer: Question 9: Please describe events, agencies or people in your life that provided initial support.

J.Salazar: Initial support, first and foremost, would be my husband. My husband turned out to be an incredible person and spouse. He, from day one, when I came to him with the idea of going to school, he was completely for it. He made sure that if I had class work or if I had homework to finish or if I had an assignment or a project or anything that needed to be done, if I needed to work on that, that he was completely there for the kids. He worked full-time and I didn’t, so I took care of most domestic responsibilities in the house. When he came home, he was completely willing to do anything that needed to be done. Bathe the children when I was at school. Put them to bed. I never had to worry about them. I knew while I was at school that they were being well taken care of and that their dad was doing a great job. He was the greatest support.

My mom was supportive in a way that she encouraged me. She wanted me to do well. She was someone I could call at times and get advice from periodically, about mothering more than anything. She couldn’t offer any advice as far as schooling or that kind of thing. She’d never attended, so she didn’t have that expertise. She was there, and I guess you could say, emotionally, if I had questions about babies or kids or something like that.

My mother-in-law was very helpful with the children as well. If we ever needed to go out or needed help with daycare, she was always there. My sister, who was a teenager at the time, even lived with us periodically. She had some trouble of her own, and we helped her out. She would in turn, help us with child care, if we needed to go out. The majority of our child
care, we provided, my husband and I. We didn’t have very much need for child care at all.

Agencies . . . I can’t . . . Let’s see, agencies . . . Russ had a good job, so we didn’t . . . Aaron, our first, was born, and we had Medicaid. He was born under Medicaid. The rest of our children, we had our own medical insurance. My husband was able to work himself up in his company, and he made a decent amount of money. We owned our own home when my husband was 20 and I was 21.

There wasn’t a lot of agencies or people in our life that provided help. We worked hard. The church helped us, if we were low on funds or low on food, there were times where our church provided us with food assistance or helped pay rent or monetary assistance if we were behind on something. That was not very often, but they were there. My father-in-law, there were a couple of times where we had to borrow a couple hundred dollars for things, bills, or situations that came up, and he was willing to help. There wasn’t too many things that we needed help with. Russ and I worked together. We were a good team, and for the most part we were able to provide the means for our family and for ourselves.

Interviewer: Question 10: Did you have confidence initially of your abilities, or did that increase over time?

J.Salazar: I always knew I was smart. I always felt that I knew things. I listened to people, I learned from others, I would listen to conversations, I would listen to the news. I always had . . . I knew I was intelligent, but I did not have confidence initially, in my ability to go to school. I was not a good student in high school, so I really had no expectation of being a good student in college. It wasn’t until that very first semester when I did well. I think I had all A’s and one B, if I remember it. It was at that point I thought, “Okay, I can do this.” It became my pride. That was my thing that I could show the world, that I could do it.

I became pretty determined to keep that going. Every semester I worked hard. I tried hard. I worked hard. I did my work. I reached out to others. I asked for help. I did anything and everything I could to do well in college. It was important to me. I wanted to prove to myself and to others, to my parents, that I could do it. Definitely, over time, that confidence increased, and I felt more and more capable. It became my thing. It was what I was good at. People were noticing. “Wow, she has three kids, and she’s so young, and here she’s going to school full-time.” It turned into a sense of pride for me that I was excited about. I wanted to continue on because I liked the way that I felt when I went to school. I was successful, and I enjoyed that.
Interviewer: Question 11: What were our primary motivations for continuing your education?

J.Salazar: Initially, my motivation was probably ... Probably to prove to other people that I wasn’t just going to be a mom. I wasn’t just going to be a nobody, just a mom. I didn’t want to be just a mom. I valued being a mother. I loved my children, and I was grateful that I had them, but I didn’t want that title of “just a mom.” I think that’s where it started.

I also wanted to prove that because I was a teenage mom, I didn’t have to this life that went nowhere. I had ideas. I had things that I wanted to say or do, and I knew that the only way that I could do that was if I had an education. To prove people wrong I think was a powerful thing.

Money. My husband worked, and we had a home, but money was tight. I think we bought our first house, it was $82,000, but still. We had one car. It was all we could do to keep things going some months. I didn’t want that. I didn’t want to struggle financially. I wanted to be able to go buy my kids shoes if they needed it, without planning for weeks. I didn’t want that kind of life for them, so I think money was also a motivating factor. I did see some friends from high school around the time where I was working on my Associate’s degree, were starting to graduate from college, and I wanted that too. I didn’t want to . . . my peers to pass me up. I wanted to be equal to them. I was going to work until I was.

Interviewer: Question 12: Please describe the challenges you faced while working toward your college degree.

J.Salazar: Probably the biggest challenge was time. We were low-income enough where we were able to qualify for student, or for financial aid. We had Pell grants, state grants, as well as school loans and Federal loans. There was plenty of money to pay for school. I was always nervous about going into financial debt, though, as far as student loans. My husband wasn’t. He used to constantly tell me, “Jena, don’t worry about that. We’ll do whatever we have to to get you through school. Don’t even think about the debt.” That was something that worried me. Money wasn’t really an issue for schooling. It was more time.

I had three children by the time I was 21. I had a 3-1/2 year old, a 2-year old, and a newborn . . . An 18-month old, excuse me, and a newborn. That was hard. Trying to . . . By this time I had a paper route that I threw at 3:00 in the morning. I got up at 3:00, yeah, about 3:00 in the morning. I’d go to the distribution center, I’d do my paper route. I’d come home, be back to bed by six. My children would start waking up an hour or two later. I would be with them all day. Do everything that’s required for three kids three and under, and then my husband would come home from
school. I’d go to college. I’d do homework during the day. I had a house to run. It was hard. It was a lot of responsibility for such a young person.

At the time I didn’t feel like it was. At the time I felt in control, though. I felt like I had my life pretty mapped out. I was a great scheduler. I was very organized. I had things pretty together. Now, looking back, I think, “Wow, that was impressive.” I was so young to have so much on my plate and be able to juggle it. But I did. I felt at the time I did a good job, and looking back, as a 39-year old woman, I feel that as a 21-year old, I had it together and was working towards that and facing those challenges.

Other challenges, Being married young. There was some challenges in my marriage that we faced during the time that I was at school that made it difficult. We overcame those, but it still made it hard. There were challenges with extended family members and some negative behavior on their part that led to stress and difficulties on my part. Some of those family dynamics were challenges that I faced while in school. The biggest would be family responsibilities and time.

Interviewer: Question 13: What social, cognitive or institutional factors can you identify as making a difference in your life that made continuing on with your education possible?

J. Salazar: Social. I didn’t have any social life at all while in school. I was married, and I had three children and a home. There was no time for social outlets. I didn’t ever go to anything social. I didn’t ever participate in anything social at my university or at the community college I attended. I never went to anything. I was not a part of any groups. I was not a part of any clubs. I did nothing like that.

The only kind of social outlet that I would have had during my whole time in college would have been church. We had some church friends. Sometimes we would have game nights or we would go to church activities, or people would come to our home. So there was a couple of things there as far as church friends. Even that was very limited.

There were no institutional factors or cognitive factors. I was good in school. I was smart, and as my confidence grew, my grades were better and better, so there was nothing that aided me in that way.

The only thing, institutional factors, is that I found my place in the university that I attended. My professors, I loved the atmosphere and the debating that sent on in class. I became known . . . People knew me. They knew that I had a strong personality and definite opinions about things. My undergraduate degree is in criminology, and I thrived. Once I became a Junior and a Senior in my major, it was something that I stood
out among my peers. That was a factor that I can identify that made a difference, that made me want to go to school, to do well, to know what I was talking about. To read and prepare before class, so that I could speak intelligently. That was something that motivated me.

Interviewer: Did you involve yourself in campus, other than attending classes?

J. Salazar: No. I didn’t. I only went to classes. I went to school primarily at night. Most of my peers were also a little bit older than your traditional college student. Most of them were also working and had children. There were those similarities. I did not involve myself in any extracurricular activities.

Interviewer: Question 15: Did you attend school physically, or did you go online?

J. Salazar: For my undergraduate, I attended physically all four years. I did not take an online course until a couple of years later, a few years later, when I began my Master’s program. I went physically for the entire undergraduate.

Interviewer: Question 16: Why do you think you were compelled or motivated to achieve such a high level of academic success?

J. Salazar: I was compelled, I think, because of the stereotypes that go along with being a teen mom. I didn’t want to fit that. I didn’t want to be a girl who got pregnant and then was a mom because she had no other options. I didn’t want that baby to be . . . to impede anything that I had plans to do.

Honestly, I feel being a teen mother set me on a course that, I don’t know had I not been a teen mom, if I would have me the same level of success. I feel that having him so young made me motivated to do bigger and better things. I wanted to be a college graduate. I wanted to have a career. I wanted to be able to provide a good life for him. I wanted to prove everybody wrong. I spent my entire 20’s proving people wrong. Proving that I could stay married. Proving that I could go to college. Proving that I could go to grad school. Proving that I could work and be a mom. All of those things that were dismissed because I had been a teen mom, I was bound and determined to prove those things wrong, or to prove that those things weren’t the case, or that they weren’t going to happen to me.

I was motivated. I was motivated to show people. Show my parents, specifically my dad, who was so ugly about me becoming a mom at such a young age. I didn’t care what I had to do. I was going to do it. It became a driving force within me that there was no way I was going to stop until I had a college degree.
Interviewer: Question 17: Why do you think you were able to achieve your college degree, yet so many women with similar stories were not?

J.Salazar: I’ve thought about this question so many times. I think some of it is my personality. I think that I . . . I’m not okay being mediocre. I’m not okay going along . . . I don’t believe life happens to you. I don’t think that I’m this victim. I didn’t have that victim mentality that, “Okay, I’m a teen mom, and so there’s nothing I can do about it. It’s the way it is. My life’s different now.” I didn’t have those thoughts. I thought, “I’m a teen mom, but so what?” I have a direct responsibility for my life. If it’s going to turn out because I’m going to work to make it turn out.

I never felt that anybody owed me anything. I felt that I had to do the work. I knew what was required. I had to step up and work as hard as I could for what I wanted. That was a college degree, that was to prove people. To prove that I could. To prove that I was smart enough or I was worthy enough, or I was good enough. The only way I was going to do that was by my own doing. I did not expect anybody else to have a role in that. I knew that my husband couldn’t fulfill that. My parents, my siblings, my friends, nobody was responsible for my life but me.

I don’t know where those thoughts or feelings came from, but I felt that. I remember being so young, thinking, “I am responsible. Life doesn’t just happen to you. You have a choice.” I firmly knew that and knew that it was going to be my own doing that was going to make these things happen. I think for some girls, they have that victim mentality, that they, “Well, it happened to me, and there’s nothing I can do about it.” I never felt that. I always knew there was something I could do about it.

Interviewer: Question 18: What expectation did you have for your future once you graduated from college?

J.Salazar: I have surpassed what I expected of myself, but it was different than I . . . It turned out different than I expected. When I went to college, I expected that I would go on to grad school, but specifically law school. I anticipated and wanted so badly to go to law school. Although I chose not to, ultimately, for many reasons. Mostly because I had three children, and I could not see the demands of law school and working. When I graduated from college I began working. I couldn’t see how I would meet the needs of my family, work, go to law school, and have three kids. I couldn’t wrap my brain around that. I decided not to go to law school.

Instead I went to . . . I went on to grad school and received my Master’s degree in Education and became a teacher. Since then I have an Education Specialist degree, and I am about to defend this dissertation and receive my Doctorate in Education. Although I have surpassed my expectation of
going on and stopping at law school, it certainly wasn’t the direction that I pictured for myself back in college.

I did know that college wasn’t . . . I was so excited when I graduated from college in ‘99, I was 20 . . . Let’s see, in ‘99 I would have been 29, no excuse me, 24. I was 24 years old. I had been married for six years. I had three kids, when I graduated from college. I did so great in college. I had a 3-point, I think, 8 GPA, something like that. This is a girl who barely graduated from high school. I think I had a 1.8 GPA when I graduated from high school. I was ready. I knew . . . I had no doubt that I could go onto grad school and finish and do amazing things. I didn’t know what direction I was going in, but I was excited. I knew that that wasn’t . . . I wasn’t done. I knew it.

At that point, though, it was for me. Going to grad school, it was nice to prove people, but I had already surpassed so much what other people expected from me. I graduated from high school, first of all. Then I went on and graduated from college, only a couple of years after my peers did, barely. A lot of my peers graduated the same year I did, and yet I had already been married and had three kids. I had already, so far, went past what everybody expected. It wasn’t about that anymore.

Now it was just excitement. School was my thing. It was my outlet. It did not put more on my plate. I didn’t feel that school was a burden. For me it was the outlet I needed to be the mom and wife that I wanted to be. Without school, I don’t know that I would have had the patience or the desire to be the mom and wife that I needed to be. It gave me my sense of self. It gave me that outlet. It gave me the confidence in all aspects of life. I owe everything of who I am today on the fact that I went to school and that I continued my education.
APPENDIX H: Permission

Michael Britt <thepsychfiles@me.com>
Tue 5/5/2015 5:56 AM
To:
Salazar, Jena;
I grant full permission to Jena Salazar to use an image I created on the Expectancy theory of motivation in her dissertation. I also grant permission for this image to appear in any and all open access Internet sites, including the Digital Commons of Liberty University.

Michael Britt

Michael A. Britt, Ph.D.
Michael@thepsychfiles.com
http://www.ThePsychFiles.com
Twitter: @mbritt

Michael Britt <thepsychfiles@me.com>
Mon 4/21/2014 3:36 PM
To:
Salazar, Jena;
Cc:
michael@thepsychfiles.com;

Sure thing Jena - feel free to use the graphic on my site. Expectancy theory is a very useful approach to understanding motivation. Thanks for getting in touch to ask.

Michael

On Apr 21, 2014, at 03:12 PM, Jena Salazar <jsalazar3@liberty.edu> wrote:

I am a doctoral student at Liberty University. I am working on my dissertation and will be conducting a study that looks into the 2% of teen mothers who go on to graduate college by 30. I would like to use a graphic you have on the Expectancy Theory of Motivation. I am seeking permission to use it in my dissertation. Thank you for considering my request.
Financial Strain Survey
So long as you reference the original source, please feel free to use the survey any way you wish.

Cheers,

Steve

**Steven Aldana, Ph.D.**
CEO WellSteps

Jena Salazar

My name is Jena Salazar, and I am a doctoral student at Liberty University. I am conducting research about the 2% of teen moms who go on to graduate college by age 30. I am interested in finding out why/how these girls were able to overcome barriers and obstacles in order to achieve their educational goals. I am interested in using your Financial Strain Survey (1998), however I would have to modify it somewhat to fit my study. Would it be fine with you if I used your survey within my dissertation? I can be reached at 910-635-9365 (EST) if you would like further information. Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Jena Salazar
Hi Jena,

Yes, I think you could probably modify the measure in that way. You don’t have to use the measure in its entirety. I would assess all the domains of support and strain, but you might want to just use perceived support and not actual received support. And, there are some questions such as the age of network members that you don’t have to include if you’re not interested in that.

I would love to see the results of your study when you have completed it. Good luck!

Christina Gee

On 3/8/2013 8:12 AM, Salazar, Jena, Ms., CIV, OSD/DoDEA-Americas wrote:

Thank you for getting back to me so quickly. I am doing a study about women who graduated from college after being teen mothers. I am interested in finding out what types of support systems were in place as they were going through college. I would like to modify the SSNQ slightly by having the women think back to when they were in college, not in the last month. Also, do I have to use the instruments in its entirety? I really appreciate your willingness to let me use the SSNQ and I just don’t want to misrepresent the intended purpose. Thank you.

Jena Salazar

-----Original Message-----
From: Christina Gee [mailto:çgee@gwu.edu]
Sent: Thursday, March 07, 2013 10:47 PM
To: Salazar, Jena, Ms., CIV, OSD/DoDEA-Americas
Subject: Re: SSNQ

Hi Jena,

Thanks for your interest in the SSNQ. That’s correct that it was originally administered by computer, but we no longer have computer support for the software. However, I’m attaching a document that lists the text of the questions so you can use that in your study as long as you use the proper citation for the measure. You would just have to write your own programs to calculate the various scores (which might be a little time consuming, but is not difficult). Hope this is helpful - let me know if you have any questions.

Christina Gee
On 3/5/2013 2:07 PM, Salazar, Jena, Ms., CIV, OSD/DoDEA-Americas wrote:

I am a doctoral candidate at Liberty University. I am doing a phenomenological study on women who graduated college after having been a teen mother. I am interested in using the Social Support Network Questionnaire. Below is an email from the Graduate Research Assistance at Liberty. He suggested contacting you concerning this instrument. Would you be able to offer some guidance as to how I could go about using the SSNQ? You can either email me jsalazar3@liberty.edu or call me on my cell 910-635-9365 (EST).

Thanks,

Jena Salazar
APPENDIX I: Charts and Graphs

Q1 Do you agree to participate in this study?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q2 If selected, what preference do you have for the interview method?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Face-to-face</th>
<th>Teleconference</th>
<th>Videoconference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q3 If selected, what preference do you have for the interview location?

- 73.3% Near home
- 13.3% Flexible
- 6.7% Teleconference
- 6.7% Phone

Q4 Please indicate your ethnicity

- 70.6% Caucasian
- 11.8% African American
- 17.6% Latino
Q5 Please indicate your age range

- Under 25: 5.9%
- 25-35: 41.2%
- 36-45: 47.1%
- 46-55: 5.9%

Q6 Please indicate your highest degree level

- Bachelor's degree: 35.3%
- Master's degree: 35.3%
- Ed. Specialist degree: 23.5%
- Doctoral degree: 5.9%
Q7 How many biological parents were in your home when you became pregnant?

- 0%: 5.9%
- 1%: 47.1%
- 2%: 47.1%

Q8 How old were you when you became pregnant with your first child?

- 13: 5.9%
- 14: 0%
- 15: 29.4%
- 16: 41.2%
- 17: 11.8%
- 18: 11.8%
Q9 How many children have you had?

- 1 child: 35.3%
- 2 children: 11.8%
- 3 children: 41.2%
- 4 children: 11.8%

Q10 What were your childcare plans when you initially had your baby?

- Daycare: 35.3%
- Friends: 11.8%
- Myself: 46.7%
- Parents: 47.1%
Q11 What were your childcare plans while you attended college?

- Daycare: 47.1%
- Friends: 5.9%
- Myself: 17.6%
- Parents: 47.1%
- Significant Other: 11.8%
- Extended family: 5.9%

Q12 What was your approximate high school GPA upon completion?

- Less than 2.0: 13.3%
- 2.0-2.5: 6.7%
- 2.5-3.0: 13.3%
- 3.0-3.5: 33.3%
- 3.5-4.0: 33.3%
Q13 High school achievement

- GED: 29.4%
- High school diploma: 70.6%

Q14 Can you identify any mentors in your life that might have aided you in the process of graduating from college?

- Parents: 26.7%
- Friend(s): 20.0%
- Significant Other: 6.7%
- Teacher: 20.0%
- Extended family: 26.7%
- Boss: 6.7%
- Child: 6.7%
- No mentor: 20.0%
Q15 At the time of your pregnancy, if there were no obstacles, how much education did you want to complete?

- 4 year degree: 17.6%
- Grad school: 35.3%
- High school: 23.6%
- No plan: 23.5%

Q16 When you looked at your life, how much education did you expect to have completed by the time you were 30?

- No plan: 5.9%
- Some college: 5.9%
- 4 year degree: 23.5%
- Grad school: 64.7%
Q17 What things do you think made it difficult for you to get all the education you wanted?

Percentage of Respondents

- Childcare: 17.6%
- Family obligations: 23.5%
- Finances: 41.2%
- No support: 23.5%
- Time: 41.2%
- Work: 23.5%
- Transportation: 5.9%
- Self doubt: 11.8%
- Nothing: 5.9%

Q18-1 I knew how interest worked on my debts

- Always/Often: 58.8%
- Rarely/Sometimes: 41.2%
- Never: 0.0%
Q18-2 I felt financially educated

- Always/Often: 35.2%
- Rarely/Sometimes: 58.9%
- Never: 5.9%

Q18-3 I was well informed about financial matters

- Always/Often: 41.2%
- Rarely/Sometimes: 58.8%
- Never: 0.0%
Q19-1 There were disagreements about money in my home

- 17.6% Always/Often
- 41.2% Rarely/Sometimes
- 41.2% Never

Q19-2 I tended to argue with others about money

- 17.7% Always/Often
- 41.2% Rarely/Sometimes
- 41.1% Never
Q19-3 Financial problems hurt my relationships

- 41.2% - Never
- 17.6% - Rarely/Sometimes
- 41.2% - Always/Often

Q19-4 My relationships with others were affected by financial problems

- 35.3% - Never
- 29.4% - Rarely/Sometimes
- 35.3% - Always/Often
Q20-1 Were you ever unable to sleep well because of financial worries?

- Always/Often: 5.9%
- Rarely/Sometimes: 35.3%
- Never: 58.8%

Q20-2 Did you ever get headaches from worry over money matters?

- Always/Often: 11.8%
- Rarely/Sometimes: 41.2%
- Never: 47.0%
Q20-3 Did your muscles get tense when you added up your bills?
- 53.0% Always/Often
- 41.1% Rarely/Sometimes
- 5.9% Never

Q20-4 Did your financial situation cause you to feel physically ill?
- 58.8% Always/Often
- 23.5% Rarely/Sometimes
- 17.7% Never
Q21-1 Did you take on more debt to get nicer things?

- Always/Often: 29.5%
- Rarely/Sometimes: 47.0%
- Never: 23.5%

Q21-2 Did you get new credit cards to pay off old ones?

- Always/Often: 17.7%
- Rarely/Sometimes: 29.4%
- Never: 52.9%
Q21-3 I made purchases on credit cards hoping that I will have the money later?

- Always/Often: 23.5%
- Rarely/Sometimes: 17.7%
- Never: 58.8%

Q22-1 I paid my bills on time

- Always/Often: 41.2%
- Rarely/Sometimes: 58.8%
- Never: 0.0%
Q22-2 I found it difficult to pay my bills

- 0.0%
- 35.3%
- 64.7%

Legend:
- Always/Often
- Rarely/Sometimes
- Never

Q22-3 Many of my bills were past due

- 11.8%
- 23.5%
- 64.7%

Legend:
- Always/Often
- Rarely/Sometimes
- Never
Q22-4 I didn't have enough money to pay my bills

- Always/Often: 5.9%
- Rarely/Sometimes: 41.1%
- Never: 53.0%

Q23 If you needed to talk to someone about something personal or private, who would you talk to for instance, if you had something on your mind that was worrying you or making you feel down?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Parent(s)</th>
<th>Extended Family</th>
<th>Friends</th>
<th>Significant Other</th>
<th>Church</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60%</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q24 During the time you were in college, how often did you perceive you talked to each of these people about something personal or private?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Less than once per week</th>
<th>Once or several times per week</th>
<th>Daily</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q25 How did you feel about the way things went the times you talked about personal concerns during this same time period?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Bad</th>
<th>Not too good</th>
<th>OK</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q26 During your time in college, would you have liked more opportunities to talk with people about your personal feelings and concerns, less opportunities, or was it just right?

Q27 Who of the people you knew lent you or gave you something you needed or pitched in to help you with something you needed to do?
Q28 While in college, how often did each of these people actually loan you something you needed or helped you out with things like providing transportation, running errands, or helping you do a chore you needed to get done?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q29 Overall, during this same time period, how good was the practical help you got from the people you listed—how well did it meet you needs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q30 While in college, would you have liked people to have given you more practical help such as lending you things, providing you with transportation, running errands, or helping you with other things you needed to get done? Less practical help?

Q31 Who would you have gone to if you needed advice or information—for example, if you didn’t know where to get something or how to do something you needed to do?
Q32 During your time in college, how often did each of these people actually give you information or advice?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>60%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once or twice a month</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About once a week</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than once a week</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q33 During your time in college, how did you feel about the advice and information you received?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>60%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bad</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not too good</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OK</td>
<td></td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q34 During your time in college, would you have like more advice, less advice, or was it about right?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Less</th>
<th>More</th>
<th>About right</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q35 Who were the people that you could expect to let you know that they liked your ideas or the things that you did?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Friends</th>
<th>Extended Family</th>
<th>Significant Other</th>
<th>Professor</th>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Classmates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q36 During your time in college, how often did each of these people actually let you know that they liked something you did or said?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Once or twice a month</th>
<th>About once a week</th>
<th>More than once a week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q37 During your time in college, how did you feel about the way things went the times the people you mentioned told you that they liked your ideas or something that you said?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Bad</th>
<th>Not too good</th>
<th>OK</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q38 During this same time, would you have liked people to tell you that they liked your ideas or things that you did more often, less often, or was it about right?

Percentage of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less</th>
<th>More</th>
<th>About right</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q39 Who were the people you would get together with to have fun and relax? These can be new names.

Percentage of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child(ren)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classmates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q40 During your time in college, how often did you get together with each of these people?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Once or twice a month</th>
<th>About once a week</th>
<th>More than once a week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q41 During this same time, how good did you feel about your experiences the times that you got together with people to have fun and relax?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Bad</th>
<th>Not too good</th>
<th>OK</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q42 During your time in college, would you have liked more opportunities to get together with people to have fun and relax, less opportunity, or was it about right?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Less</th>
<th>More</th>
<th>About right</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q43 If you wanted to talk to someone about being pregnant or get some other type of help related to your pregnancy—a ride to the doctor, clothes for the baby—who would you go to?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Parent(s)</th>
<th>Friends</th>
<th>Extended family</th>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q44 During this same time, how often did each of these people actually talk with you about being pregnant or help you with your pregnancy in some other way?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Once or twice a month</th>
<th>About once a week</th>
<th>More than once a week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q45 How did you feel about the help with your pregnancy you received from the people mentioned during this same time?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Bad</th>
<th>Not too good</th>
<th>OK</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q46 During this same time, would you have liked more help and support with your pregnancy, less help and support, or was it about right?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Less</th>
<th>More</th>
<th>About right</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q47 Who could you go to for help in taking care of your child/children? For instance, who could you rely on to watch your child/children in an emergency or if you just needed a break?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Parent(s)</th>
<th>Friends</th>
<th>Extended Family</th>
<th>Daycare</th>
<th>Church</th>
<th>No one</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>86.7%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q48 During this same time, how often did each of these people actually help you with your child/children?

- Never: 0.0%
- Once or twice a month: 7.7%
- About once a week: 23.1%
- More than once a week: 69.2%

Q49 During this same time, how did you feel about the help with childcare you did receive?

- Bad: 7.1%
- Not too bad: 0.0%
- OK: 21.4%
- Good: 42.9%
- Very good: 28.6%
Q50 During this same time, would you have liked more help taking care of your child/children, less help, or was it about right?

- Less: 0.0%
- More: 46.7%
- About right: 53.3%

Q51 How good did you feel about the way things went the times this person tried to help or support you during this same time?

- Bad: 7.1%
- Not too good: 0.0%
- OK: 14.3%
- Good: 64.3%
- Very good: 14.3%
Q52 During this same time, could you have used more help and support from _______? Less help and support? Or was it about right?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Less | More | About right
--- | --- | ---
0.0% | 40.0% | 60.0%

Q53 How important to you was the help and support you received from this person?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70%</td>
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<td>60%</td>
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<td>40%</td>
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<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not too important | Somewhat important | Very important
--- | --- | ---
0.0% | 0.0% | 100.0%
Q54 Who were the people you could expect to make you angry or hurt your feelings? These would be people you argued with or upset you in some other way.

- Parent(s): 46.7%
- Extended family: 33.3%
- Significant Other: 60.0%
- No one: 6.7%
- Child(ren): 6.7%

Q55 During this same time, which of these people actually made you angry or hurt your feelings?

- Parent(s): 40.0%
- Friends: 6.7%
- Extended family: 33.3%
- Significant Other: 46.6%
- Church: 6.7%
- Other: 6.7%
APPENDIX J: Summary of the Quantitative Data

Results of the questionnaire, The Financial Strain Survey, and The Social Support Network Questionnaire are reported in this section. With all three instruments, there were a total of 55 questions for the participants to answer. There were 17 total respondents to the surveys. Of the 17 respondents, not all answered all 55 questions.

Questionnaire

The first three questions of the questionnaire asked the participants for their permission to participate and their preference of interview method and location if they chose to be interviewed. The next few questions asked demographic information. When asked to identify their ethnicity, 11.8% identified as African American, 70.6% as Caucasian, and 17.6% as Latino. Of the 17 respondents, 5.9% were under the age of 25, 41.2% were between the ages of 25 and 35, 47.1% were between the ages of 36 and 45, and 5.9% were between the ages of 46 and 55. Next, the respondents were asked to indicate their highest degree attained. Just over 35% had attained a Bachelor’s Degree, while just fewer than 65% attained a graduate degree.

The respondents were asked how many biological parents were in their home when they became pregnant. Only one respondent did not have any biological parents in the home, while 47.1% had one parent and 47.1% had both biological parents in the home at the time of their pregnancy. The following questions directly relate to this study. Respondents were asked at what age they became pregnant. Of the 17 respondents, 5.9% became pregnant at 13, 29.4% were 15, 41.2% were 16, and 11.8% were 17 and 18 respectively. The respondents were then asked how many children in total they have had; 35.3% only had the one child, while 11.8% had 2 children, 41.2% had 3 children, and 11.8% had 4 children in total. Additionally, of the 17 respondents only two women were still teenagers when they gave birth to their second child.
The next few questions in the questionnaire dealt with life after the participants had their first child. Respondents were asked to identify their childcare plans initially and then while they attended college. Initially, 35.3% said a daycare would provide childcare, but that number jumped to 47.1% while the participant was in college (Figure 2). Friends were identified by 11.8% as providing childcare, but that number declined to 5.9% once the participant was attending college. Parents were said to provide 47.1% of the childcare and that number remained steady once the participant began attending college (Figure 3).

Figure 2
In order to understand the academic achievement of the participants prior to their pregnancy and afterward, the following questions were asked: What was your approximate high school GPA upon completion? Of the 15 participants who responded to this question, 13.3% had a GPA less than 2.0, 6.7% had a GPA between 2.0 and 2.5, 13.3% had a GPA between 2.5 and 3.0, 33.3% had a GPA between 3.0 and 3.5, while 33.3% reported having a GPA higher than a 3.5. When asked about high school completion, 29.4% received a GED, however, 70.6% did graduate from high school despite being a teen mother. Additionally, participants were asked at the time of their pregnancy, if there were no obstacles, how much education did they want to complete. Of the 17 respondents, 17.6% said they wanted to complete a 4 year degree, 35.3% wanted to complete graduate school, 23.6% were satisfied with completing high school, and 23.5% had no plans for completing their education. However, when asked how much education they expected to complete by the time they were 30 years old, 64.7% expected to complete graduate school, while 23.5% expected to at least complete a four year degree, and fewer than 12% had little expectation to attend college or no expectation at all.
The final two questions in the questionnaire pertain to the educational attainment and support received by the teen mothers. Respondents were asked to identify what things made it difficult to get all the education they wanted (Figure 4). Time and finances were the greatest obstacles for 41.2% of the women, respectively. Having to work full time, having other family obligations, and having no support were reported as being an obstacle by 23.5%, respectively. Childcare concerns were reported by 11.6% as being an obstacle. Only 11.8% reported self-doubt as being an obstacle. Finally, a mere 5.9% of the respondents reported transportation as an obstacle or not having any obstacles at all. To counter that question, respondents were asked to identify any mentors in their life that might have aided them in graduating from college. Parent(s) and extended family were listed by 26.7%, respectively. Friends, teachers, or no mentor was cited by 20%, respectively. Significant other, boss, or children were reported as being their mentor by 6.7% of the women, respectively.
The Financial Strain Survey

The Financial Strain Survey (FSS) has 18 items and uses a Likert scale, which utilizes interval-based multiple-choice style of questions. For purposes of compiling the data into percentages, I combined the multiple choice questions into three categories: always and often, rarely, and sometimes and never. The survey is divided into five sections: education, relationships, physical, credit card use, and meeting obligations. I chose this survey to ascertain the financial life of the teen mothers while they were attending college. With such a high percentage of women citing finances as an obstacle, it was important to get a clear picture of their apparent financial strain. Section one, question one asked the respondents if they...
understood how their debt worked. Of the 17 respondents, 58.8% reported they always or often did understand how interest worked concerning their debts; however, in questions two and three, only 35.2% reported as feeling financially educated and 41.2% were well informed about financial matters respectively.

The next section of the FSS dealt with relationships and how financial strain possibly affected those relationships. Of the 17 respondents, 41.2% said there were disagreements about money in their home, but only 17.7% admitted those disagreements turned into arguments about money. When asked if financial problems hurt their relationships, a total of 82.4% indicated rarely/sometimes or never. However, one third of all respondents said their relationships were affected by financial problems. The following section of the FSS looked at how financial strain might have affected the respondents physically. Respondents were asked if they were ever unable to sleep well due to financial worries. Of the respondents, 35.3% reported as always/often, while 58.8% said rarely/sometimes and 5.9% reported never having difficulty sleeping because of financial worries. However an increased percentage, 41.2%, did report they always or often got headaches from worry over money matters, and 53% reported having tense muscles when bills were added up. Conversely, 23.5% said their financial situation caused them to feel physically ill.

Credit card use is the fourth section of the FSS. There were three questions asked in this section. The first question asked the respondents if they took on more debt to get nicer things. Only 23.5% of respondents admitted to taking on more debt for nicer things. Next, the respondents were asked whether they got new credit cards to pay off old ones. Roughly 30% said they rarely or sometimes did, while nearly 53% said they never used new credit cards to pay off old ones. The final question dealing with credit card use asked if the respondents purchased on
credit, hoping they would have the money at a later time. Overall, 82.3% said they never or rarely/sometimes made purchase on credit in hopes for future money to pay them off. The final section of the FSS asked questions dealing with meeting financial obligations while in college. Fifty-nine percent of respondents said they paid their bills on time, notwithstanding, 64.7% found it difficult to pay their bills. However, only 23.5% reported that many of their bills were past due. Surprisingly, 58.9% of respondents claimed they had enough money to pay their bills.

The Social Support Network Questionnaire

The Social Support Network Questionnaire (SSNQ) is a structured survey that has been designed to assess social support and social strain in teen mothers’ relationships. The SSNQ is a modification and extension of the Arizona Social Support Interview Schedule. Again, 17 respondents were asked the following questions, but not all respondents answered all 32 questions of the SSNQ, because some of the questions did not pertain to them. For many of the questions, the respondents can list as many answers they choose. The first section of the SSNQ addressed emotional support. Respondents were asked if they needed to talk to someone about something personal or private, whom they would have talked to for instance, if they had something on their mind that was worrying them or making them feel down (Figure 5). Of the 15 respondents to answer this question, 53.3% answered friends and significant other, respectively. Parents and extended family were both cited by 26.7%. Only 6.7% answered church or no one, respectively. The respondents were then asked how often they talked to the people listed and 42.9% said daily, while 21.4% said they talked to them once or several times per week, and 35.7% said they talked to them less than once a week. When asked how those conversation went during the times they talked about personal concerns, 57.1% said the conversations went ok, and 42.9% said the conversations went good or very good. When asked if the respondents would
have liked more opportunities to talk with people about personal feelings and concerns, fewer opportunities, or if it was just right, overwhelmingly, 71.4% said it was just right.

Figure 5

The next section of the SSNQ focused on tangible assistance. Respondents were asked who of the people they knew would lend them or give them something they needed or pitched in to help them with something they needed to do. These would be people who would have run errands for them, lent them money, food, clothing, or drove them somewhere they needed to go (Figure 6). Of the 15 respondents to answer this question, 73.3% said parent(s), 46.7% said extended family, 33.3% said friends, and 20% said significant other. Only 6.7% said government, boss, church, or no help received respectively. Respondents were asked to identify how often each of these people actually loaned them something they needed or helped them out with things like providing transportation, running errands, or helping them do a chore that was needed. Forty percent said once or twice a month, whereas 46.7% said more than once a week and only 13.3% said never. When asked to rate how good the overall practical help they received from the people they listed, 86.6% said the help was good or very good. It was split 50% to 50%
of those respondents who thought the amount of help was about right or whether they needed more.

Figure 6

The following section concentrated on cognitive guidance. Respondents were asked to identify whom they would have gone to if they needed information or advice (Figure 7). Parent(s) were identified by 50% percent of the 14 respondents to answer this question. Extended family and significant other were cited by 21.4%, respectively. Friends or researching the answer by themselves was cited by 14.3% of the respondents, respectively. Other sources of advice and information were college advisor, boss, church or no one with 7.1% of the respondents, respectively. When asked how often each of those people actually gave them information or advise, 53.3% said once or twice a month, 6.7% said about once a week, while 26.7% said more than once a week. Respondents were then asked how they felt about the advice and information they received with 60% saying it was okay and 33.3% saying they would have liked to have more advice or information. Conversely, 40% said they felt good or very good about the advice and information they received and 60% felt the amount of advice or information was about right.
Positive feedback and social reinforcement is the focus of the next section in the SSNQ. Respondents were asked to name the people they could have expected to let them know they liked their ideas or the things they did. Of the 15 respondents to answer this question, 53.3% said their friends were the people they could have expected to let them know they liked their ideas or things they did. Forty percent said their parent(s) and 26.7% said extended family and significant other respectively. When asked how often each of these people actually let them know they liked something they did or said, 33.3% said more than once a week, while 46.7% said about once a week and 20% said only once or twice a month. Respondents were then asked how they felt about the way things went the times the people mentioned told them they liked their ideas or something they said. Two-thirds said good or very good and 80% said the amount of times people said they liked their ideas was about right. Twenty percent respectively said they felt okay about the feedback and would have liked more feedback.

The next section consists of questions concerning social participation. Respondents were asked to identify the people they would get together with and relax. An overwhelmingly 86.7%
of the 15 respondents who answered this question said their friends would be the people they would get together with and relax, followed by 46.7% citing their significant other. Twenty percent said extended family, while only 6.7% said parents. When asked how often they got together with each of these people, 46.7% said just once or twice a month, 26.7% said about once a week, and 26.7% said more than once a week. When asked how they felt about the experience the times they got together with people to have fun and relax, 64.7% said they felt good or very good, however, 46.7% would have liked more opportunities to get together with people to have fun and relax.

The following section centers on pregnancy related assistance. Respondents were asked to identify whom they would talk to about being pregnant or get some other type of help related to their pregnancy (Figure 8). Sixty percent of the 15 respondents to answer the question identified their parent(s), followed by friends with 26.7%. Less significant sources of help were extended family, church, agencies, and information they may have gained through their own research. One-third of the respondents said they actually talked with others about being pregnant more than once a week. However, only 26.7% said they talked about once a week or up to twice a month respectively. When asked how they felt about the help they received, 21.4% said not too good or bad, and 46.7% said they would have liked to receive more support with their pregnancy. However, 50% said they felt good or very good about the support they received and 46.7% said the amount of help was about right.
The next section of the SSNQ dealt with childcare assistance. Respondents were asked whom they could go to for help in taking care of their child/children. For instance, who could they rely on to watch their child/children in an emergency or if they just needed a break? Of the 15 respondents to answer this question, again parents were the greatest response with 86.7%, followed by extended family with 40% and 26.7% cited friends. Only 6.7% identified daycare, church, or no one respectively. Nearly 70% said they received help from the people listed more than once a week and 71.5% felt good or very good about the childcare they received. Additionally, 53.3% of the respondents said the amount of daycare help they received was about right. However, 46.7% would have liked to have more daycare help.

The final section of the SSNQ ascertains the overall satisfaction the respondents felt about the way things went the times they tried to ask for help or support. Of the 14 respondents to answer this question, 78.6% felt good or very good about the help they received during this time in their life. Sixty percent felt the amount of overall help was about right and 40% would have liked more help during this time. When asked how important the help and support they
received was, 100% said it was very important. Finally, respondents were asked to identify people they could expect to make them angry or hurt their feelings. These would have been people they argued with or upset them in some other way. Of the 15 to respond, 60% identified their significant other, 46.7% said their parent(s), and 33.3% said they expected their extended family to upset them or hurt their feelings. When asked which of these same people actually hurt their feelings or made them angry, 46.6% said their significant other, 40% said their parent(s), and 33.3% said their extended family.
## APPENDIX K : Interview Log

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<td>Lori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>October 23, 2014</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>Jamie</td>
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APPENDIX L: Interviews

INTERVIEW 1

J. Salazar: Okay, I’m Jena Salazar. Thank you for meeting with me today. Can you spell your first name?

Lori: Lori, L-o-r-i.

J. Salazar: I have the consent form here. I have one copy for you. It’s the same consent form that you saw online for the survey.

Lori: Yes.

J. Salazar: The only difference is of course there’s a part for you to sign. I have a copy for you to keep and then one for you to sign.

Lori: Okay.

J. Salazar: The second page you can keep that one. Second page has a signature there. That just says that you’re aware that it’s going to be recorded as well as transcribed. I will provide a copy of the transcription to you once I have done that. The 8th, August 8th. Okay, then let me sign that. Again, I appreciate you meeting with me today.

Lori: No problem.

J. Salazar: Okay. Then, I’ll just go ahead and sign your copy too that way. Alright. There you go. So far so good. All right, I’m going to ask you a series of questions. There are 18 questions that I’ve outlined but any given time we can also gear off a little bit if that’s needed. Okay, if we can start. First question I’d like to ask is please describe your life before becoming pregnant as a teenager. What was your family life like?

Lori: I grew up very sheltered. Very sheltered. I grew up my dad was a Baptist deacon. My mom was church hostess. Unless we had blood coming out of some part of our body and bones sticking through or fever of 108 we were at church. That was just all there was to it. I grew up in a town of 900.

J. Salazar: Wow.

Lori: These people I had known my whole life, they knew my business, I knew their business but you really didn’t have a great grasp of the outside world.

J. Salazar: I can see that.
Lori: Really, I liked my life but looking back I realized how sheltered I was, I realized that there were not a lot of expectations for me because in a town that size you could either get married and start having babies or if you wanted to go to school and be a school teacher that was a good job for woman. My dad hoped I would become a bank teller. That’s a good job for a woman.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: Everyone have that, everyone had that same expectations. There’s a team of a town of 900. It’s not anybody thought of being a nuclear scientist.

J. Salazar: Right. Okay. That leads me to question number two. Prior to finding now you’re pregnant, what was your attitude towards school or education in general?

Lori: I always knew I wanted to get an education. I always knew I wanted to go to college. My family was just, “If you want to, that’s fine but if you don’t want to that’s fine.” My parents, my dad went to one or two years of junior college. My mom dropped out in high school because she got married.

J. Salazar: Right.

Lori: Once she get married why do school? I always felt I wanted to. There was something more for me. I had no idea what but I felt like there was something more for me.

J. Salazar: Interesting. Okay. Prior to your parents finding out that you’re pregnant, how did they feel about school? You had mentioned it was, “If you wanted to, great,” there was no expectation. That wasn’t the natural order of things for you to go into college.

Lori: No.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: My sister had gone to college and she was married and in school. They had seen my sister do that. If I chose that path that was okay but mom and dad really didn’t care. There was a junior college that was about ten miles from our house, that was a good place. Basically I could go find somebody to marry me.

J. Salazar: Right. When they found out that you are pregnant, did their attitude towards education changed?

Lori: They were even less supportive.

J. Salazar: Of education?
Lori: Of education.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: Because there was a baby on the way. You needed to get a job, going to school is not paying anybody any bills. I needed to get serious, get out there get a job because there need to be food on the table for the baby.

J. Salazar: Right. Okay. Now, what was their expectations in terms of your education as far as in caring for the baby? Did they view . . . Was there a connection between that and you caring or was it just employment was really?

Lori: I don’t think they had this connection of education and caring for a baby. They wanted me to be a mom, they wanted me to be a good mom but you can be an excellent mom without having any college. You can have a job that paid a dollar over minimum wage without having college. There was not a real long term focus on but if I sacrifice now it would be better in the end because nobody did that. There’s a ton of girls that graduated high school with me and within a couple of years were having babies and married and never went back, never finished because that was just the expectation.

J. Salazar: Did you feel like that that should be different? Did you feel a call somehow that that didn’t . . .

Lori: I did but I always felt like I was the oddity, I was the oddity in a small town because I kept and I would have a discussion with my parents. Why make minimum wage or slightly above minimum wage for the rest of my life when I can sacrifice a little bit now and it will pay off later.

J. Salazar: You saw the direct correlation?

Lori: I saw that but mom and dad, “Honey, you’re just going to end up being a stay at home mom anyway. The best you could do is being a school teacher and you can go back and do that after your kids get out.” Get into school. They have the time. My mom and dad didn’t have anyone in their lives I think that plays that focus on education. They had never seen anyone make it out of our little one horse town. I don’t think they put all of that together. It was an argument we went around a lot with.

J. Salazar: Right from the get go you got number one obstacle I guess that you came for is that expectation of your own family as far as the importance placed on education? That was an obstacle you had to overcome initially I mean, okay.

Lori: Yes.
J. Salazar: My next question is what role did education play in your family not very important role. I mean they valued work.

Lori: Yes. What’s funny though, my sister and I were both in gifted and talented program at school. We were both National Honor Society, we were both extremely bright but they had zero expectations for us because we were girls. We were going to have babies and be stay at home moms. My brother who’ve always struggled at school, my parents actually like, “You need to find a good career, you got a family to support.” They encourage him, he only went to college one semester but they thought that was amazing, “He’s a man, he’s going to have some . . . “

J. Salazar: Totally different expectation.

Lori: Family to support.

J. Salazar: That’s interesting. That’s exactly my next . . . Your sibling, college graduate. You said your sister went to college but did she graduate?

Lori: Yes.

J. Salazar: She did. Four year degree?

Lori: Yes. My sister graduated traditional typical four years of college bachelors degree. She’s a school teacher. She’s three years older than me.

J. Salazar: She in fact became a teacher.

Lori: Yes, yes.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: That’s a good job for a woman.

J. Salazar: Your brother went to one semester?

Lori: David went to one semester. He is four and a half years older than me.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: He went to school one semester and then he went working in the law field. Now, he owns his own business and so he is mom and dad’s pride and joy, amazing. Still I’m working on a dissertation and my mom ask me the other day, she said, “What do you do?”

J. Salazar: Wow.
Lori: Teach your mom.

J. Salazar: That is amazing. Okay. Then again, even still that value of work and hard work and just working your way up is still seen as more important I guess you could say than education. Especially for women.

Lori: Yes.

J. Salazar: Okay. You’re just going along and answering these questions before I even ask them. Your family’s view of you being a female. Your role as a female is to have children, to ideally be a stay at home mom. Is that what the expectation was? Okay. Now, you work and your sister. Does your sister work at home? Are your parents okay with that role or they would rather you be more traditional and stay home?

Lori: They are okay with women being teachers because we get out of school when our children get out so we can be at home in time to cook supper for our husbands and help our children with homework.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: We’re out during the summertime so we can spend time with our children and they don’t have to go to other care providers.

J. Salazar: Got it. As long as your career doesn’t step on the role of your woman?

Lori: Yes, as long as it doesn’t step on that primary role of being the good little wife that has dinner on the table and a good little mom that’s doing projects at the kitchen table with their kids, they are okay if we do that side business of going to school.

J. Salazar: Got it, okay. Please describe your experiences from the time you found out you were pregnant until the time you entered your undergraduate program. What I’m interested in is the reaction, the story. How did you tell your parents? How old were you? What were the circumstances around it? What was their reaction to it? How did the family dynamics change? The main event, how did that transpire?

Lori: I knew I was pregnant when I registered for classes for my freshman year in college. I was about four or five weeks pregnant. Did not say a word to anybody.

J. Salazar: At this point you were how old?

Lori: I was eighteen and did not say a word to anybody. My brother-in-law graduated that month from college. He was a summer graduate and that’s when my sister and her husband announced that they are going to have a baby.
J. Salazar: Right.

Lori: Everybody was so excited because it was going to be the first grandchild and she was due in April. The whole time I was sitting there thinking, I’m due in March. I knew that and I just could not say anything. I had no idea what was going to happen when I told my mom and dad that I was pregnant. I made sure I was going off to the junior college that I had spoken about. It was ten miles away. I had talked with one of my good friends and I talked with her mother and told them what was going on and I said if they kick me out can I stay and they said yes. Then I called the university and just anonymously, “Can a pregnant girl stay in the dorm?” Found out that yes, you can live in the dorms if you are pregnant up until delivery and then you can come back but not the baby.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: I was schedule to move in to the dorm so I knew I had a place to stay at my friends house, I knew I had a place to stay when school started. Then I talked to my youth minister and I told him what was going on and when I thought I wanted somebody there when I told my mom and dad and so we all sat down together and the dean and I told them that I was pregnant. My dad listened to it and he said, “I just got to go.” He got up and left. My mom just cried and wailed. Part of it was not really that I had ruined my life, part of it was the shame, the shame of having an unwed daughter and my dad was a deacon in the Baptist church and basically I was going to have to wear the letter A forever.

My mom throughout the time at the same time my grandmother was dying of cancer and so we know there’s a lot going on in our family at that time. My mom, it was within a day or two, my mom came to me and asked me if I had considered having an abortion and would that be something that I would consider.

J. Salazar: That must have shocked you.

Lori: Yes. Yes, it still shocked me but that . . . My parents would never support abortion but spaced with the prospect of our whole little tiny town knowing that now their daughter, upstanding, prominent little family shamed the whole family because of this. Is there any way we could get out of this? Mom proposed that and I said no. I said no, I’m not going to. That was never mentioned again. My Baptist youth minister, he supported adoption, that I should give this baby up because I was not equipped, “You’re too young, you have no business.” My grandmother passed away. Our pastor that had been my pastor all through my childhood and youth and I had babysat his children a million times came back to do my mother’s funeral.

He sat me down and told me that he heard and that he had a family in his church that were trying to adopt and so he wanted me to allow this people to adopt my
child because that’s the right thing to do because you know you have no business raising a baby. You know that you’re too young.

J. Salazar: What were you saying to yourself internally when you’re hearing this?

Lori: I’m thinking I can’t believe this man that I used to trust is telling me this. I can’t believe the people that I had been raised around that we all thought we would support each other and we had supported each other through a million different things that now it’s my time of need and I’m being treated like the leper. There’s a lot of things people can support but that was not one of them. I had never told my parents what that pastor said to me but they knew something was said because several years later mom and dad had kept in touch with him. His family and I said, “We’re all going to see Brother Danny Preach. We’re going to make a little weekend of going to where he lives.” No, no. They’ve asked me a few times what was said and I said no. No, just to pick out adoptive parents for me.

J. Salazar: Forward.

Lori: At that point in time that’s not what I needed from a spiritual leader.

J. Salazar: Right. I would agree. You told mom and dad you had all this reaction. It was about what time of the year?

Lori: It was in August.

J. Salazar: Right when the school is about to start. You already picked out the college that you’re going to attend, you already called about dorm situation. You had your ducks in a row, you knew about different programs and stuff that were available. When your parents found out and there was a discussion. Did they then at that point ask you not to go to school? Were there expectation for you to stop?

Lori: No, at that point they were too [shell shocked 00:20:10]. We had already paid for it. I mean, at that point like I said I had registered, written out a check.

J. Salazar: You’re going?

Lori: It was paid for, it was a done deal. I think that was one of the best things that happened at that point in time because by the time my grandmother passed away which was we’re talking just a matter of a few days within a week, seven day period or so I told my parents, my grandmother passed away, the pastor did all this. I moved in to the dorms.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: I was at the dorms now and I had five day of meal ticket so I could stay there five days and eat in the cafeteria and technically come home on the weekends.
J. Salazar: How far away was it from home?

Lori: Ten miles.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: Ten miles. I could eat Ramen noodles or go over at friend’s house or something so I didn’t have to come home and spend the night of two nights.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: I would come home and do some laundry, we would make polite conversation and talk about the weather, anything other than what was really going on but I think that gave me some space and it gave them some space to come to terms with everything that was going on. At college, I was in the dorm with three girls and they were fabulous because I told them upfront I was pregnant and they were so sweet and they would help me.

J. Salazar: Was this a religious college?

Lori: No. It’s just a public county junior college.

J. Salazar: Junior college, okay. You were in school, you came home some weekends but not all but as far as your parents’ attitude toward you, did you feel supported by them at this point?

Lori: At that point, no. Our relationship was very strained and I think they supported me continuing school that semester because they didn’t have to deal with me daily looking at me growing. I think that they were supportive in the fact that I wasn’t there.

J. Salazar: What were your plans once that first semester was over? You’re due in March. What were you going to do? Come December when the semester was over.

Lori: I’ve thought about it all the time. I can’t say I had a huge grand plan because the birth father was involved but he was having to deal with the whole idea of becoming a father, did he want to be involved, his family pressuring him to marry me.

J. Salazar: Was that something you wanted?

Lori: I think at that point in time my shelter little heart thought that that’s what I needed because I can’t tell you how many times my parents said, “In God’s eyes you’re already married.”
J. Salazar: You think? Because you were pregnant, in God’s eyes you were already married to the father.

Lori: Yes.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: We really needed to make this legal. There was a lot of pressure and there was a lot of pressure that from my religious community of people should be married when they have children, good girls should have a husband when they have a baby. There were other girls that had babies that had gotten pregnant before they were married but that baby just came early. Why not? For six weeks early and people just accepted that but I wouldn’t go along with that.

J. Salazar: Why not?

Lori: It’s so wrong. It just felt like I wasn’t being true to myself, it wasn’t being true to . . . To my values I made a mistake but that doesn’t mean that they had to lead to 15 more.

J. Salazar: Right. I think you just said it’s crazy to sound, I mean you still had values, you still knew what was right and wrong. You still had your beliefs that you’ve been raised with. A mistake does not change those thinking process anyway. Okay. Why did you choose the college that you chose to begin with? Even before the pregnancy.

Lori: Because it was close.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: That was really more of my parents’ influence.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: There was a four year university that was about a 100 miles away and I really wanted to go there but my parents were not supportive at all. They can handle this college fit, open up some prospects for marriage but they didn’t want me to go that far.

J. Salazar: Did your sister go to the same college that you went to?

Lori: Yes. She started out with the same, she went to the junior college and surprise that’s where she met her husband.

J. Salazar: It works for your sister and they are hoping that it would work for you. Okay. Make sense.
Lori: You’re seeing a pattern.

J. Salazar: Yes. Okay, you’re at school now. First semester is going. What agencies or what groups or support systems were in your life during that first semester to help you navigate school? I mean, did you get involved with a different church closer to school? Was there any school programs or a counselor? What support system did you have while you were there at that first semester?

Lori: No one, I had my college roommates. I went to the Baptist Student Union once and it’s not fun showing up at the Baptist Student Union as the pregnant girl because nobody wants to sit with you because it’s contagious apparently. Really, I didn’t. It was a very tough year because my parents were upset with me, my sister was furious with me because I had obviously done this on purpose so I could have a baby before she did and steal the thunder and the limelight of the first grandchild and while everyone should have been fondling over her that they are dealing with the fall out of me. She wasn’t really a person that I can deal with.

J. Salazar: Your relationship with your sister is strained, your relationship with your parents definitely strained. You had good college roommate. Did you bring any friends with you from high school to college?

Lori: No, I was a leper.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: I was absolutely treated as a leper because I had another friend that got pregnant and she had an abortion. I had another friend that got pregnant and had an abortion. I got another friend that got pregnant and got married and had her baby a month early. Why can’t you just follow the rules and follow what’s expected. Suddenly I was no longer their friend. One of my friends, her parents wouldn’t let her associate with me anymore because now I was like the town’s slut. She couldn’t even hang out with me anymore.

J. Salazar: Do you feel like that your town and your immediate surroundings, the people in your life almost felt like you had an attitude about this, you were just going to show them you were a little disrespectful by being pregnant and showing and not following the rules. Does that make sense?

Lori: I haven’t thought about it in other terms but possibly. I could think of a couple of people in our church that got pregnant and then they immediately had... Got married and the church threw them lavish showers. I think some of them looked at me like, “How dare you? How dare you?”

J. Salazar: In your face.

Lori: Yeah.
J. Salazar: They tell you you’re out there. Okay. All right. December comes, first semester is over. Where do you go from there?

Lori: I had to move home.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: I had to move home and things have settle down to a point with mom and dad that we could deal with each other. Mom was actually looking forward to helping with the baby.

J. Salazar: She’s warming up to the idea.

Lori: She was warming up to the idea and the plan was that I would live with them and then when I went back to school. I had the baby, she was due around spring break time and then once I had the baby I could stay out for a week or two or whatever and then go back to class.

J. Salazar: Were you going to go back to school that January through . . . That winter semester or whatever. Okay, you did. You finished that fine.

Lori: Yes.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: From that point, mom said that she would help out with the baby, PII.

J. Salazar: Basically at the time of the birth you had a full year of college?

Lori: At the time of the birth close I had around spring break of my first year.

J. Salazar: Almost to the end. Okay. Your grades were good? Were you doing well in school? How was it?

Lori: My grades were well. My grades were good but honestly with the junior college I was always an A student. I was taking calculus and analytic geometry the semester that I had her. I ended up having to drop that course because being gone for a week and I only miss classes for one week after having her. Being gone for a week and calculus and analytic geometry I couldn’t catch up.

J. Salazar: Right.

Lori: I was taking trig at the same time. I caught up in trig but I ended up dropping that one class.
J. Salazar: Okay. You have your baby, summer you’re at home all summer long, right? With your baby.

Lori: In May, she was born March 25th and then in May thank you Lord I finally did the right thing and married her biological father.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: Then, I moved in to the house. Our own house and at that point I would just needed to get a job and start working because school was done.

J. Salazar: That’s what you were thinking, school is over. That was a thing in the past.

Lori: Mom and dad, they helped with college until I got married and at that point they said, “You’re married, you’re on your own.”

J. Salazar: Right.

Lori: You wanted me to get married. That was really their policy with my sister was the same way.

J. Salazar: Leave and cleave, how do you say when you . . .

Lori: Yes. When you got married you’re on your own and so she and her husband had to work and pay their own way through college because mom and dad were not helping them.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: When I got married I lost all of that financial assistance with going to helping pay for college and books, things like that.

J. Salazar: Would they help with day care and those kinds of things while you work?

Lori: Mom would baby sit.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: Mom would baby sit. I didn’t have to take her to a day care or somewhere. My mom would baby sit but I had to get a job.

J. Salazar: Because at this point were you 19 or were you still 18?

Lori: I was 19.
J. Salazar: You’re 19 at this point, you have a baby, you’re married, you have one year college behind you but at this point you’re thinking probably school is not a reality.

Lori: I wanted it to be but I honestly could not figure out how in the world I would ever do it.

J. Salazar: What was your husband’s expectation of that or his attitude towards school? Was he supportive of it?

Lori: My husband, he was not supportive of anything. He went in to this marriage dragging his feet and didn’t really want to be there but again he felt the same pressure from his family to do the right thing to make an honest woman out of me. We got married but he resented being in the marriage, he resented me, he did not . . . He was just not a nice person. Because of my lack of support system I think, because of being ostracized, by the time I finally married him I was emotionally, psychologically low because everyone told me how I was a leper. I began to feel that way and so I married him thinking thank God someone . . . Now I will have value again but he didn’t really want to be there and so he became physically abusive but I stayed because who else would want a pregnant girl or now a girl with infant child that . . .

No one loves to raise someone else’s baby. I’ve been told that numerous times. Now, he didn’t value education. He did not value be continuing. I just needed to get a job, pay some bills and be a mom and have supper on the table when he got there.

J. Salazar: Just like your parents?

Lori: Because that’s what girls have to do.

J. Salazar: Okay. Then, how did you internally find that the strength or even the desire, the motivation to say, “This isn’t the life that I want and I am going to go on with my education.” Where did that come from do you think? When did it start, when did it start first of all?

Lori: I always knew this was not where I was supposed to be. I always knew that. As crazy as it sounds, my ex-husband talked about having another baby. He hates me, he doesn’t like the baby that we have, he feels trapped but yet he wants to have more children. I could not understand that disconnect and I kept, every day I thought, “How did I get here?” Because I don’t think this is the life I’m supposed to be living. I felt like there was more. I could do more. I felt like I was a bright girl that now is barefoot and pregnant or now barefoot with a baby and I thought every day I would go through this. How did I get here? What am I supposed to do to get out? I couldn’t figure that out, okay?
Very odd blessing in disguise, one night my ex-husband got very angry and he was physically violent and he held me at gun point and told me that he was going to kill me but he want to go get drunk first. He left and so I grabbed the baby and I left. At that point, my parents supported me leaving him. They understood that this was not where I was supposed to be and I ended up divorcing him. That left me in this weird limbo where I was in control of my life. My mom and dad couldn’t make decisions for me.

J. Salazar: Because they view you at this point as a woman, married, adult.

Lori: My husband was no longer making all of the choices for me so here I was with this baby and me and I could do what I wanted to at this point.

J. Salazar: Did that give you a sense of empowerment?

Lori: Yes. It did. As I’ve said, I don’t know how long I would have taken the abuse. I don’t know how long because as crazy as it sounds because it sounds like it happened to a different person. As crazy as it sounds, I would get beaten up and then I would just take it and not do anything about it. Staring at a gun and I’m thinking this is not where I wanted to be. It was that life changing moment that freed me up and so like I said, it’s a weird blessing in disguise because I could go on in that crazy situation and not knowing how to get out of it. That was the moment that it came to me that moment of clarity of I have to take charge.

J. Salazar: Did that clarity, did it come from because you felt like you said this is not where you belong, “How did I get here?” For yourself or did your baby also provide you some motivation?

Lori: I think she was a small portion of the motivation but he never abused her and so for me it was that moment of clarity of this is not how I want my life to play out. I think I have more to offer than just being a mom and working at a department store for minimum wage and being somebody’s punching bag. I think I have more to offer than this. It was that moment of this is not where I want to be. I can change it, right here and now.

J. Salazar: What did you do?

Lori: I left, I loaded the baby up, left with my mom and dad’s house. He had pulled all the phone cords out of the wall and taken the car seat and so I just threw in the back seat and strap her down and went to my mom and dad’s house. They already know what was going on because he called and told them he was going to kill me. Suddenly my mom and dad understood and at that point I started making changes. I found a better job that could pay me a better wage, that I could live independently. I started looking at what I want to do with my life, where could I go to college. There’s a two year college right here but if I wanted to get a four year degree I would have to travel the nearest, the 60 miles.
J. Salazar: Significantly further, yes.

Lori: There’s another that’s a 100. I would have to move somewhere, I needed to sit down and think about what do I want to do. Then, at that point I started making plans of what did the long term look like, in five years where do I want to be.

J. Salazar: Right, you could start at that point with all the darkness that was surrounding you with that light coming through a little bit, could you see the five years?

Lori: I had no idea what, I had no idea. At that point in time I did have hope and I think I had lost hope for a long time. At that point, at that moment it was empowering, I can take control of this and no I don’t know where I’m going to be but I know it’s not going to be right here. I know it’s not going to be doing this and I know I need to get an education or this is my future.

J. Salazar: Right, right. You definitely saw a correlation between your actions and your future?

Lori: Yes.

J. Salazar: Lack thereof means this current situation is going to prolong or I’m going to make some changes here and my situation is going to change. You felt the direct responsibility would you say to your own future?

Lori: Yes.

J. Salazar: Okay. You didn’t have that, some people have that life happens to me. You didn’t have that? You definitely felt you had a responsibility here. You could make things happen.

Lori: Yes. At that point yes, I think about my life, I felt like what have happened to me there was certain expectations that were placed and I didn’t have a lot of choices. There was always some relationship that whether it was parents or ex-husband that would dictate but at that moment it was me taking control. I had control of my own destiny and I knew I had to have an education to make changes or I would be working in a department store or in a grocery store for minimum wage for the rest of my life.

J. Salazar: Very good. My question, the next one is did you have confidence initially in your abilities or did they increase over time? I think you just answered that. They increased over time. Would you say that’s fair?

Lori: Yeah.

J. Salazar: Initially, coming out of high school you felt probably pretty isolated, pretty alone, pretty fearful of your future but over time you did have a sense of increase of
confidence and motivation to take control. Awesome. Okay. you’ve answered it a little bit but I just want to make sure that we get this down. Your primary motivation for continuing with your education was?

Lori: To make a better life for myself and for my daughter.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: I knew that there was never going to be a better life without that education.

J. Salazar: Okay. Given that your family didn’t have that. Given that your surroundings didn’t dictate that to you, where did that thought come from do you think?

Lori: As I’ve said I’m a bit of an oddity. I don’t know. My grandmother was a nurse and that’s my mother’s mother and she’s the only grandparent that I ever had a relationship with because the others died when I was very young. She was very confident and very sure of herself and she went to nursing school when . . .

J. Salazar: It wasn’t coming.

Lori: She was born in 1914 and so we’re talking about in the last 20’s early 30’s 1920’s, 1930’s. She went to nursing school. Women at that time didn’t do things like that and I don’t know I think I always looked at her as an inspiration of I can do things. The women in our family can be powerful, the women in our family can make things happen. She was that kind of person and so I think I get some of that from her, some of that inspiration.

J. Salazar: Wonderful. Okay. Please describe the challenges you faced while working towards your college degree. At this point, what school did you choose? The 60 mile away or 100 mile away?

Lori: None of the above.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: Because I ended up turning around and remarrying very quickly but you know what? My mother and dad didn’t say a freaking word about it because they had already . . . They felt a lot of guilt about pushing me into this marriage, traumatic and so horrible.

J. Salazar: When did you meet your second husband?

Lori: I met him right towards the end of my marriage.

J. Salazar: Okay.
Lori: Because I had gotten a job and was working as a secretary in his office. His office manager was a friend of mine and she knew my situation. She helped me get the job and so I knew him through that.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: We ended up getting married and he had been married previously, he had children in PII so we ended up moving back to Oklahoma so he could be with his kids. I ended up going to a university in PII which was about 30, 35 miles from where we live. I would drive back and forth.

J. Salazar: Was he supportive?

Lori: Yes. Very supportive. That’s one of the reasons that I was drawn to him. I was 19, 20 and had a baby and been through all of this stuff and he was 36 and have five children and was a chiropractor. It sounds like this horrible stereotypical really wasn’t at all. We just sound that way. It just fit and he was very supportive of education. I think that’s one of the things that he wasn’t from around there and he said, “My gosh, have you ever thought of being something other than a school teacher or a mom?” Showed me there was more out there and I thought, “Oh my gosh, there’s somebody that thinks like I do.”

J. Salazar: That’s pretty enlightening I guess.

Lori: Yes.

J. Salazar: Okay. I could see how maybe for the first time you were probably pretty excited about your future that there was a prospect, there was hope and happiness, awesome. Okay. You moved to PII, you’re married, does his five children live with you at this point?

Lori: They slowly dwindled in.

J. Salazar: Okay. They dwindled in. Then, what were some of the obstacles that you had to overcome during the next three years of schooling?

Lori: Even thought he was a chiropractor I mean we were still my gosh we had five of his children to feed and we had to feed and we had to pay for a house that was big enough to house everybody. We were still poor as church mouse. I remember thinking okay I think I have enough money to buy a bag of beans and rice, beans and rice for supper because hopefully a check will come in the mail because being self-employed has steady money, you get it when insurance checks come in. We could have thousands of dollars or we could have $20 in the bank and had no idea when you’re going to get another check. I remember choosing some of my classes because I kept going to school and I kept saying maybe we shouldn’t do it this
semester. No, no, he said, “Yes, you have to keep going. If you quit . . . “ There were times that I really thought about not quitting forever but just financially.

J. Salazar: Because you paid cash as you went along?

Lori: Yes.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: Yes. I remember choosing some of my classes because you talk to other people and Dr. PII didn’t require books.

J. Salazar: That’s a class for me, right?

Lori: Class for me. I took two classes under him. Two humanities classes because he didn’t require text books.

J. Salazar: Exactly. Call it being smart. You got to go to school, it’s so hard.

Lori: Things like that. I remember talking thing and trying to figure out and if you were this first one in the library, the library did have a set of text books.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: Only one set, one of each books so you had to be the first one there to check it out. Trying to rush to the library to see if you could be that one to have the textbook that year.

J. Salazar: When you’re in school, did you work full time or did you not work?

Lori: No, I worked for my husband. I would go to school in the day and then I would do books and stuff at night.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: Filing insurance billing and paying bills.

J. Salazar: The business is a team effort?

Lori: Yes.

J. Salazar: Okay, then as far as raising children also team effort? I mean, was your husband supportive as far as while you’re at school at night or during the day he help with the kids and went back and forth?
Lori: Yes. One year I had to do not school and I had to, so we made up a little list and every week someone else did the meal.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: The kids actually recruited dad, they all learn, if you’re in my house you’re going to learn how to cook before you graduate.

J. Salazar: They’ll thank you I’m sure.

Lori: They would do a meal and it might be something very simple like hotdog that you know Jim was at home with them and Jim would oversee, make sure things got done. We have our moments of oh my gosh but we all knew that there was no way in this world that we were ever going to have a better life unless we got an education.

J. Salazar: You just one day at a time figure it out?

Lori: Yeah, you just keep going because that’s your only option.

J. Salazar: At that point, you saw the light at the end of the tunnel? You knew that there was a payoff?

Lori: Yes.

J. Salazar: You knew that payoff was worth continuing on?

Lori: Yes.

J. Salazar: Okay. What social or cognitive or institutional factors can you identify as making a difference in your life that made you continue your knowledge or education possible? What I’m referring to is academically you said you did well in high school so I assume in college cognitively you have the ability to do well in school. There was no learning disabilities or anything that you had to overcome, there’s no obstacles in that way?

Lori: No.

J. Salazar: Okay. That was good. Social factors, you had a supportive husband at this point, you had step children they were also supportive. Your family, mom and dad lived far away, right? You didn’t have that. Did you have friends? Did you gather friends along this way in Oklahoma?

Lori: We had a really good, good group that came from our church and my husband was involved in Kiwanis.
J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: Between our activities in the church and his activities in Kiwanis, there’s a really good group of us that did things that we’re there for each other and that we’re supportive that you could just call and blow off steam and invite over for a fun night of cards instead of trying to figure something out.

J. Salazar: Did you have the option, if something were to happen like husband is at work, you had assignment, somebody you could turn to that could help with day care or anything like that or did you really just have to work it out at home?

Lori: Where we live, there were two blocks and every single house on our side of the street for two blocks had children.

J. Salazar: Wow.

Lori: They were all really within about . . . Really concentrated in the five year range. There was a few outliers.

J. Salazar: Right.

Lori: Really, they would travel in herds and so if you had all of the children at your house, you had every child for two blocks at your house playing. When they left they all left. As moms, we were all friends with each other and I could call some of them and say, “Can you please keep the herd down there for a little bit and I can take of something?” We would help each other out like that but it was a unique situation because there was so many of them within that block, two block system and it was a small town and they would all run and travel in packs.

J. Salazar: Right. Sounds wonderful. Okay. Institutional factors, was there any again at your school. Did you have to take advantage of anything like tutoring programs or day care or after school drop off or any kind of things that helped you as far as continuing your education? Was all of your resources met? Were all of your needs met with the resources outside of school?

Lori: Yeah, it was all met through outside of school. There was a day care over there but at that point in time I was . . . We had another baby and there’s two kids now. I was having a friend babysit and she was charging me very low amount. We’ve looked at day care over there. It would have been more convenient, we wouldn’t have been drawing on a resource of a friend that could possibly [inaudible 00:57:21] but they were serious, they pay, they were high rate. I was paying our friend about a $100 a week watch both of the girls while I take classes. Over there I want to say it was about 250 or $300 a week for this two.

J. Salazar: Significant difference.
Lori: Significant difference. That’s the only time we ever try to draw on anything from the university.

J. Salazar: Okay. Did you involved yourself anything on campus other than attending classes?

Lori: Towards the end of my program I got involved in our department. I was a Family Consumer Science major. I got involved in our Family Consumer Science club.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: That was probably maybe half way through my junior year.

J. Salazar: How much time did that require of you?

Lori: Maybe two days a month after classes we would do get together and plan a service project or a plan a fund raiser and a business meeting. It didn’t require a lot of time but it was a good opportunity for me to be with just other women and not me and my husband as a fit.

J. Salazar: Right.

Lori: Because everything else that we did we were a couple.

J. Salazar: It give you that individual identity.

Lori: Yes.

J. Salazar: Outside of being a mom, outside of being a wife.

Lori: Yes.

J. Salazar: Okay. Did you miss that? Do you think being so young, was that something that looking back now you felt like you missed out on a little bit of that?

Lori: I think that’s why I joined and became active in there because I was missing out on that. Because everybody we knew we knew as a couple. It’s not as if I would go out shopping, we would do it as a couple.

J. Salazar: Right.

Lori: This was something. I think that’s why I got involved with it. It’s because I realize then I needed something that was my own identity. I need to be Lori and not just PII wife or PII and PII mom.
J. Salazar: How long did it take you to graduate from college? You went basically you went one year then you got married. Did you take a year off? Did you go straight into that?

Lori: Okay. The next time I went to college, ‘88 through ‘89 was my first year. Then the next time I went was fall of ‘92.

J. Salazar: Okay, you took about two and a half years off.

Lori: Yeah.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: Because we moved and then I got pregnant.

J. Salazar: You already had a second baby before you went back?

Lori: [Crosstalk 01:00:25].

J. Salazar: Okay. At that point, PII would have been about two and a half, three?

Lori: Yeah.

J. Salazar: When you started going back at that time?

Lori: Yeah, because the girls are three years apart.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: PII was three so I went back in ‘92 and I went for ‘92 . . . Spring of ‘93 and then I went I think the fall of ‘93. Then I stopped again and then we went, I went back again in ‘97, ‘98, ‘99.

J. Salazar: You graduate in ‘99?

Lori: Yes, May of ‘99.

J. Salazar: How old were you when you graduated?

Lori: Twenty-nine.

J. Salazar: Twenty-nine.

Lori: Managed to cram that in to 11 years.

J. Salazar: You did it. Your Bachelor’s degree is in?
Lori: Family and Consumer Science.

J. Salazar: Okay, do you have a teaching certificate along with that?

Lori: I did not get that at my time of my Bachelor’s degree.

J. Salazar: All right. I’ve asked this many times, hopefully we’re getting to the gist of this. Why do you think you are so compelled or motivated to achieve such a high level of academic success? Now, you have stated you felt like it was going to be a change in your life for you, for your daughter, now you have two daughters. You have a husband who had education so you saw now somebody directly in your life that was educated, your grandmother provided that example for you. Were there any other things that you can think of that gave you that sense of that motivation or compelled you? The best way compelled is that, “I just felt like I needed to continue.” Can you put your finger on anything else that might have added to why you went because 2%, that’s it, 2% of girls who are pregnant by the time they reach 18 graduate college at 30, 98% of them do not graduate. Why were you a part of the 2%?

Lori: I just felt like I could do this and I think once I was successful in college then I knew I could do this.

J. Salazar: Awesome.

Lori: Once you have that success of a mom, I got seven kids at home. I’ve got a husband, we’re trying to manage a business but I still have calculus. I can do this.

J. Salazar: You’re a superwoman at that point.

Lori: You’re really not but you feel like at this point you can’t scare me, I can do this. That’s why I just kept going at it and I just kept going at it because I knew I could do this. There were financial challenges; there were challenges with kids and having kids and moving to PII. We had to establish residency before I could get . . . By the time we establish residency I’m pregnant with another baby. There’s all this little challenges that were thrown at there but I think once I had been successful and saw that I could be successful it didn’t scare me anymore.

J. Salazar: Wonderful. Why do you think the 98%, why do you think so many with similar stories, similar beginnings as yours 98% weren’t able to overcome? What contributes to that you think?

Lori: Lack of support.

J. Salazar: You didn’t have a lot of support really and yet you’re able to do it. Because I would agree . . .
Lori: I’m an oddity

J. Salazar: Okay. Maybe that’s the answer.

Lori: I don’t know but I think just drawing from some of the people that I know from my own life that didn’t finish. I can name girls that I graduated with that got pregnant and then didn’t finish. A lot, there was no expectation, there wasn’t a value placed on it but they didn’t have someone in their life either pushing them or someone to look up to that had achieved it before. I really can’t say that I had either of those. My husband was a huge, my second husband was a huge asset but I don’t know other than . . . I’ve always felt like I was an oddity. I didn’t do things the typical way and I don’t know why, it’s just the way I’m wired.

J. Salazar: Clearly you are 2%. It’s definitely an outlier. Statistic, really. I mean, honestly that’s very low and I would definitely say that you had something you did, not every woman has for sure. What expectations, when you graduated what was your thinking? What were you going to do from there? You graduate in ‘99, you had a degree specific to a career field so obviously that’s the way you’re thinking but did you expect to go on. I mean, “I made it. Thank goodness I’m never doing this again.” I mean, what was your thoughts?

Lori: I enroll Master’s degree.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: My husband and I talked a long time about that and we decided if I didn’t do it then I might never do it but right now we had it down to a science. We were a finely tuned machine, they are working and my husband is a pastor now. He transitions from chiropractor to pastor. We never really know where we’re going to be in two years, in five years because he’s a pastor. They move around.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: We really had a conversation, we were still 35 miles from that university. They had a masters degree program and he said, “If you want to go this might be the best chance because the next time we’re at a church we could be 80 miles from the nearest university or something.” We made that decision and we went . . . I enrolled and I got a masters degree in Human Resources.

J. Salazar: Wow.

Lori: It took two years.

J. Salazar: You were on it, the second time you stuck to it and finish it in its allotted time.

Lori: Yes.
J. Salazar: Wonderful. Did you go from there?

Lori: From there and the whole focus at that point was trying to, a job. A career and we lived in Oklahoma which at that time ranked 49th in teacher pay.

J. Salazar: Wow.

Lori: I knew that wasn’t a direction I needed to go since at that point we now adopted our nephew that my husband’s sister passed away. Now we have eight kids.

J. Salazar: Wow.

Lori: I knew that wasn’t something that financially . . . I didn’t go to all this education to make above minimum wage.

J. Salazar: Right.

Lori: I got a masters degree and began working for the state in a residential facility working with people with developmental disabilities. It’s basically an education type, special ed thing but this were all adults. I work with them on their life skills and independent functional skills and teaching them beyond when they age out of the public school facility.

J. Salazar: It would be a really rewarding thing to work there.

Lori: It was great. That’s great job. That’s great job.

J. Salazar: How long did you do that?

Lori: I did that for four years and then we moved, my husband being a pastor. We moved and we went to PII and they don’t rank 49th in teacher . . .

J. Salazar: A little bit better.

Lori: The don’t rank 49th. We was in PII for about three years and I taught the three years that we were in PII.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Lori: When we were in PII, I started talking about doing doctorate. We were looking at different programs and we actually looked at PII because we liked the program. Then, we ended up here in PII. I told him, I said, “I really want to do this.” We did it and he said, “Get all of those requirement that you have to take there at the school because before you finish the program we might not be here.”

J. Salazar: Right, that’s true.
Lori: Again, that was always the focus.

J. Salazar: You’re still here.

Lori: I’m still here. I’m working on the dissertation.

J. Salazar: You are in the process of your dissertation as well?

Lori: Yes.

J. Salazar: Very good. That is wonderful. That concludes all my questions. Is there any additional information that I didn’t ask that you want to share with me as far as your education process or any thoughts as far as how you were able to overcome it or graduate or is there any additional information you want to share with me?

Lori: I can’t think of anything. I think we’ve covered a lot of territory here. I think that’s my story.

J. Salazar: That is fantastic. I want to thank you so much. I know it’s one of those, it’s still a taboo subject, it’s still a tender subject for many women and so I appreciate you being willing to sit down and tell me your story. I will transcribe it and then I will email you a copy so that you can look at it. Make sure that I in fact got it all correct. I’m just going to do it as I hear it. Then from there I’m going to interview total 10 women and then do some coding and different things and find out some similarities hopefully among the story as I work through. The goal here is society like you said, the prognosis is very low for teen moms and the doom that a lot of this teen moms feel doesn’t have to be that way.

I’m no way advocating for pregnancy in your teenage years but it happens and life goes on and I want my goal here is to help these girls to realize that yes it’s hard and yes you’re going to struggle and there’s going to be huge obstacles to overcome. Two percent of women were able to do it and this is how. This is their story, this is what they lived through and this is how they got to the other side. Because hopefully one day I’ll take my dissertation and write a book and be able to present it to these girls as a sense of hope. You said you feel like you didn’t have hope for so long and I think that probably a lot of girls feel that same hopeless, “How am I going to overcome this.” I want them to know that they can because women have.

Lori: It’s very overwhelming and you’re so young and I look back sometimes and I say, “I was so stupid.” I don’t really think I was stupid, I was 18.

J. Salazar: You just didn’t know.

Lori: Just didn’t know and there’s no .. They haven’t had a lot of experience to draw on to help them solve the problem.
J. Salazar: Right. I’m sure, I think everything that’s directed towards them is no negative they are going to be, they are going to have miserable marriages, they are going to be drop outs, those kinds of things. You said you felt like you just . . . You could do better or you knew that you have the ability. I’m curious to know and my hunch is I wonder if those other 2% of women had similar thoughts. Did they have that, “I knew I could do better.” Did this 98%, did they not have those thoughts? Did they not think that they could? Did they not have that responsibility, their own right, “If I do this, this is what’s going to happen. I have a choice here.” I’m curious to see how that turns out.

INTERVIEW 2

J. Salazar: Okay, I’m Jena Salazar and if you could please tell me your name?

Leslie: Leslie

J. Salazar: Can you spell your first name?

Leslie: L-E-S-L-I-E.

J. Salazar: Thank you. Okay, so I’m going to ask you a series of 18 questions and we will just go from one to the other. If you could just be as thorough as you can with each answer, then I will be able to really get this, the whole feel for your story. We’ll start with question number 1, please just describe your life before becoming a pregnant teenager.

Leslie: My life before that, I was 15 years old, I was a going to private school, I was getting into the 10th grade, I was at the beginning years of 10th grade. It was the first days actually, and my parents were very religious so I’m going to a private school. I was only going to school three times a week, and it was only three hours a week. So each as well, and four hours. And I would go to church, Monday, Wednesdays, and Sundays and hang out with my friends, which were part of the church.

J. Salazar: Prior to you finding out you were pregnant, what was your attitude towards school generally?

Leslie: Towards school, well I wanted to be a lawyer when I grew up.

J. Salazar: Okay, so were you a good student?

Leslie: Yeah, I was a good student.

J. Salazar: Prior to your parents finding out that you were pregnant, how did they feel about school? What was their thoughts about school?
Leslie: My mom was more about behave, more like “Let’s be a [inaudible 00:01:57],” “Let’s see if you get a high school diploma,” kind of not really talking about me being greater than that. And it was more my dad, that he was like, “Okay, when you become a lawyer, you’re going to do this.” It means, “you’re a lawyer, you’re going to do that,” right? I said, “after high school, you just sort of lost cause.”

J. Salazar: You didn’t understand that you had to go to college in beginning. (Laughs.) And then after they found out you were pregnant, did change?

Leslie: Yeah, it did.

J. Salazar: How?

Leslie: Actually, my parents expected me to continue to go to school, like okay, that’s not going to make a difference, but it was more like, I guess I was treated more like an adult. Like, okay, they would [inaudible 00:02:44] everything to me as far as like, [inaudible 00:02:46] like, what are you going to do now? It wasn’t their decision anymore now they had just put it all on me. And to me, my dad spoke to the principal to let him know I was pregnant and if there was any way I could continue to get home school. He kicked me out, he said no. I was a bad influence for the rest of the girls there. So I tried to go to continuation school, take a home study program, but my husband at the time, he wasn’t [mulling 00:03:16] it. I know too much of the time, when I moved out to PII, I tried going and signed up, but no. “You’re going to meet someone there, no, no, no!” He was 23, I was 15. He was very manipulative and like “No, no, no school for you, you’re done. You’re going to be a mother now.”

J. Salazar: So, what were their expectations for you in terms of education? You had said that your dad expected and wanted you to be an attorney. But mom, her expectation is there were none, if you graduated high school, that’s good but if you didn’t, yeah.

Leslie: They’re like whatever, I mean, I was one of 8 kids so the ones before me, my old brother went all the way to the 12th grade, missed the last 2 weeks of school and just didn’t walk. My sister after that graduated from home, came back two days later and then graduated, but she was two years older so everybody’s kind of like “oh it didn’t count” I guess? And then my brother dropped out of the 9th grade, he kept repeating it. And I was the first of my dad’s kids and I was expected to like, get a degree and training and for my dad. My mom wasn’t like that, whatever. Was like “this kid.”

J. Salazar: Did she have that same attitude with all the children?

Leslie: I guess, yeah she did. Yeah. She’s the one who went to school to the 3rd grade? I don’t know. [inaudible 00:04:55] like, they go to where they teach them math and how to read and did that.
J. Salazar: So you kind of answered some of this, what role did education play in your family? You had said you come from a family of 8 children, you have kind of split four and four from your mom and dad, right?

Leslie: Yeah.

J. Salazar: Okay. Of those 8, there was probably half who went to school and half didn’t? Go through the siblings and tell me where they were.

Leslie: I guess there is one that, he went to school, didn’t finish the last two weeks, dropped out, got married really fast, got his girl pregnant and they got married and I don’t know. My brother, the one after him, he was raised in a marriage that was his father’s son marriage? I don’t know, and then it was my sister, my older sister, she ended up running away around 11th grade. She [inaudible 00:05:55], two years later, finished high school. My brother after her he had her reputation in school so he ended up repeating the 9th grade twice and after that he just wasn’t, he didn’t school so he just dropped out and started working with my dad. My dad was an electrician. And then there’s me, and after me is my little sister and two brothers and after me, they’ve all graduated high school and my young sister was going to PII, she graduated a year before me and my little brother, the one at PII all the way went up the same year. He graduated high school and started PII and started in fall, the day I started, so they’re . . . My little brother, he’s special ed, when he was four there was a problem with him and they ended up cutting him open and damaging part of his brain, so although they told him he was going to be in a vegetative state for the rest of his life but my mom made sure that he got all of the therapy that he needed. He thinks normal, he talks, he walks, he has a girlfriend, he doesn’t go into the thing, but he, you know, graduated from high school, he’s going to PII right now. Like younger the [inaudible 00:07:19] I don’t know.

So my dad, we’ve all have a degree, we all have something.

J. Salazar: You said your mom went to the third grade, and dad went how far in school?

Leslie: I don’t know how far he went in his schooling, but I know he went to trade school and he got his contractor’s license so he’s an electrician, but I don’t know what he needed to be able to do that.

J. Salazar: Now what was seen as your role as a female in your family? Your brothers and sisters? So what was role as a female in your home as well as what did they expect from you?

Leslie: Okay, at home I was usually the one helping my sister, my older sister cook and clean, most cleaning, helping out with the household duties. Although my dad was, he was going to go down and try to teach me some electrical because I was telling him, “Okay, I want to go work with you, I want to go see what you’re
teaching the guys, I don’t want to clean.” And he would sit down and show me a little bit, but my dad was a [ghost 00:08:25], he’d try not to baby them. He really, most the girls are very independent and all three of us very independent, we’ve always kept the job and we’ve always taken care of ourselves. And most of my brothers are like, there’s no one to [inaudible 00:08:47] now and [inaudible 00:08:47]. Everybody works.

J. Salazar: Okay. Now, the next question is the big story. Please describe your experiences from the time you found out you were pregnant all the way to the time you went to college. So at what point, think about how you told your dad and all of that. So start from the beginning and then go to the point where your father was upset and you can stop there. But go ahead and start from the beginning and tell me what happened.

Leslie: Well from the beginning, I was always be at my best friend’s house, I ended up dating her brother and lost my virginity and the second time we had sex, he got me pregnant. He ended up, I started avoiding him because I knew I didn’t love him, I wasn’t in love with him, and I didn’t want to continue that relationship at all, it was more like frustrated, that he wouldn’t live with my friend. I started avoiding him until he crashed his sister’s brand new car into my neighbor’s house. He [inaudible 00:09:59] because I was avoiding him and I figured, he might end up killing himself. I told him “I’m not feeling, I’m throwing up, I don’t know what’s wrong with me.” And that’s when he’s like “You’re pregnant.” Like what? What do you mean I’m pregnant? He said “You’re pregnant, I got you pregnant.” “Why would you do that?” I didn’t want to speak to him anymore, I was avoiding him and that’s when he went and crashed the car. Totaled it and to me it was like, “Okay, this guy is going to end up killing himself, like I have to stay with him.” But I had to tell my sister, “Hey, can you either . . . “ I think my mom kind of, she kind of like new. I was throwing up a lot, any smell made me throw up. I was already three months pregnant by the time I found out I was pregnant.

I had to go tell my sister, “Hey, I’m pregnant,” and she was like “No!” But she took me to the doctor and said my parents were concerned so she had to tell my mom and then, my mom went to go tell my dad for me and said I can go talk to my dad and he was waiting for me. And they were all crying.

J. Salazar: Okay, I apologize for that. Your dad was crying; he just broke down, that was really hard for him. Okay, go on.

Leslie: Then he just laid out, he wasn’t even sobbing. He just came [inaudible 00:00:12] down. He was just laying on the bed, with his hands on his stomach. He said, “How can you do this to me?” I’m like, “Oh my God! Okay, I’m sorry.” He asked me if it was true and then he’s like, “Okay, with Robert?” I said, “yes,” and he’s like, “Is he going to take responsibility for the child?” I said, “Yeah.”
I knew, when I did it this time, it was too controlling. To me it was not like I’m a slut, I already knew it, I wasn’t [inaudible 00:00:46]. It’s not like I was hanging out with my friend a lot. It was [inaudible 00:00:50] whatever, but . . . [inaudible 00:00:52] I knew that I wasn’t in love with this man but, for me it felt like-- My family was very traditional; like “You have to get married. You’re not going to have . . . “ Abortion was never the question but the next thing was, “You’re going to get married.” That wasn’t from them, but it was more . . . He’s just [inaudible 00:01:15] be responsible for the child,” and I said, “Yes.” Okay.

Once I talked to the boyfriend he’s like, “We need to get married. We have to get married before the child’s born. We need to make things right and we’re going to marry.” At this point I’m stressed out. Man, I must really [inaudible 00:01:36] for my daughter now; for my baby. Make it better. How am I going to make my parents stop feeling shame? My parents were PII and I got kicked out of high school. I used to go to a private school; [inaudible 00:01:49] private school. I got kicked out of there, in the tenth grade. So to me, I embarrassed my family. You know, 15 years old.

I tried not to leave the house as much and then, to everyone’s surprise, my boyfriend gets arrested and goes to jail for the next six months. I was already about three months pregnant, at the time when I found out; almost four months. He didn’t come out of jail until my daughter was [inaudible 00:02:19] and that kept them from bonding. He never really bonded with my daughter and even some time, when he did come out it was [inaudible 00:02:28]. He was deep in drugs, and when he came out we got married. My dad said, “Are you sure you want to do this?” He said, “It’s a love baby.” [inaudible 00:02:37]. “You know, it’s not just you [inaudible 00:02:41].” About $600 fee to get a judge to approve our wedding.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Leslie: At that time, when he asked me “Are you sure you want to do this,” I wanted to say “No! Please no!” But I felt like I have to. He’s part of the consequences that I have to deal with this. He’s like, “Okay!” So we got married and my ex-husband already knew that he was going to go back to jail. He just wanted to put me aside, basically; make sure that I was married and no one else was going to come and sweep me up or whatever.

My parents kept [inaudible 00:03:16] me the whole pregnancy. My baby was born; this guy was basically in and out of jail and I had a lot of my friends around me so I ended up moving to PII. I live in PII and I ended up moving to PII with his family because I felt like I was [inaudible 00:03:35] burden my family and they’ve already done enough. He needed to help out and his family was like, “Okay well since he’s still in jail come and be here.” I moved to PII, I started working when I was seventeen. I went and I got a job; I told them that I had a
high school diploma, I didn’t. I didn’t graduate [inaudible 00:03:54] so they kicked me out.

I tried to go to continuation, but my ex-husband was like, “No. I don’t want you walking anywhere. You’re really going to go and meet somebody who’s come to the school, you’re [inaudible 00:04:05].” Those days [inaudible 00:04:07] and my daughter [inaudible 00:04:10]. I moved to PII. He did get out of jail I started [inaudible 00:04:17] my first job. I ended up getting about three jobs until I got my [inaudible 00:04:23] job, and I did that since 2003 until I still my [inaudible 00:04:27]. Not until he finally got out of jail, which was about a year . . . He stopped going in and out of jail which was about a year [inaudible 00:04:36]. During the time he was out it was constantly fighting; very constant. He was very jealous, very possessive, very . . . It was horrible. It was a nightmare. It was bad. He would get upset and kick me out; you know, grab my stuff, put it plastic bags and throw it outside. Mine and my daughter’s. His daughter’s. It was like that for the next eight years, like . . . yeah.

J. Salazar: Wow.

Leslie: It was constantly break-up to make-up, break-up to make-up. At one point, when my daughter was four, [inaudible 00:05:10] . . . In 2003? No, 2003 [inaudible 00:05:20], we decided to have another child. It was my decision because I saw my daughter was very lonely, very independent, and I figured, “You know what? I know I don’t love this guy I know this is not maybe who I’m going to spend the rest of my life with, but my daughter’s alone and . . . I was with seven brothers and sisters and I don’t want my daughter to be by herself.” [inaudible 00:05:43] wanted to break-up with him and eventually have another father for more kids but [inaudible 00:05:49] my child. Okay.

We decided to have a child. He bailed; he decided that that day he just didn’t want to have anything to do with me. [inaudible 00:05:59] and I was pregnant. So my next pregnancy, I spent it alone and I struggled a lot. I was making like [inaudible 00:06:08], and I had to pay my rent, my car payment, and put myself through school to get my broker license. I was about twenty and had my daughter, and by this time [inaudible 00:06:22] . . . Twenty-one. I was twenty-one and it was real hard. I was [inaudible 00:06:29] for that pregnancy. [inaudible 00:06:33], and now that I’ve [inaudible 00:06:35] I’m really struggling and he’d be like, “Here’s $10.”

I called my dad and I was like, “I’m pregnant and she’s not going to come out okay if I continue this. I can’t afford to do this.” My dad said, “Come back home,” so I left PII and I went back to PII with my dad. When I was there I was on unemployment until my daughter was born and until she was, I think, eighteen months. No, she was four months. I decided to start working again. Once my daughter was born, as soon as she was born he came back. We worked things out for awhile; he bonded with this one because I figured, “You know what? You’re
going to be there for the delivery.” I was trying to make my older one call him every night to say goodnight and that she loved him. He would come around, once every three months, to give her a doll or whatever, but when my second one was born I made him be there and he seen the delivery and he watched how everything happened. After that, he has been really close to that second child.

We started working things out again. My dad told me, “After you have that child he’s coming back.” We started working things out; it was not even six months, seven months, again, he decided it wasn’t for him. He left again. It was a lot of mental abuse, saying like, “Oh, you’re a [inaudible 00:08:10], you’re a whore and you’re this, you’re that. If it wasn’t with me it’d would be someone else. You’re blah, blah, blah. You’re this; you’re that. Your family is this; your family is that.” Yet, my family take care of him. My family took care of me and his child.

I went back to work, as soon as he decided to get up and leave I started working again. I was doing really good for myself; I was bringing home about $5,000 a month but I was still staying at home because I felt like I needed to pay my dad back for everything he’d done for me. When my second daughter was born and I was in the hospital delivery her, I found out my dad had lung cancer.

J. Salazar: Had lung cancer?

Leslie: Lung cancer. He had never smoked, so that was really [inaudible 00:08:56]. He ended up passing away, three years later in 2006. During that time I was still at my mom’s; I was still helping them out, paying a lot more than I should’ve because I wanted to get that weight off my dad. He’d helped me so much.

He decided, “Let’s work things out. I got you a house now.” I was doing really good at work; I lost a lot of weight, got myself in shape. He rented a house for us. Maybe about six months later he decided he wanted to leave again. He was [inaudible 00:09:34], 2007 he decided things are not working out, so he moved out and I met my current boyfriend in 2008. February of 2008; my husband left in December of 2007 and I met my boyfriend 2008, in February, and he came to live with me and my roommate.

I had a roommate at the time because I couldn’t [inaudible 00:09:57]. They ran up my electricity bill, they were ordering movies every day, him and his sister, and left me with the bills through the roof. I couldn’t afford to keep up; I had to get a roommate. It went to the point where he told my daughter, “We’re breaking-up”--my [inaudible 00:10:12], she was six, seven at the time--”we’re breaking-up and you and your mom have to leave.” She was like, “What? Me and my mom? Why don’t you leave? You leave. You get out of here.” [inaudible 00:10:24] said, “You know what? She’s right!” “Go to your room, I’ll talk to you later;” and him, “You know what? You’re the one that wants to break-up with me. You get up and leave. I’m not going anywhere.” It took my daughter to be yelling at him for me to say, “She’s right! No. No. I need to listen to her!” She was making sense.
When she was three years old she said that she wanted to be a plastic surgeon.

J. Salazar: Wow.

Leslie: My daughter’s really smart. Right now she’s going into high school; I took her to orientation today.

In 2008 I met some guy [inaudible 00:10:57] my roommate said, “Hey, I have a friend, I think you guys would get along really good.” He came over, and he started asking, “So, what do you do for a living?” I’m like, “Oh, I’m a broker. Insurance broker. I’m okay; I make enough to live.” He’s like, “Well [inaudible 00:11:12] to go back to school?” I’m like, “Why would I go back to school? That’s over. That’s it, I’m done. That was when I was young.” He’s like, “[inaudible 00:11:23]? No it’s not. You’re really smart, you should go back to school.”

When I was in [inaudible 00:11:29] and I was working in that office and it fell through, I was top agent out of 200 employees. I was #1.

J. Salazar: Wow.

Leslie: I made really good amount of money. [inaudible 00:11:41] very ambitious. I think you should go back to school. I’m like, “How am I going to do it? I tried going to a continuation, I . . . I don’t have time for that. I have my kids, I’m alone; I can’t do that.” He’s like, “No. Go to a community college, it’s never too late. You can go. What did you want to do when you were younger?” I’m like, “I wanted to be a lawyer but I could never be a lawyer anymore. I’m old! I can’t do this!” That was in 2008 and I was like, “You’re crazy.” He’s like, “You can. I go to school part-time, I have a job. You can do it!” [inaudible 00:12:16]

“No, no, no. I can’t do that. I can’t do that.” I met him in February, 2008. I . . . [inaudible 00:12:28] We were dating out of 2008; by October of 2009, I ended up losing my job because, he was telling me, “You’re job’s not stable.” I was getting paid cash.

J. Salazar: Oh.

Leslie: He’s like, “It’s not stable, you know you can get fired any minute. What do you have to rely on? You have nothing to fall back on.” “Yeah, yeah whatever. I’m just [inaudible 00:12:49]. How am I going to go to school? No, no, no. I mean, I was a straight A student, but no. I can’t do it.” I didn’t know how easy it was to go back to community college, I mean all the steps.

We kept dating, 2008, [inaudible 00:13:03] 2009, my younger cousin brought around his girlfriend that was twenty-three and she was going to PII. She kind of resembled me and my boyfriend looked at me, we were at a Halloween party, and
he was like, “I see why you looked at her!” And I’m like, “How did I look at her?” and he’s like, “You looked at her like she’s accomplished something you always wanted to.” I was just like, “I’m kind of jealous, yeah.” I looked at her and I’m like, “Oh my God. That could’ve been me.” That could’ve been me. She had a [inaudible 00:13:35] up the PII, yeah. She was so smart, so

J. Salazar: [inaudible 00:13:41] Mmm, what happened?

Leslie: I’m sorry [inaudible 00:13:53]


Leslie: At the time I had lost my job and I was trying to get unemployment and he was like, “You know what? Don’t go back to work, go to school. You go to school, I’ll help you.” I’m like, “What do you mean, you’ll help me? I have bills, you know?” At that time I have to leave my house; just a house I was renting, but I ended up having to go back to my mom’s house. He was like, “I’ll help you. Don’t worry.” My dad had already passed away, my mom needed help with her mortgage and I was the only one that was renting so everyone pushed me to just go home. Help her out; instead of me paying rent somewhere else, go help her. Okay. He’s like, “I’ll help you. I’ll pay whatever it is, I’ll help you just go. You can do it.” I was like, “Are you serious? Really?” He’s like, “Yeah! Come on, you can do it. You can do it.” I’m like, “Okay.”

In 2010, in January, I enrolled and I started my spring semester in 2010 and, oh my God; I couldn’t have done so much . . . I was just so proud of myself, like, “Oh my God, I got this! I can do this.” I got the hang of it; got financial aid, I started looking at my classes. How I can take what classes, what I needed to take, what my [inaudible 00:15:15] I was even telling other people, “Come on! Let’s go!” I enrolled so many people, it’s true. Because of the whole thing of, “Oh, we’re too old you know. We’re already past that; you have to go from high school to college or university.” [inaudible 00:15:29] what community college is for. Oh, you [inaudible 00:15:34]? Oh, no, that’s too much money and if you don’t really know that community college is out there to help you.

My first semester I had a 3.6 and when I was in high school I didn’t even finish. I just had gone into the tenth grade before I got kicked out, so I had no idea government, politics, [inaudible 00:15:52], nothing. Nothing. So I ended up taking five classes at a time, until I graduated from PII Community College. Even then, I was so surreal; like, “really? Am I really going to transfer?” Like, “really? It’s going to happen?” It was like three days later [inaudible 00:16:15], I think my graduation’s in June the 16th and this is the 13th, “Um . . . Should I go?” He was like, “What do you mean ‘should you go?’ That’s a great accomplishment! You have to go!” I’m like, “I don’t even [inaudible 00:16:27].” Everybody was like, “Dude! We’ll take you, just go. Just go.”
I ended up walking my [inaudible 00:16:35], my boyfriend, we both graduated with our associate’s. Keep in mind, he had been going to school since 2003 at the time when I started; we kind of pushed each other, it was more of a team effort. Although he continued to go to work and help out his parents and help me out and he pushed me more to what I needed to do to be able not to work so I can be able to go school and help me fill out financial aid forms and basically held my hand and showed me the way. After that I got the hang of it and I would go, “Hey, I may have to manage my money so it can last and pay my rent and pay my bills.”

J. Salazar: Right.

Leslie: I can attribute most of it to him; he was a great help. Sometimes you need to hear it and you need someone to hold your hand and walk you through it.

J. Salazar: Absolutely.

Leslie: I didn’t know that it was available for me. I graduated from PII. I ended up adding my classes for [inaudible 00:17:29] maybe a week before we started. Again, something I didn’t know. He hadn’t transferred; he still hasn’t transferred, so he couldn’t help me with that. I had called another friend and went, “PII, how do I do this?”

The year I graduated from community college, the year before my sister had [inaudible 00:17:48] with her boyfriend. I did it the year after and then [inaudible 00:17:52], I graduated a year after she graduated.

J. Salazar: That’s awesome.

Leslie: Yeah, it is super awesome. Even the [inaudible 00:17:59]. But I can attribute a lot of it to him; he pushed me and he held my hand and made me go to school. After that I felt like, “Okay, now I have something to prove to my dad. Like, look. I did it.” Right now I’m studying for my LSATs.

J. Salazar: Ah, that’s awesome.

Leslie: Yeah, I have my test in September.

J. Salazar: Oh, good luck to you!

Leslie: Thank you!

J. Salazar: That is so awesome. How did you choose the college that you went to? What made you choose where you went?

Leslie: When I started [inaudible 00:18:30], it was so surreal. I felt it was more like a day at a time. “Okay, I’m talking in these classes.” “Oh, okay, are you [inaudible
“Alright, next semester.” So by the time I started thinking about what [inaudible 00:18:43], it was the last semester of [inaudible 00:18:45]. I ended up choosing PII sending the letter the first. When they sent me the letter, and one of my friends already went there, and my sister went there, so I figured I’ll just go there.

J. Salazar: Okay. Let’s see. Now describe for me any event or agencies or people in your life that provided initial support. What I mean by that: Was there any sort of programs that you were involved with at school or church or in your community? Anything that helped you as far as with your children for daycare assistance, tutoring assistance, financial aid, counseling, any kind of things like that?

Leslie: The school counselors; I went to them and I saw they really weren’t helping me as much, as I had to get my own road map and figure it out. My boyfriend, again, knew a lot about it. Professional student. He knew how to tell me where to look and what road map I needed to follow, and I ended up guiding a lot of my fellow students. There was a lot of financial aid; if it wasn’t for financial aid I wouldn’t have been able to go to school.

As far as daycare, I didn’t [inaudible 00:19:57]. They’re already so much older, they won’t allow them in a daycare. Their dad helped me a lot. After the second one was born he always wanted to be in their lives. He’s even fought to try to take them away from me so he’s very [inaudible 00:20:16]. He would help me; he [inaudible 00:20:20] so he would pick them up after school, after they get out of school, and he would keep them until six o’clock and then I would go pick them up from there. It was a daily thing, so he’s been in their lives a lot more now. He’s a great father again.

Other programs? The school counseling . . . ? Uhm, no. I didn’t use the counseling. I didn’t use the student services; it was for . . . associated student services at [inaudible 00:20:52]? [inaudible 00:20:57] fee, like an extra $5 a semester, and they help you out at the end of the semester by giving you [inaudible 00:21:04] or anything like that. As far as the programs inside the school and the campus . . . I didn’t even go to orientation . . . I don’t know.

Oh! Tutoring: I used a lot of their resources but I was always on the [inaudible 00:21:17]. I was taking five classes a semester, sometimes six, so I was always there. I was taking the tutoring for Chemistry, I [inaudible 00:21:25]. I was always on campus; always at the computer labs. I was always there.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Leslie: It was my job to be there, really.

J. Salazar: Good! Okay. Did you have confidence, initially, in your abilities to go to school? Or did that increase over time?
Leslie: It increased over time. I think my first semester I put in a lot of work because I had someone that was supporting me and telling me they believe in me, so I had to prove them like, “Hey, you’re not placing your faith in the wrong person. I can do this. If I’m going to not work, I’m going to do this full-time and I’m really . . . “ I mean, as an employee I never missed a day at work so why was that going to keep me from missing from school? In Political Science I got an A+; that teacher was hard assed. Everybody in the class, about 90%, got a C.

J. Salazar: Wow.

Leslie: Yeah, my first exam I got a C and I cried and she told me why. [inaudible 00:22:25] essays, the answers. Don’t just answer the question, give me an essay in writing, how you know it.” Oh my God, I knew so much about political science, I could teach the class. I wrote an eight-page final. (laughs) It was only two pages required. (laughing) I got me my A+. But I had no knowledge, prior to that class, of any kind of government. I spent a lot of time there. A lot of time there. I had to show my boyfriend, like, “Look. I can do this. I can do this.”

After that it was more proving it to myself. My sister, too, because she [inaudible 00:23:04] going to school, too, and everybody has a smart one. She graduated high school even though she didn’t [inaudible 00:23:11]. She was messing up and ended up going back to school, going to continuation schools to be able to accumulate her credits so she can graduate on time, and ended up graduating on time not with her peers [inaudible 00:23:23] high school. Right after that she enrolled in community college but, again, she had been there for a couple years before I came in. [inaudible 00:23:33] like “Hey, you’ve been here four years. Come on. Hurry up.” She’s my little sister.

J. Salazar: Oh, okay.

Leslie: Yeah, my little sister and my little brother had just graduated from high school so he went straight to PII.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Leslie: University. We were kind of in a competition; the last four always been a competition because we’re the smart ones and have-- Yeah, it happens. I had to prove myself.

J. Salazar: Very good. What was your primary motivation for continuing your education?

Leslie: My daughters. My daughter is. My daughter, since she was three, she’s been wanting [inaudible 00:24:13] to be a plastic surgeon. How can I encourage her to go to school? And my fear was for her to ask me for help and for me not to be able to help her. In math. I remember, I don’t think I ever learned how to divide! How can I teach my daughter? So it was my daughter.
Right now my daughter wants to major in Psychology.

J. Salazar: That would be good. (laughs)

Leslie: [inaudible 00:24:41] (laughs)

J. Salazar: Yeah, really? Please describe the challenges you faced while working towards you degree. What were your biggest obstacles?

Leslie: Money. I would say money. That’s basically it. I had to find a way to make ends meet with financial aid and it was just that. It wasn’t even time because it was mostly like, “Okay, I have to save enough gas to be able to get to school.” I’m very independent; I don’t like depending on other people [inaudible 00:25:16] my boyfriend would pay. I need this book. I need this; I need that. I learned how to find my books on Craigslist for $5 and I learned how to do things like that. I don’t like asking for help but, you know, things would happen. My car would break down. At the end of [inaudible 00:25:33]. The last three years he went out and he bought himself a brand new car, and he gave it to me. He bought himself a laptop, a Macbook, and he gave it to me. Like, “Here. You need it. You need this.” He had no reason to buy it but he went and got it and he gave it to me.

[inaudible 00:25:51] my iPod, my cell phone. I have an iPhone because he gave it to me. He has helped me so much! Everything [inaudible 00:26:00]. I don’t know if it’s a bad thing or . . . (laughing) Even that time for me I would fight with him and we would break-up, he would still make sure like, “Hey, are the girls okay? Are you okay? Do you need anything?” “No, I fine. [inaudible 00:26:13]” “Yeah, yeah, yeah. Are you guys okay?” “Yeah, we’re good.” “Okay, I’m going to transfer some money.” “No!” (laughs)

J. Salazar: Wow.

Leslie: He’s been very supportive.

J. Salazar: Okay. Let’s see. You kind of already answered this question: What social or cognitive or institution factors can you identify as making a difference in your life as you made continuing on your education possible? What I mean by that is, you already said that cognitively you were a good student. You were already doing well in school so you didn’t any sort of those obstacles to overcome. Right? No learning difficulties that you had to overcome.

Leslie: [inaudible 00:26:56]

J. Salazar: Okay. So that’s a plus. Did you feel your school was supportive as you were going through the process? Was there resources there to help you when you needed it?
Leslie: I think that the teachers, the professors, would really try to help out. They would try to get to know the students and I really liked my [inaudible 00:27:21]. Even PII, because my brother told me, “Oh, no, once you go to university you don’t talk to your professors. You talk to the TAs. There’s too many students, they don’t even look at you.” That’s not true! I didn’t get that from any of my professors. I knew who they were and they genuinely cared about what you were doing and what you were going through. I guess [inaudible 00:27:45] see me, I was a little bit older than the rest of the students. I always sat in the front, I was always asking questions and always wanting to know more and even comparing it, “Oh is it like this? Or is it like that?” I think I got a lot of help from my professors; if I was stuck on something they took the time to explain it to me and [inaudible 00:28:04] hours, and “Meet me here,” and “Meet me there.” I think a lot of it was professors. I didn’t [inaudible 00:28:11] any TAs; TAs helped out a lot, and also the mentoring, tutoring hours. [inaudible 00:28:19] tutoring hours [inaudible 00:28:21]. For my English and math and Chemistry; they did a lot. But I felt like, “I can rely on my school. I can go and ask if I was having a problem, I could just ask for help and they will.”

J. Salazar: Okay.

Leslie: They’ll find a way. (laughing) I’m sure there was a program out there for somebody.

J. Salazar: (laughs) Right. Did you involve yourself in campus life at all? Or did you just go to school and that’s it?

Leslie: Because I was taking life five classes at a time, I maybe had a break for my lunch so I started going to Psychology Club meetings when I was in community college; also feminist meetings. There was too much going on [inaudible 00:28:59]. (laughing)

J. Salazar: What was that, again?

Leslie: Feminist meetings?

J. Salazar: Oh. (laughs) Okay. (laughing)

Leslie: [inaudible 00:29:06] they were not liking each other and I was like, “Yeah.”

J. Salazar: Too much estrogen. (laughs)

Leslie: Too much estrogen going on; too much. So I stopped.

J. Salazar: Okay. Did you attend all your classes physically, in the class, or did you take any on-line?
Leslie: The last semester in [inaudible 00:29:25] I took them on-line, because in the last semester of [inaudible 00:29:28], in 2012, my boyfriend encouraged me to open up my own business and, again, “I’ll help you, come on. Let’s do this. You can do this.” I opened up an office, did insurance, and I took everything on-line. I ended up being the worst grades ever; I had Cs and Ds. I don’t get Cs and Ds. (laughs) I still passed it but, it was a disappointment to me. I don’t do good with on-line classes. I do better with going into school.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Leslie: Meeting my professor and getting the most out of the class.

J. Salazar: Right. Why do you think you were compelled or motivated to achieve such a high level of academic success?

Leslie: I think that because even though my boyfriend, he would go one semester but [inaudible 00:30:23] semesters he couldn’t and he’ll drop his classes, he had to leave. I feel like if I start something I need to finish it. If I’m going to do something I got to do it to the best of my abilities and I’ve got to complete it. [inaudible 00:30:37] half-assed. It’s not [inaudible 00:30:38] that I tried, I really didn’t, if I didn’t put my 110 in it.

A lot of it was my daughter. My daughter is very smart; she’s really smart. She’s always correcting me, she’s always, “Mother [inaudible 00:30:52] has no K in it.” (laughs) Whatever. (laughing) She’s really, really smart and a lot of it was showing her, “Look, I can do it. I’m expecting you to do it. You have to do it.” Make it easy, and a lot of it was as I was going in I would push other people like, “Come on! One semester at a time.” It was basically, that’s how I see it: One semester at a time. When I noticed it like, “Oh my God, that’s it! I’m done. I’m done! I have to apply for graduation. It’s over! Oh my God!” My [inaudible 00:31:26] college, it was like the last days when I applied because . . . It was just like, already, “Okay, I got to go to school.”

At that time I was working [inaudible 00:31:34]. I was not just working, I had my own business. I don’t know, I think it’s been . . . Just try it. Just try it; let’s just finish it. Semester’s here and like, “(groans) Can’t wait til it’s over.” Once it’s over, “Oh my God. There? Okay, next one.” I just got into the habit and it wasn’t really like . . . I hadn’t really thought that far ahead as I was a student, because I liked it. I liked being a full-time student.

J. Salazar: Okay. Why do you think you were able to achieve a college degree when so many girls in the exact same situation that you were in were not able? You are among the 2%; that’s it. Two percent of girls who get pregnant prior to their eighteenth birthday go on to graduate college by 30.

Leslie: That’s [inaudible 00:32:23]. (chuckles)
J. Salazar: Yeah. That says a lot-

Leslie: You know what? Out of the people that I’ve met, that I met at PII and community college, most of them are still there. I think a lot of it is the lack of motivation and the lack of drive and also who they surround themselves with. I started noticing, “Okay, who am I around? What are my friends doing?” They’re out partying; like, “Okay, I don’t want that. So . . . “ I think a lot of it is I have to prove, I have to finish. If I was going to do it I was going to give it my all and a lot of it was my support system. If I didn’t have my boyfriend there and my youngest siblings that were like, “Hey, well, I should finish. Hey, we’re smarter. Hey, you know, you’re the oldest and now you dropped out. You’re the drop-out.” That was like, “Oh, man . . . No. How can I show my daughter this?” I was the dumb one from my siblings. No. I’m talking about the last four [inaudible 00:33:28] that were my dad’s. My dad, we all knew him and though he was so smart and bright and I’m his birth child and I dropped out. I’m the fuck-up. Oh no. I need to prove that I didn’t; it’s something I had to do for myself, mostly.

Even now, in law school, that I’m like, “Okay, do I really want to be a lawyer?” I fell in love with psychology; I want to help people and . . . Well, I start working tomorrow is orientation; I applied with the County of PII [inaudible 00:34:00] worker. I applied for five different positions so they’re not telling me which one I got yet, but I don’t want to be a [inaudible 00:34:08] want to be able to help people; but at the same time, I need to accomplish that law degree. I need to have that under my belt because I said I was going to do it. I told my dad I was going to be a lawyer and, although he’s not here anymore, I feel like it’s something I have to do. I have to do for him.

J. Salazar: What expectations did you have for your future once you graduated from college? What were you thinking you were going to do from there?

Leslie: Right now, when I’m thinking in the next five years, it’s like, “Okay, now I got to go to law school.” Three years; it’s supposed to be three years, and then when I [inaudible 00:34:44], I’m like, “Can’t take any longer than three years!” (laughs) Has to be [inaudible 00:34:48] in three years. I don’t know! To me, what I’m thinking is, when I graduate from there my daughter, right now is a freshman in high school. I want to be able to have enough money to take care of her once she graduates high school, to buy her a car. Buy her a house so she can live while she goes to school. She wants to go to PII, I want to buy a property there so she can go to school. I can’t accomplish that without having a great job, and the only one that I can think of that could pay me that good is be a lawyer. I like helping people.

I want to work with people [inaudible 00:35:24]. I like to defend people; I like to argue (laughs) [inaudible 00:35:30]. If I see injustice . . . I mean, if it’s being done to me, I’ll stay quiet. It’s more like, “Okay, maybe it’s me. I’m a little [inaudible 00:35:39].” But if it’s for my daughter, if it’s anyone that I see that’s
weaker, “No! Hey! What are you doing? Stop talking to that person like that! No, no, no, no, no.” I want to help out; I want to give back. I even thought about, “Okay, maybe I can find somewhere where I can counsel younger girls and talk to them, in even a high school.” Just go and talk, like “Hey.”

When I went back to my community college, I was doing my research studies and I spoke to the Dean of the school. He wanted me to go back, give him my information to be able to come back as one of their star students that graduated from PII and actually transferred out, because he says that not many of them transfer. I see it, first-hand; me and one of my friends actually transferred out and she also graduated but from PII. The same thing: she wanted psychology and then from there going to law school. I don’t know why those two [inaudible 00:36:35]; you want to help people but, at the same time, defend them, too. (laughs) [inaudible 00:36:40].

J. Salazar: Well. That concludes my questions. Just for clarification, how old were you when you graduated with your bachelor’s degree?

Leslie: I was just thinking about that today; I was 30 years old.

J. Salazar: 30 years old.

Leslie: Yeah.

J. Salazar: Wonderful.

Leslie: [inaudible 00:36:56]

J. Salazar: That is the end of my questions. I am so excited for you!

Leslie: Thank you!

J. Salazar: Congratulations on your degree and everything that you’ve accomplished. You are a great example to your daughters.

**INTERVIEW 3**

J. Salazar: Okay. I am Jena Salazar and I appreciate you meeting with me today. Can you please state your name?

Kristina: Kristina

J. Salazar: Kristina Can you spell it?

Kristina: K-R-I-S-T-I-N-A
J. Salazar: Perfect. I do have your consent form. I will, if you would like, I would provide a copy of it for you with my signature if that’s something you would like to have. I’m going to tape record this phone conversation and then it will be transcribed. At the end of the transcription, I will provide a copy of the transcription to you so that you can read through it and make sure that it is, in fact, what you said.

Kristina: Okay.

J. Salazar: So you will get that. I have a series of 18 questions. Some are pretty easy, some are more in depth, more involved, but I will just go through those questions and if you can do your best to think back and be as thorough as you can in the responses, I would really appreciate that.

Kristina: Okay.

J. Salazar: Okay. The first one is please describe your life prior to becoming pregnant as a teenager.

Kristina: I was a high school student. I took honors courses. I was very active in school. I was a cheerleader. I played softball. I participated in many extracurricular activities. I lived in PII at the time.

J. Salazar: How old were you when you became pregnant?

Kristina: I was 16.

J. Salazar: Okay. Okay. Prior to finding out you were pregnant, what was your attitude towards school or education generally?

Kristina: I was pretty focused. I knew that I wanted to go to college and making sure that I was taking courses to go that route.

J. Salazar: Okay. Prior to your parents finding out you were pregnant, how did they feel about school?

Kristina: I lived with my biological mother at the time and she was also a student. She had been going to college for a long time and so it was her dream for me also to go to college.

J. Salazar: Okay. Now did that change or how did that change when she found out you were expecting a baby?

Kristina: She no longer cared if I went to college. She didn’t really care at that point if I had graduated from high school. She just kind of washed her hands and said okay, well, this is your life now and didn’t provide too much support at that point.
Okay. It sort of leads into my next question so what was their expectation for you in terms of education? You’re saying once there was a baby on the way, her expectation was what?

Her expectation was for me to get on welfare and start collecting welfare checks, which I greatly opposed to. My biological father still lived in PII and his plan at that point was for me to move back home with him because I had actually lived with him up until the eighth grade. His goal was for me to come back to PII and he would help to make sure I graduated from high school and went on to college.

Okay. What role did education play in your family as far as were your parents and siblings college graduates? What role did your extended family . . . What role did education play?

It wasn’t a big part. At that point, I had a lot of cousins and aunts and uncles that were all about the same age as me and we were really the first group that graduated from high school. On my father’s side, I had an aunt that did go to college and had a master’s degree. My father went to college while I was going to college and he got his bachelor’s in 2004.

Okay.

He was the first one from my immediate family to actually get a bachelor’s degree. My biological mother, she had gone to college her whole life and just graduated last year with a bachelor’s degree.

Okay and your siblings?

I was the first one out of my siblings to get a college degree.

Okay.

I have a sister who just graduated last year with a bachelors.

Okay. Okay. What did your family view as being your role as a female? As a girl, you’re going to be a woman, what was your role as a female?

The typical female role at the time, my dad, he loved me to death, but his thinking was I was just a girl and I have a twin brother so he put a little more inspiration onto him. He was going to be the one that went to college and did all the other stuff. Their goal was to just [inaudible 00:05:37] and do your little thing and if you graduate from college, great, but he had the typical male and female viewpoints. My biological mom, she had a little more respect for women. She had been a single mom at some point and but . . . Again, she also would fall back onto women who got pregnant and weren’t married or anything, just to get assistance and start getting help from the . . .
Okay. Okay. The next question is really what I call your story. I want you to describe for me your experiences from the time you found out you were pregnant to the time you began your undergraduate program. I want to know the circumstances surrounding when you became pregnant, how did you tell your parents or your mom or whoever you told, what was their reaction, how were you treated, what steps, just the whole story of how you went from being a teen mom to the point you entered college. What was your story?

Well, I lived in a small town and I was very active in school. I had met my son’s biological father. He was five years older than me so he was out of school and we started dating the beginning of my sophomore year and then I got pregnant in March of my sophomore year. I was living with my biological mother. She knew that I was pregnant. She asked about the pregnancy test. She found out the same time I did. She wasn’t that upset. She just was this is what it is and okay.

School was hard because it was a small town. I actually had friends that were no longer allowed to hang out with me because I was pregnant. I continued going to school. I had to stop playing softball but there was a daycare on campus. Once I had my son, he was able to go to school with me. I was in PII until September of my senior year and then I moved back to PII and went to PII, which also had a development center that I could attend. He went with me there while I finished high school. I graduated June of ’94 and then I moved back home with my biological father. They were extremely disappointed when they found out I was pregnant. They wanted me to move back immediately to PII but I wanted to stay in PII and try to at that point things seemed to work with the biological father, which didn’t work out. It looked like I wasn’t going to be able to finish high school in PII. That’s when I made the decision to come back to PII and get some help so I could graduate on time.

Once I graduated high school, I immediately started at PII in that August and I attended PII for two and a half years and my family helped pay for daycare for my son and watched him at night while I did my hospital work. My biological father and my stepmother and then I also have a twin brother, so they helped make sure that I could go to college and work. Then, I transferred to PII in the winter of 1996 and I attended PII for two years. That’s how I had met my husband now. I took some time off from school and we got married and we had two more kids and I started back in college in November of 2003 and then I finished my Bachelor’s and then two Masters.

And two masters. Wow. How old were you when you graduated with your bachelor’s degree?

I got my bachelor’s in 2005 when I was 29.

29, okay.
Kristina: I took like six months off and then started my MBA and got that in 2007 and then I went and got my MA in education and finished that in 2009.

J. Salazar: Awesome. Okay, how did you choose the colleges that you attended?

Kristina: PII, it was, in the ‘80s that was where like the senior community college from the high school for those that were going the community college route. Most of us either went to PII was one route for [inaudible 00:10:44], PII was [inaudible 00:10:46] and then I was . . . My goal was to be a family consumer science major and be a high school teacher so PII had a really good program. That was why I had transferred here. I didn’t finish; I stopped going and then I started with the PII and I chose that school just because they had just started their online programs and it was convenient because I worked full time. I could study at night when the kids were asleep and then I just stayed with the PII for my two Master’s programs because I was familiar with the school.

J. Salazar: Okay, please describe any events or agencies or people in your life that provided initial support. You had mentioned your family helped you with child care costs and provided child care while you were at PII. Were there any other agencies or any other people in your life that provided initial support for you?

Kristina: When I first got pregnant, a lot of friends in my high school were huge supports. The ones that could still stay my friends, they were a huge help. I had friends that babysat my son so I could work while I was still in high school. I had a very difficult home life so I had friends ultimately, they were there for, you know, we’d set a time with my son so I could try to go to school. I really had a lot of friends up until my senior year when I moved back to PII and then at that point it was my father and my step mom and my brother.

J. Salazar: Okay. Now, did you have confidence initially in your abilities to go to school, to continue on your education, or did that increase over time?

Kristina: No, initially it was [inaudible 00:12:40] before I got pregnant I knew that I could go to college.

J. Salazar: Okay, why do you think that is?

Kristina: I don’t know. Really [inaudible 00:12:53] I have an aunt that went to college and she started in PII and had a Master’s degree in art. I knew it could be done, that women could go to college and I wanted to be one of the first in my family to go on the college route.

J. Salazar: Okay. What was your primary motivation for continuing with your education?

Kristina: I knew that I wanted better jobs than what would be available to me without a college degree. I worked with kids so I kind of wanted to be a teacher and I had
already had the education to get there. Then I had changed my mind and decided that I wanted to major in business and work in the business industry until I spent a few years there and realized that I wanted to work with kids, I’d rather work with little kids instead of adults who acted like kids. So I went back and got my teaching credentials for English. I [inaudible 00:13:58] at the time when there was no teaching jobs for English so that’s why now I’m at PII with the college again. It’s still in my field but not actually teaching.

J. Salazar: Okay so then just to reiterate, your primary motivation was you felt that an education was necessary to get the better paying jobs and to do really what you wanted to do versus what you had to do, so to speak.

Kristina: Yes.

J. Salazar: Okay. Please describe the challenges you faced while working toward your college degree. What obstacles did you have to overcome to accomplish that?

Kristina: The biggest one was making sure that I was a good mom for my son. I had to work to make sure that there was money coming in, to make sure that he was cared for and that he was my priority. I chose to have him and he didn’t ask to be born to a teen mom and my main goal was to make sure that no matter what I did, that he was my first priority and I had time to spend with him. Then, I had to make sure that I could work to support him.

J. Salazar: What about factors such as paying for school? Was there financial aid available to you?

Kristina: When I first started, my parents paid for me to go to school but they paid all the way up until I stopped going at PII. At that time I had moved out and moved in with my husband. When I went back to school, I was able to get some financial aid but most of it was student loans and my work also paid for part of it.

J. Salazar: Okay. Okay. What social, cognitive, or institutional factors can you identify as making a difference in your life that made continuing on with your education possible? What I mean by that is where there any . . . Did you have to take advantage of any tutoring or mentor programs or were there any things that sort of helped you? I know we discussed obstacles that were in your life but were there any things that was placed in your past that helped you accomplish your goal of a college degree?

Kristina: Not for the college. In high school, the school did provide daycare and that you could take your child to school with you. That was the biggest tool to make sure that I graduated from high school. If that wasn’t available, then I don’t know what I would have done then but for college, there was no outside support that I needed at that time.
J. Salazar: Okay. You really had a pretty supportive family along the way. They helped you financially with tuition, they helped you with child care. What was the role of the baby’s father?

Kristina: There wasn’t. Actually, we tried to work things out for about 10 months after I had my son and he was in and out. It was very sporadic when he was around so I moved out of . . . That was when I went to PII when my son was 10 months old and we saw him probably twice from 10 months old until when my son was three and that was the last time that we had saw him.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Kristina: Then, he would get in touch every now and then. He never provided any financial support. The last time we heard from I think was in 2005.

J. Salazar: Okay. Did you involve yourself in campus life other than attending classes?

Kristina: No. I did not. I would have liked to but I just did not have the time to do any campus social activities or anything like that.

J. Salazar: Do you think that that was, did that have any sort of impact in you completing or was there any impact there at all because you weren’t able to participate?

Kristina: I think so. I think if I had been able to participate a little bit more when I first transferred to PII there I might have been more motivated to stay and finish. When I did stop going I was just burnt out and tired of just going to school for so many years. I think if I had made more connections on campus, got a little bit more involved, I would have stuck it out the first time and finished much sooner.

J. Salazar: Okay. Did you attend school physically or did you go online? You talked about that a little bit but tell me where you . . .

Kristina: [inaudible 00:18:51].

J. Salazar: Go ahead.

Kristina: When I attended PII, I physically attended school.

J. Salazar: And then also PII you physically attended obviously.

Kristina: Yes.

J. Salazar: It wasn’t until your graduate program, your master’s degree, when you started going online?

Kristina: Yes.
J. Salazar: Okay and did that . . . How did that affect your experience?

Kristina: The online actually I really enjoyed just because it made it very convenient. I had wanted to come back to school for a while but it was just, I had three kids at the time and trying to find time to go back to PII Beach and physically be on campus and away from my kids and trying to find time from the full time job and also being a mom, I could not find any time where I could actually physically be on a campus. Being able to do an online program where I could stay on the coach when I do homework was ideal for me. That made it possible for me to go back to school and graduate.

J. Salazar: Okay. Now, I’m sure you’ve read my criteria and sort of the background about it from my link but 2%, that’s it, 2% of girls who go on to graduate college by the age of 30, only 2% were teen moms were able to do that. My question is to you is why do you think you were compelled or motivated to achieve such a high level of academic success?

Kristina: I think because I had in my mind before I got pregnant that I wanted to go to college but then I think also I didn’t want to be a teen mom that didn’t go to college. You know, you always hear oh, you’re a teen mom. You get that stigma on you that you’re a teen mom and I wanted to prove that even though I had my son and I made that choice that I could still go on and be successful and go to college, that I wasn’t going to be just one of those statistics of those girls that got pregnant and never did anything.

J. Salazar: So then 98%, 98% of your fellow girls who became teen moms were not able to go on. Why do you think that you were able to achieve a college degree but yet so many with similar stories were not?

Kristina: I think a big part was even though my family didn’t make it overly easy for me, I mean, they were disappointed that I was pregnant and there were the ramifications of what I had done, they still wanted me to be able to be successful so they helped give me some tools that made sure I could start on a college path. My father let me live with him and paid for daycare and paid for school. They wanted me to succeed and not let one decision affect my success later in life. That makes a . . . In my situation, my biological mom who I lived with, once I got pregnant, she was like well you can just get on welfare and start collecting checks and whatever happens, happens. Then when I moved back home with … Even though she was still going to college and she knew college was important, she kind of lost any motivation to push me to go to college. When I moved back home with my father, he was really yeah, you did this but let’s keep moving forward.

J. Salazar: Okay. What expectation did you have for your future once you graduated from college?
Kristina: I wanted to, well, when I first got my bachelor’s, I hadn’t planned on continuing. That thought was in my mind that that could be an option one day but I hadn’t planned immediately on doing it until someone had told me that if I didn’t continue, I wouldn’t go back. I said okay, well I’m not going to, you know, someone tell me that you can’t do it if you don’t do it right away. It’s like all right, well I’ll go back to make sure I get a master’s and my goal had been really to just get a better job or get a . . . Ultimately, I would have liked to have a teaching job [inaudible 00:23:12] what it is right now in PII.

J. Salazar: Right. What I hear you saying is that you saw the direct correlation between going to school now, putting the time in now, and the end result of a better job, a better career. You saw that you had . . . I don’t want to put words in your mouth but you knew that that was on your shoulders. You could make that happen by going to school. You saw that that was your responsibility. Is that correct?

Kristina: Yes. Yes and then I also knew that I did have three kids and I wanted to show them you need to go to college because you want your kids to go to college. I was really pushing for my son saying yes, I’m a teen mom and you are the product of a teen parent but I went to college, you need to go to college. I want my girls to know that they need to go to college even though you might make choices along the way, you still need to live up to your potential.

J. Salazar: Right. Okay, well, I just want to give you . . . Thank you so much for answering these questions. Just let me give you a background. As you said, there is so much negative sort of that comes to teenage girls when they become pregnant in that life is just over, that their dreams are over. I think for so many, they buy into that. 98% of girls do not go on to graduate college by 30 because I feel that they hear those negative stories. They hear the statistics of you are likely to be on welfare or you are likely to be divorced or your child is likely to not do well in school and so forth. My goal with my research with my doctorate is to eventually perhaps write a book when I have completed this process to be able to share with those 98%, if you will, that life isn’t over. That they can achieve what they set their mind to do and that there are success stories to look toward and here you go. Here are these women who were in the exact same situation as you are and yet were able to go over these obstacles or around the obstacles or through the obstacles, whatever the case may be, to accomplish a goal of being a college graduate. I really want this to be sort of a how to for girls who find themselves in this situation. That is my goal in doing this research.

Kristina: I’m still in contact with some of the girls I went to high school with that were also teen moms and I could not find another one that had graduated from college. I do see that it’s a very small amount of people that do.
J. Salazar: When I started along this path, I didn’t realize that. It never occurred to me that it was such a small percentage until I was doing research for a different thing and I was just reading through and when I read that, I just couldn’t believe it. I couldn’t believe that that was the case but like you, I started thinking about the girls who I knew who had been pregnant in high school and I couldn’t really think of one either that had graduated. I really started thinking wow, that really must be the case and it really just got me thinking that that is just, that’s not okay. Teen pregnancy in the United States is definitely an issue. It continues to be less of an issue. Teen pregnancy rates drop all the time and it’s much better today than they were even five years ago and certainly better than they were 10, 20 years ago.

Kristina: Yeah.

J. Salazar: We’re learning and we’re making headway but yet there’s still a very large amount of girls if I have my numbers right. About 750,000 girls in the United States under 17 get pregnant each year. If you think about 98% of those 750,000 girls, that’s a considerable amount of girls who are not going to graduate from college.

Kristina: Yes.

J. Salazar: That’s just not acceptable. There’s no reason why they can’t continue to go on to college. Not everybody is going to have the support system that you’ve had and I’m sure you’re grateful for that but there are other means and other ways and I just want them to feel empowered that they can do it. I appreciate your participation in this and being able to share that message that it is possible.

INTERVIEW 4

J. Salazar: Okay. I’m Jena Salazar and I am here with Kimberly. Spell your first name

Kimberly: It’s K-I-M-B-E-R-L-Y

J. Salazar: Well I have your consent form. I have it signed and I also signed it right here. I appreciate you getting that to me before hand. I’m going to ask you some questions and we’ll just go one by one. Sometimes, I experience that some of the answers, you might answer from one question kind of leads into the other question so I’ll pretty much stick to my questions but I also might veer off depending on the [inaudible 00:00:45].

Kimberly: Okay.

J. Salazar: Question number one, please describe your family life before becoming pregnant as a teenager.
Kimberly: MY family life before I became pregnant.

J. Salazar: Yes.

Kimberly: I think the one thing that comes to mind the most is just the fact that my mother and I, we did not get along at all. There was a lot of fighting, a lot of disagreements. I think maybe more so than just the typical teenage daughter-mother relationship, more than just the disagreements that come along with most teenage girls. I was in and out of school a lot. I was very attached to my boyfriend at that time who actually happens to be my son’s father. I dropped out of school and moved in with him and so just like the home was not that great, [in that perspective 00:01:52]. It was better than I thought it was but at that point in my life, I thought of course it was just the worst ever.

J. Salazar: Prior to finding out you were pregnant, what was your attitude towards school and education generally?

Kimberly: I hated school. I despised, I dropped out of school in ninth grade, went to an alternative school in tenth grade, got kicked out and that was all before I became pregnant. It was just, I didn’t like school at all. I was just not a school person. I was not studious. I didn’t want to be there. I didn’t have very many friends. He did middle school so I was just wasn’t a very school person.

J. Salazar: Prior to your parents finding out you’re pregnant, how did they feel about school?

Kimberly: They thought it was very important that I make it to school. My dad has a college degree and even though mom doesn’t, I remember she was always trying to teach us stuff and always expressed to us how important school was and how important it was to graduate and to do our best in school. They just thought it was really important.

J. Salazar: Did that change when they found out?

Kimberly: No. They still thought it was important. Their mind and their opinions toward school never changed and hasn’t changed even to this day. It was more at my end that changed than anything else.

J. Salazar: What was their expectation of you in terms of your education?

Kimberly: They expected that I would at least graduate from high school. Now whether I went to college or anything was not maybe as important to them as it was just for me to be happy in whatever I did but they knew that getting a college education was going to afford me the best opportunities available to me, but like I said, it was more important for me to graduate high school at that point than to graduate college.
J. Salazar: What role did education play in your family as far as, you’d mentioned your father had a college degree. Your mother did not, but what about your siblings or your family? Was college something that was talked about openly? What was the role that education played in your family?

Kimberly: You’re talking about just immediate family, right?

J. Salazar: Yes.

Kimberly: Like just the ones I lived with, okay. Well I’m oldest of four kids so it was always talked about very openly but more so with me because I was the oldest and I was supposed to lead by example and I would be the person going out to college or so the plan was, but I think my sister was more interested in or maybe had more of a goal towards school.

J. Salazar: How much younger is she?

Kimberly: Two years, two-and-a-half years, yeah. It was always one of those, she talked more about it than I did because she was more popular in school. She enjoyed going to school and she had so many friends in school which really makes a difference.

J. Salazar: I could see that definitely. What did your family view as being your role as a female?

Kimberly: Interesting. I think that my dad . . . It was not really a woman’s place is here, a man’s place is there. It was never really said that way. My mom was able to stay home with us kids through the majority of our elementary and middle school and so she always was doing the cooking and the cleaning and my dad went to work and came home and everything. Us as kids, we would help out with chores around the house and everything but as far as what my expectations were as a female in the household, I don’t really think there was a distinction between me and my brother. It wasn’t that they expected me to be barefoot and pregnant or anything about anything.

It was just, I think I remember now my mom and dad always tell me, “You can be anything that you want to be. You can do anything what you want to do. It didn’t matter whether you were a girl or a boy.” I think that would be my best guess I guess.

J. Salazar: My next question sort of is all encompassing question. The question is, please describe your experiences from the time you found out you were pregnant to the time you entered your undergraduate program. I want to know the story, the story behind the pregnancy, the situation surrounding it, how you told your parents, their reaction, what was your journey to get from there to college? What was that?
Kimberly: That story is going to be a funny one.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Kimberly: I guess I had dropped out of high school in ninth grade, got kicked out in tenth grade. I eventually ended up moving in with my boyfriend, my son’s father at that time. I didn’t know, now looking back, whether we were joking about it or whether we were serious about it but we had talked about having a baby at age fifteen and of course inside, I just sat there and go, “What the heck was I thinking?” Then when I ended up back at my mom’s house, he actually moved in to the house as well which again, it was not a got idea but I remember specifically the day that I found out that I was pregnant and I told my boyfriend, I remember crying that day and then when I told my parents, it was a little bit too close to April Fools’ day and so they literally asked me, “Is this some April Fools’ joke?”

Of course I said, “No. Unfortunately it’s not.” They were very upset and very angry at both of us. Eventually, they got over it and once we . . . Of course we ruled out abortion, we ruled out adoption and let them know that I was keeping the baby and we were going to parent together and plans were eventually to get married. I think they were more supportive, definitely my mom was and did anything that she could to help out. Went to the doctor’s appointments with me, help me get information later on and helped me get a daycare assistant.

She would watch my son while I went to school. At that time when I was in high school, I was also going to a . . . This is before I found I was pregnant, go to a local vocational school out there. It was one of those concurrent type things and so I was able to spend part of my high school time at the college I guess. She would watch . . . After I had my son, I continued to go to PII school and she would watch him while I went to school and eventually got daycare assistance and so that made it a little bit easier. Then after I . . . Let me back a little bit.

I have decided at that point that I was going to get my high school diploma because I knew it was going to be the best decision and even though it was at year six, I knew I was like, “I still need to get it.” I went to the high school that I graduated from and it was very discouraging because the high school counselor actually tried to convince me and talked me into just getting my GED and didn’t think I belong at school. I think that they gave me more drive and ambition to get my high school diploma sort of, “Oh, I’m going to show you” type of thing. After I graduated high school in May or something like that, I actually enrolled in classes at PII here in PII that next August.

After a few weeks of taking classes, I decided it was just . . . After spending so much time in high school and everything it was just, I needed a break. I just took about probably a year, maybe a year-and-a-half off between high school and college and then I finally my associates degree up at PII and eventually transferred down to PII which was where I graduated from.
J. Salazar: How old were you when you got your associates degree?

Kimberly: Let’s see, I did graduate in 2002. I think [I’d be better at my math], twenty six.

J. Salazar: Then from there, did you transfer back to PII?

Kimberly: No. After I got that, I knew that I want to get a degree but I just didn’t know what and I didn’t know what I wanted to be when I grow up. [I’m not trying], still do. I started to taking some classes at PII and just thought that it was just too hard for me to work full-time and then go all the way downtown to take classes and everything so I eventually transferred over to PII which is primarily an online program and that’s where I graduated from.

J. Salazar: Okay, awesome. How did you choose the schools that you attended?

Kimberly: PII, I actually was living up there with a boyfriend at that time, it’s the closest Community College.

J. Salazar: And then PII.

Kimberly: Well PII, when I moved back down here then . . . I’m an PII resident. I lived up here my whole life, with the exception of up there with him, whatever. Then I started going to PII and I actually work there now so that’s kind of makes it convenient. PII, I think I just chose that because I heard that maybe it was an easy school. Lived up there, they had a daycare so that way, I could be close to my son. I went to chose PII because they had a very good reputation and then chose PII because again, with the reputation. My father also graduated from PII so that was kind of an added incentive for me but the fact that they have . . . that I had to do it all online was what it primarily sold me on it.

J. Salazar: Please describe for me the events or agencies or people in your life that provided initial help. You had mentioned mom was very supportive. Are there any other agencies or anything that was present in your life that provided support for you as you were going on from the time you had your child to working your way into college?

Kimberly: I did get WIC assistance, the Women, Infants and Children. I did get food stamps as well a little while there, also daycare assistance. Then I eventually ended up marrying my boyfriend, his father and when we moved out to PII during that time, I think part of the military helped us as well, a little bit.

J. Salazar: Okay, because he was in the military.

Kimberly: Yeah. I guess I left that part out of my story, sorry.
J. Salazar: It’s okay. You married your child’s father at what point? How old was your child?

Kimberly: I married him at . . . so 1993, it seems . . .

J. Salazar: It started over. Darn it! It didn’t lose what we already did; it’s just there’s going to be two tapes now. Okay, so go ahead and start. You had . . . You married your baby’s father and you were about 19, you said.

Kimberly: No, I was 17.

J. Salazar: Seventeen. I apologize, okay.

Kimberly: Yeah, so my son was born in December and got married in June, and then he joined the military and after boot camp or whatever, we moved out to PII with him that next January.

J. Salazar: Thank you for completing that.

Kimberly: No problem.

J. Salazar: How . . . We already talked about that. Did you have confidence initially in your abilities to go to college and to do well, or did that increase over time?

Kimberly: I think it increased over time. You know, it definitely the older that he got, the easier it was and the more confidence I have in knowing that I could complete everything and, so yeah.

J. Salazar: What was your primary motivation for continuing with your education?

Kimberly: My son. He was my primary . . . He’s actually been my only motivation, that I knew that if I didn’t finish college and didn’t have some kind of education that I could struggle financially, and I didn’t want that for him. You know, like I said my dad went to college and everything so we grew up in a fairly well off financial status, I guess if you will, so I guess maybe he’s also been a little bit of my motivation as well. I just wanted to be able to give my son whatever he needed and wanted, just like my father was able to give to me.

J. Salazar: Did you recognize, as you look back, did you recognize a direct correlation between your actions and the future that you wanted for your son? Did you understand that responsibility or the correlations made between the two things?

Kimberly: That probably increased over time, probably not at 16. Probably not even at 17. You know, moving him all the way across the country and marrying his father, entering into a bad relationship and . . . No, I didn’t understand that that could result in maybe bad things for my son.
J. Salazar: But then on the flip side when you began going to school, were you able to put that, “If I go to school then this is going to be the reward for that.” Were you able … Was that a motivating factor for you?

Kimberly: Yeah, eventually, and I knew that in theory, when you get a degree you’re supposed to be able to make more money. In my job, because I work for the State it doesn’t necessarily work that way. In the position that I’m in it does afford me more opportunities to move up if I choose, but I think at 16 I don’t think I realized that. I just …

J. Salazar: But as you were going to college, did you?

Kimberly: Yeah, the further along in college that I got, yeah it was definitely, “Okay I know that having whatever will get me into the field that I want to go into, will get me into a job that I enjoy doing.” Even though the money was a factor, that money has not always been the primary motivator for me. It’s always been I want to be able to do what I like doing.

J. Salazar: Okay. Please describe the challenges that you faced while working toward your college degree. We’re specifically talking about the time that you were in college. What challenges or obstacles did you have to overcome?

Kimberly: Having to work a full-time job, that definitely left less time for me to be able to go to school, having my family, having my son I knew that I couldn’t work full time and then go to school full time and still expect to be a full time mom, or a good full time mom. I’m not saying that there’s not women out there that can do it all, it’s just that I knew that I couldn’t. I knew that it was more important for me to be at home with him than it was for me to finish school in a shorter amount of time. I knew that I would get there eventually but I knew that I also needed to be at home with him instead of going to school. You know, being a full time employee and full time mom, those definitely contributed to my challenges to going to school. Fortunately I was able to get school, like grants and financial aid and stuff. Money was never really a big factor or a big challenge for me, so I would just say mainly just the time.

J. Salazar: Now you had said that you married your child’s father. How long did that marriage last and was that an obstacle in and of itself?

Kimberly: I was still in high school while I was married to him. I divorced him by age 20, and I don’t think I started going to school until after I divorced him.

J. Salazar: Oh, okay.

Kimberly: I would say no, that’s not. Definitely a challenge in finishing high school, but not college.
J. Salazar: Okay, trying to get the time frame. What social or cognitive or institutional factors can you identify as making a difference in your life as you continued on with your education? So, you had said you weren’t a good high school student, but was that something that you overcame in college and you were able to do that? Was there school help or tutoring? What sort of things were in place to help you overcome any of those obstacles that you might have had?

Kimberly: Yes, I was a bad student in high school. I didn’t do well, I was just happy to graduate, and I knew eventually my goal was to graduate with honors in college. I guess maybe I felt like I had something to make up for, and when I graduated PII I did graduate with honors. I graduated with a 4.0. I’m very proud of that.

J. Salazar: Absolutely.

Kimberly: I don’t know what … I think that’s the only thing that I can think of.

J. Salazar: Okay, that’s fine. Did you involve yourself in campus, other than attending classes?

Kimberly: No.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Kimberly: I didn’t have time, it seemed like. I didn’t have time for extracurricular activities because my extracurricular activities included soccer games for my son, or hockey, or … It was just always him. No, I really didn’t do too much extracurricular.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Kimberly: I’m making up for that now.

J. Salazar: Good. Did you attend … Now, you already answered this, basically. So you attended school physically up until the time you went to PII, and then you went online.

Kimberly: Correct.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Kimberly: I mean, I tried taking as many classes as I could online, but when I was going to PII they were all class classes. None of them were online. It wasn’t until PII. I was able to take some online classes at PII, but the rest of my Bachelor’s was done online.
J. Salazar: The reason for my study is that two percent, that’s it, two percent of women who are teen moms go on to graduate college by the time they are 30 years old. My question is, why do you think you were compelled or motivated to achieve such a high level of success academically?

Kimberly: I would say honestly because I see how, for instance my brother does not have a college degree, he’s not in college and he struggles. My ex-husband, he does not have a college degree. I see how he struggles. I see my dad and he’s got a college degree and I see how well off he and my mother are, so it was, I guess now that I think about it, it’s hard to say, but I guess money’s the motivator.

J. Salazar: Yeah, it’s reality, you know?

Kimberly: I didn’t want to be one of those moms that struggled and couldn’t make ends meet and couldn’t pay bills and had to take McDonald’s jobs and stuff like that. I just was not going to do that. I refused to work fast food to be able to support my son, so …

J. Salazar: Why do you think you were able to achieve your college degree, yet so many women with a similar story as yours aren’t able to do it? Ninety-eight percent aren’t able to do it? Why do you think that is?

Kimberly: I think that maybe motivation may be part of it. They may feel defeat. They also may feel like, “Oh, well I’m just so old, so who cares? Whatever.” They may be in a job already and maybe stable employment and why rock the boat? Maybe some just have too many kids. I can think of a couple of my friends who they’ve got five kids and I just see how much they struggle. I think that they still are trying to finish their degrees but maybe just motivation. Their family dynamics and maybe the finances. I mean, I can’t imagine that they wouldn’t qualify for financial aid with … These two women, specifically with five kids, but then if they do it’s like when do they have time to go to school if they’ve got five kids to take care of. I would say maybe some of the challenges are depending on how many children these women have. One being maybe a little bit easier than five.

J. Salazar: Right.

Kimberly: You know, maybe they grew up in a household where school was not that important to them. Maybe their parents don’t have college degrees so maybe they didn’t very good role models.

J. Salazar: Okay. What expectation did you have for your future once you graduated? What were you plans? What were you going to do with that degree?

Kimberly: I know that I can, you know some of this just changed, actually in the past since I’ve gotten my degree. My first initial thing was things were at work were just I hated it there. I didn’t want to be there so I knew I needed to get a degree, and
then I’d finally leave there and people would take me more seriously if I had a bachelor’s degree and could be manager if I wanted. Now I’m comfortable where I’m at because the dynamics have changed at work, where I’m at right now, but I’m also comfortable in knowing that I do have my degree and if I want to leave there I can. If I want to pursue a supervisory management level position I can. I think that just knowing that I have better opportunities was my main goal.

**INTERVIEW 5**

J. Salazar: I do have your permission slip or permission form. If you could please say and spell your name.


J. Salazar: I appreciate you meeting with me this evening. I will go through the questions and we’ll just see how it goes and go from there. Question number one, please describe your life before becoming pregnant as a teenager?

Alanna: Let’s see. I moved out of my house when I was 14 almost 15 years old. Most of my teenage life was actually living with my kids’ father. I pretty much did whatever I want, skipped school a lot. I was into everything, drugs, alcohol, partying, that kind of thing. Really, no structure. I had a relationship with my family. It wasn’t bad, I just didn’t want to be there and I had too many siblings to have any interest to stay at home. I was kind of one of the masses. Yeah, I guess that I wasn’t a teenager very long before I got pregnant.

J. Salazar: Prior to finding out that you were pregnant what was your attitude toward school or education generally?

Alanna: I liked school in the overall, but I think I was just really distracted by everything else. I have always been into learning. I love to read. I read a lot, always have, even when I was young. As a matter of fact, sometimes I would skip school to read.

It wasn’t necessarily that school wasn’t important. I think the biggest thing was I didn’t realize the consequences of my actions would remove school from my life.

J. Salazar: Okay. Prior to your parents finding out that you’re pregnant, how did they feel about school?

Alanna: My mom had too many kids to keep up with. She had been married several times. She obviously wanted us to do well in school. She was also
a teenage mother. I believe she actually finished High School, but barely. For her, it wasn’t quite on the forefront. It wasn’t like she made us do our homework every night.

When I was still living with her I would disappear for three or four nights at a time. She wouldn’t necessarily notice. At least she would notice, but it wasn’t like, “You need to get your but home. You’ve got to go to school.” It wasn’t a forefront. It wasn’t a priority to her.

J. Salazar: Your father? Was he there?
Alanna: My father, that’s an odd situation. I had a step dad at the time when I got pregnant, and about 10 years prior. My dad didn’t know I existed until I was 23.

J. Salazar: Okay.
Alanna: My stepdad at the time, he was just completely not into . . . I mean it was a bunch of girls so his interaction with us was like a pat on the head. “Have a good day”, kind of thing.

J. Salazar: Okay. Did that change when they found out that you were expecting a baby?
Alanna: No. By then I was living with my kid’s father and his family. While my mom was like, “Oh, Holy crap”, when I found out I was pregnant she actually left my stepdad at the time. She was in a different place. She wasn’t necessarily worried about it. She knew I had my kids’ grandparents on the other side to take care to me and to help me through it.

Plus, as I said, she was a teenage mom. She actually kind of in a weird way expected it to happen to one of us. She figured it would probably be me because I was so much trouble.

J. Salazar: What was their expectation in terms of school? You said your mom, it wasn’t something that was on the forefront. She didn’t really talk about it. Those words, “You should go to college.” Was that something that was expressed to you?
Alanna: It was. My mom actually went back to school when she was 33 or 34. It would have been right around the time before I delved out to my own world. That would have been around the time when I was pregnant that she was trying to go back to school. It kind of changed her mind that in the middle of it, “College is important. College is a big deal. You should probably try to do that.”
I did try. She supported me and pushed me in my first effort. I had two kids way too quickly and it didn’t work out. She just let it go at that, because she couldn’t finish for her own personal reasons.

J. Salazar: Okay. What role did education play in your family? You mentioned you had many siblings. What has education been as far as their lives or just in our family dynamic altogether?

Alanna: Just a second please.

J. Salazar: No problem.

Alanna: You need to figure out your own dinner. Okay. I’m actually the first one on my family, I want to say ever, to get a college degree. None of my sisters have one. They’ve all attempted to go to school. Life, family, and things like that have gotten in the way, I might have distant cousins that have a degree. Definitely none of my sisters. Not my mom, my grandparents, their parents, so on and forth. Even my aunt and some of my more immediate, but extended family don’t have a degree either. When I graduated, it was a big deal. Most of my family came from PII to come see.

J. Salazar: Okay. What did your family view as your role as a female?

Alanna: We had so many girls in our family. We’re a very girl power, confident, sarcastic, “You do what you want to do. Say what you want to say”, family. “You can do anything you want to do. Be anything you want to be. Don’t let anyone weigh you down.” That’s probably why my mom was married so many times. She would get tired of the current husband, and she would move on.

If anything, it was kind of the reverse. It was because you’re a woman you’re stronger. You have the power. Use it and use it wisely.

J. Salazar: Okay. The next question is sort of an all-encompassing, “Your story.” I’d like to know the circumstances surrounding your pregnancy, how you told your parents, their reaction. I would like to know. The question is, please describe your experience from the time you found out you were pregnant, until the time that you entered your undergraduate program?

Alanna: Oh that’s a long story.

J. Salazar: Yes.
Alanna: I found out I was pregnant when I was working at PII with my kid’s father. It was after hours. I had been sick for a month and a half. I thought I was just sick.

A woman that I worked with had been trying to get pregnant with her husband. She thought she was pregnant. She bought a pregnancy test. It was one of the boxes that had three in it. She was like, “Here, take one with me. Maybe you’re pregnant.” We thought it was a joke. Mine came out positive, and hers didn’t.

I was at work, 17 years old then. I would have gotten pregnant right before I turned 17. I stumbled out of the bathroom, and handed it to my boyfriend at the time, and was like, “Uh, what do we do?”

He called his mom, who we were both living with at the time. I talked to her on the phone. I told her over the phone. She drove up almost immediately. I walked out thinking I was about to get the lashing of my life. Not that she’s ever been that type of woman, but you never know, telling her you’re pregnant. She just walked up and hugged me really tightly. She didn’t let go for a while. She’s like, “Oh baby, we’ve got a road ahead of us.”

It wasn’t until the next day that I told my mom. I called her on the phone and told her. She was like, “Oh”. Like I said, she wasn’t actually surprised. I guess, obviously living with my boyfriend for as long as I had, maybe it was more of a surprise that it took so long. She was. “Yeah, I kind of expected it might happen. I was hoping it wouldn’t. Are you okay?”

She was wrapped up in her own life to get to overly worked up one way or the other. She did make an effort to come see me right away to just sit with me. Then I think she probably saw me maybe two more times during my pregnancy. It wasn’t a priority to me, so it didn’t rub off as a priority to her. That’s kind of how she works. You have to tell her it’s a priority, and then she’ll make it her priority.

My pregnancy was 10 months straight of nausea and sickness. It was awful. My son was the worst. He was five weeks late. He was almost two feet long when he was born 23 and 1/4 inches long. A big kid. He looked just like his daddy. We still lived together. We still lived with his dad’s parents.

Things were okay. His dad cheated a lot. Eighteen year old guy, he cheated a lot. Tough to have the kids hearing all this. I’ve never really kept it from them. I guess that’s okay. At one point we broke up. Then I found
out I was pregnant again. They tell you to wait 6 weeks. On my six week checkup, I was already pregnant with my daughter.

We tried getting back together. That worked for a little while, and then we broke up. I was still living with his family and him even through all this. While we were technically broken up and I was pregnant with our daughter.

Close to when my son turned 1, their father was in a car accident. He flipped his explorer going about 80 miles an hour. He ended up in a coma for a month. He lost a chunk of his skull, part of his brain. He died a couple of times on the table. Eventually, he came to. It was actually kind of weird. When he came to and was at least aware of himself and for the most part his surroundings, he asked to see his son and his daughter, only I was still pregnant. That was a little strange.

He regained most of himself. Although I would say that mentally he’s stuck at the age that he was at the accident, about 19 or 20. He’s never really developed past that in a lot of ways, especially responsibility wise.

We tried to stay together for a little bit longer, but I couldn’t take care of two kids and a grown child. Even though he didn’t need a lot of things you would think of after an accident like that. He could walk again pretty quickly. He could talk and feed himself. It wasn’t that extreme, but there were other things. Definitely at the maturity level. He probably came out of it about 12 and had to grow back up to 20. I just couldn’t do it.

Eventually I left. I took the kids and I moved to PII where my Mom was living at the time with I guess my current step dad now. That’s a different story we’ll get into in the interim.

I moved out there and my family did a lot to help me at that point. They put me up in an apartment. They helped me find a job. I even lived with my oldest sister and her dad, which has no relation to me. He let me come in with my two kids and stay with him for about a month until I found a job and got into an apartment.

It was okay. It was tough. I would say my job probably wasn’t paying my bills every month, but I didn’t always notice. Partially because family would help me. Partially because you learn to just juggle them so that even if they’re late, they’re only a little late here and there.

I did that for about a year, the kid’s father came out, we tried it again. I moved back to PII. I only lasted in PII for two or three more months and I realized there was no point in trying it again. He was a very different guy. A one point, there was one night when he got mad at me for something. I
kind of pushed it, and he hit me. That’s when I knew, “Okay, absolutely then.” Not to give him a bad rep, he’s not that type of guy. I probably pushed it just as much as he got angry. He was still quite messed up from the accident. I’m sure he’s probably never done anything like that since.

After that, I moved in with my other sister in PII for about a month, and then back to PII. Then when I got back to PII, I was there for a short time and I started working for PII which again, didn’t pay the bills. At this point I was living with my mom and my stepdad. They actually were about to start having children of their own.

I feel like I’m missing something. There’s been a lot that’s happened. It’s been a long time period.

There’s a point where children actually lived with my mom for about a year. I would come and visit. I want to say that happened before I moved back to PII. I feel like my life is a jumble here. It would have been after I tried to get back with their father, but before I moved back. Maybe I was back in PII for a lot longer than I thought.

Then I moved back to PII and I lived my mom and my kids. They were trying to have their own kids. I net a guy out there, and we started dating. We dated for about four years. His family is very Catholic. So to go out to be comfortable with each other, for them to get comfortable with me, me having kids, and being out of wedlock, things like that.

Eventually, he and moved in together. My kids were still living with my parents, though. I had to show them that I was stable. The kids were coming over to the house. It was kind of like shared custody, I guess, at that point. I would keep them for long weekends, and sometimes during the week. Pretty much when my mom would let me, they would come over.

That worked out well enough, and my mom got comfortable enough with that. The guardianship papers that I signed, she was ready to dissolve them so that I could take the kids back.

PII and I, that was the guy that I was dating at the time, we moved into an apartment together with the kids. We lived together there in PII for a few years. I lived in PII a total of five years from the second time that I moved there until the time that I moved away and didn’t go back. He and I were together probably three years of that, so for two years I lived in PII before we were living together. We did really well.

There was a point where my mom moved to PII with her new husband at the time and her two new babies. She had her tubes untied after 10 years
and had two new babies. They moved to PII where her husband at the
time’s family was from. I stayed in PII for about half a year to a year after
she moved and realized that I had no one there other than PII family.
Which, they were great, but I wanted my own family around. So PII and I
picked up with the kids and we moved to PII.

We lived in PII for about a year. PII and I broke up in that year. He moved
back to PII. I stayed for probably another couple of months. Then my
mom and my stepdad and my brothers up and moved back to PII.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Alanna: My mom found out she had MS about three months before they moved. It
was on my 24th birthday that she found out. She decided she wanted to be
closer to my other sisters. She wanted to just go back home. My stepdad at
the time was, “PII is fine with me. I love being there too.” They just up
and moved back. I followed two weeks later with the kids.

I lived with my older sister Brittney at the time for about a month, the
same one I lived with her dad, until I found a job. Then again, back to an
apartment with the kids. We lived just the three of us for about a little over
a year.

Halfway through that, or maybe less than that I switched jobs. I was
driving from PII which is right on the outskirts of PII, all the way to the
middle of PII. It was a 78 mile drive one way. It was practically double the
money, so it was worth the drive. My original plan was to move closer to
PII when my lease ran out on my apartment.

At the time I was playing the online game, “World of Warcraft”. My mom
plays, my sisters play my previous boyfriend had played. There was the
peer pressure to play too. Eventually I started playing. Through that game,
I met PII my current boyfriend. We talked online for about six months.
That would have been about eight months before I moved out of PII again.
We talked online for about six months. He came out to visit at the end of
December 2008. I think that’s right. It will be six years this December.

What I did, was I actually sent the kids to visit their paternal grandmother
while he was out. Because I wasn’t ready to introduce him to the children.
He came out for about a week. We got along great. It was a good week.
After I dropped [inaudible 00:19:55] off at the airport and got the kids
back, we pursued an online relationship for about three months, I think.
Then he came out for the summer. It would have been about four months.
He came out in May. He suspended his job, I guess went on leave, or
whatever. He then came out to spend the entire summer with me and the
kids to get to know us all together and sort of be my live-in nanny.
He spent two months straight with my children. In that time, I found out my job in PII, I was getting laid off. He decided, “Well, why don’t we all just pick up and move to PII?” I was all for it. I was so tired of the back and forth long distance. We got along great. We still do. We picked up at the end of the summer. We moved me and the children to PII and we’ve been here ever since.

J. Salazar: Okay. When did you begin your degree?

Alanna: I got a job for about three or four weeks when I first got out here. Then through, I don’t know what you’d call it, my job ended. It was through a temp service. That was when I decided it was time to go back to school. I was tired of working. I was working IT in PII, and then IT again when I moved out here. I just can’t stand people who break computers. They’re really hard to work with.

I was like, “This is not the route I want to go.” I talked to him. He was actually out of work. He had got his degree right before we met in person. It was right in the middle of the economic downshift. He was out of work. I was like, “I’m still going to go back to school.” He supported me. He was all for it. I started at PII in January of 2010. Maybe it was 2009. It took me exactly four years to finish my degree. January to December. Maybe it was 2009. I went straight through.

J. Salazar: You were how old when you graduated?

Alanna: I was 30. I graduated this past December of 2013. I would have turned 31 in April of 2014.

J. Salazar: Awesome, congratulations.

Alanna: Thank you.

J. Salazar: Okay. How did you choose the college that you attended?

Alanna: I knew I wanted to start with a Community College because I one, didn’t actually want to start in classes. I wanted to do all my 101 classes online. I figured Community Colleges were going to be a lot cheaper. Also they had not necessarily different rules for being a resident, but they were a little more lax about being a resident. I just had to show proof that I had been there. For a year I didn’t have to have a driver’s license in the state, which I didn’t at the time. I had enrollment form for my kids and stuff like that.

It was cheaper, easier, and closer, in case I did want to go actually to classes, or needed to go to the school. I wasn’t confident in what I was
choosing to do, even though part of the reason I went back was because I suddenly had this desire to join the field of study. I figured start simple, small, and that’s why I picked the college that I picked.

J. Salazar: Okay. Then from PII, where did you go? Where did you get your Bachelor’s degree?

Alanna: I transferred to PII and got my Bachelor’s degree there. It was probably the best move I could have made.

J. Salazar: Okay. Please describe any events or agencies or people in your life that provided initial support. Once you became pregnant, you said your children’s father, his parents, were supportive.

Alanna: Very much so.

J. Salazar: Were there any other people or agencies or anything that were offering support along the way?

Alanna: I had a good friend. Her name was PII. She’s still a good friend. I would say the biggest support she offered me was freedom. In the sense that while I was pregnant, it would get very difficult to be in a house with the grandparents of my future child. A boyfriend that we were on again, off again, even though I was living there pregnant.

A lot of the support she offered me, not as necessary, but directly related to the pregnancy, I would spend weeks over there sometimes. Just getting away from life and all the stress that made being pregnant harder.

Agency wise, during pregnancy, nothing really. Although I did, I guess you could look at it, as my kids were getting Medicare. That’s the closest you get to an agency that supported me in a sense.

J. Salazar: Medicaid?

Alanna: Medicaid, Yeah. Otherwise, there wasn’t really. I had enough people around me who accepted my situation with grace and decided, “Well, it’s happening, so let’s just welcome it with open arms.” I didn’t really need any outside help.

I did consider actually at one point, joining the military. Then I found out you had to give your children up during basic if you didn’t have a spouse. That went down the drain really quickly.

J. Salazar: Okay. Did you have confidence initially in your ability to go to school? Or did that increase over time?
Alanna: You’re talking when I went back and actually finished, right?

J. Salazar: Yes.

Alanna: I did. I think at that point because my kids are so much older, I think one of the biggest hurdles that had always stopped me was finding childcare. It was hard enough to find childcare just to work. Going to school just seemed ridiculous. By then, my kids were older. When we first moved to PII, we lived with Kevin’s brother. His brother has a . . . I guess not 11 at the time, would have been younger. There were enough adults at the house. The situation that we had to compensate each other on childcare wise, that was no longer an issue.

I’ve always known that I was smart enough to go to school. It was just a matter of knowing what I wanted to do. I had actually tried to go back to college when my kids were itty bitty babies. That did not fit into what I wanted to do. I knew going into it I had already planned out my first two years. Not just semesters, but years of classes. I knew exactly what I was going into. I was pretty confident that I could do it at that point.

J. Salazar: Okay. What was your primary motivation for continuing with your education?

Alanna: Part of it was being tired of working call center jobs. I was lucky when I got into IT which was better paying, and at least some direction. I wasn’t happy with it. Part of it was that I realized my kids didn’t need that kind of role model. I knew I would always be very forthright with them about my past and how I got to the point of being a teenage mom I wanted it to be a story where in the end, they were happy with their mom and that even if they make mistakes, they’ll know that they can do better.

Part of it was I was watching the television show “Bones.” And I thought it was ridiculous. It was not possible for them to do some of the things they were doing. I went online and started looking it up and realized that it was a real field of study. That’s kind of what pushed me forward. I think that was the breaking point. That was my last hold off that [inaudible 00:28:11], and I was ready to go. I think it was like a week later that I was taking the action placing tests and starting to enroll in classes.

J. Salazar: What is your major?

Alanna: Biological Anthropology. I actually am applying for that school right now.

J. Salazar: Very good. Okay. You answered a lot of this next one. If anything else come in we . . . Please describe the challenges you faced while working toward your college degree. Initially, it was the fact that you had two very
small kids, daycare, working, all of that. Then fast forward to when you actually went the four years straight. What was some of the challenges that you had to overcome during that time?

Alanna: It’s going to sound kind of backwards, but I would say I didn’t actually really have any challenges. Maybe ones that I didn’t recognize right away. I know that the kids probably would have liked more time with me. I got pretty selfish at times. “I’m doing my homework. Leave me alone. I’ve got school work to do.” They put up with a lot from me in that sense. Otherwise, I had financial aid that covered most of the financial part. I had good grades, so they had scholarships that covered the rest. That challenge was taken off the table after the first semester.

I would say the biggest challenge was the types of classes. I cried every day that I took calculus. Luckily, PII is a computer engineer, so he was able to help me with that. I think it was more toward the end that I ran into challenges. That was just things like senioritis. Wanting to be done and moving on to the next stage. Wanting to learn more than what they teach you in the undergraduate level and things like that.

I had so much support and pretty much carte blanche to do it. I wasn’t expected to get a job or anything like that. It was pretty much, “Do what you need to do. Finish school, we’ll support you,” just from my kids and my boyfriend, and that was enough.

J. Salazar: Okay. Just for clarification. You were with your current boyfriend when you went to college. During that time, did you work? Or you just went to school?

Alanna: I did work-study one semester.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Alanna: That would have been the only actual paycheck that I brought in for one semester. No, I did not work during school.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Alanna: I did a lot of other non-school related internships and stuff like that.

J. Salazar: Okay. What social or cognitive, or institutional factors can you identify as making a difference in your life in continuing on with your education? What I mean by that is were there tutoring that you took advantage of? Or social groups that you were involved in? Or anything that sort of made a difference to help you keep going?
I would say probably the biggest resource that I drew on was actually two professors. Very early on I met PII and PII. PII, I first met him, he was my Archaeology 101 teacher. Then PII was my Physical Anthro 101 teacher. They pushed me hard. I told them right up front that I had planned on going the full distance. That I will eventually get my PHD. That this is the field that I want to work in. They brought all kinds of opportunities in front of me.

I actually TA’ed for both of them. Now I actually work for the Community College [inaudible 00:32:11] now. They would bring opportunities like getting in front of the class, and helping with lectures for the other classes. I did honors projects for both of them. Independent research that’s continuing on even now that I’m out of PII and out of PII. I would say that they in a way, embodied the institution for me in their ability to just be so wrapped up in my personal education and helping me progress.

Once I moved to PII, another part of PII state that really helped was the human identification map. PII is currently building a pretty strong forensic program. Even though they don’t have a Master’s or PHD option yet. Because the lab was so new, PII, the director, depended heavily on her interns. I interned with her for four semesters. Just that alone helped drive my education. It made me want to finish because it gave me hands on experience. It gave me hands on experience at a higher level than most undergraduates would because it was so new, and needed so much structure.

PII herself was a pretty big drive as well. It was nice having a female role model both from PII and from PII. Mind you, they have very different lives than I do. It was nice to know that as a woman, I could be just as important in that field of study, even though it originally started on the backs of men.

Okay.

I was part of Phi Beta Kappa. Toward the end of my education at PII, they were helpful in the sense of helping me find scholarships. They did offer tutoring services and things like that. I actually ended up being a tutor, not being tutored.

At PII, it was kind of the same thing. Part of the Honor Society. My last semester there they have this First Year Success program. I was invited to help tutor and teach with the First year Success program. Which in a weird way, it helped me finish out my own schooling because it again gave me that drive, because I was in a teaching position which I something that I want to do eventually as well.
It’s kind of the reverse, where they needed me in a way that actually helped drive my education further.

J. Salazar: It kind of provided that motivation for you?

Alanna: Yes.

J. Salazar: Well you answered my next question. Did you involve yourself in campus other than attending classes? You did, so very good. You briefly touched on this. Did you go to school physically online?

Alanna: Both.

J. Salazar: Both, okay, so at PII . . .

Alanna: I started online at PII. My first two semesters were completely online. My third semester, I want to say it was half online, half in class. My fourth semester at PII was all in class.

At PII, I did pretty much all class. There was one semester where I think I did three online. For one summer semester I did three online and one in class. It was classes I was just putting off because they were boring. I did them online.

J. Salazar: Okay. Why do you think you were compelled or motivated to achieve such a high level of academic success? You said you had women in your life who show an interest in you and provided that role model for you. That was later though. You were already in your late twenties by the time that came to fruition. Where did the motivation start? Why do you think you were motivated?

Alanna: I would say the motivation started after meeting PII. He is an incredibly intelligent man. I would say more intelligent than it even shows until you get to know him. In a weird way, I think I felt like I was not good enough, not for him, but to be presented at his side to other people. I felt like at the very least, he should have somebody that had the credentials behind them to support him. He was always very supportive of my intelligence and very vocal about how he likes that about me.

I’d always known I was fairly intelligent. I mean intelligent enough to get through a lot of high school classes without attending and things like that. I felt like it was the time to make myself that person that I wanted to be for him. But also I realized that I didn’t want to lose that part of me. I didn’t always want to be known as a mom. Or as the girl who became a mom young and, “Oh, well yeah, she didn’t go to college, but she had kids young,” that kind of thing.
It came from me being tired of not being as good as I thought I could be. And as good as the people around me thought PII deserved. That was part of it.

J. Salazar: All right. The crux of my study is that it’s only 2% of all teenage moms go on to earn a college degree by 30. I mean 98% of women in your very same situation were not able to accomplish that same thing. Why do you think you were able to accomplish such a high level of success educationally and 98% of girls are not?

Alanna: I would say about 40% of it was having the support in my life that I did. Kevin being probably 90% of that 40%, if that makes sense. The other 60% is I know that I am worth something to some degree somewhere. That I just need to show that to people. I think for a long time, it was starting to really wear on me that I was just a mom. I had the drive to be something different. I think with a lot of teen moms, they don’t realize that drive can go somewhere. They don’t get the support that I got that made it easier for me to be kind of foolish. I guess almost reckless, not having a job and just going to school.

I would say that you also find kind of this medium. I know there was a point in my life where I was paying my bills on time, maybe saving a little bit of money and if it hadn’t been for someone coming into my life that I wanted to be better for, I probably would have continued on that path for a long time, or maybe permanently.

I think it was a combination of environment, relationships that I was building in my life, and then my own personal desire to just be better than who I had always been. And to show the people in my life that I might have been that black sheep.

My mom always said that if she made a check list of anything that she never wanted us to do, I checked them all off twice and added things that she never thought of. I wanted to show them that wasn’t who I was. That I was a brain inside and not just a bum.

J. Salazar: What were your expectations for your future once you graduated?

Alanna: Grad School. I went into my undergraduate knowing that I was going to grad School. I pushed myself ridiculously hard. I almost made it out with a 4.0, it was a 3.97, or something like that. It made me very sad. I loved internships because I was preparing myself for Grad School. I had applied for two Grad Schools before I had graduated. There were some other things going on in my life that had made it very hard to do that at the time. I applied for one that I knew Kevin could transfer his job with. Then one that was a really good school in my field. I had heard their enrollment was
down. They were extending their application for the next season, that kind of thing. I figured take advantage, maybe.

I got declined to PII, which would have been the school PII could transfer to. Just because what I wanted to do, and what they were looking for, I guess didn’t line up as exactly as I thought they did.

I officially got declined for the other school, but I found out that they had all their acceptances in. I don’t even know if they reviewed my application. I had to defer and now I’m waiting until, it would be entrance August 2015, so I’m applying to Grad School now.

My interest lies in the PII, and it seems their interest lies in me, so that’s a good start. After that I plan to teach for a few years and work in the field of archaeology related, forensic related. Then go back and get my PHD.


INTERVIEW 6

J. Salazar: All right. Can you please state your name and spell it for me?

Angela: Angela. It’s A-n-g-e-l-a

J. Salazar: Okay. Thank you for your participation. I really do appreciate it. The first question I have is please describe your life prior to becoming pregnant.

Angela: Do you really want all that muck?

J. Salazar: Yes.

Angela: Like immediately before or my story?

J. Salazar: We’ll get into your story more so. Just what were the family dynamics of your household prior to becoming pregnant?

Angela: Okay. My mom has been married nine times. They are the limit, did you know that? We moved a lot. I never went to the same school for entire school year until I made it to high school. My mom’s first husband was actually my grandmother’s boyfriend so I like the guy a lot. He was much older so he was like a father to her and like a grandfather to us and he was amazing. Then the next guy, my biological father was actually her first husband and then my grandmother’s boyfriend was her second husband and then this guy from I don’t know where. Anyway, he had three kids and he smoke dope. She really liked him and while
they were married I was very proud of her and that she got her GED and she went to school and got a two year degree in nursing during that time.

She divorced him twice and remarried him during that period. She had the next guy was somebody that she took care of his mother and she married him. He lived in PII and she remarried the guy that like to smoke dope. She was married to him when I got pregnant. He hated my guts and that was quite all right. At seven years old and she tells us story very lovingly of course when I was seven I told her that I really didn’t think he was really worth the ground that he stood on and that I really hated for her to bring him into our lives. She told me that I was seven years old and I didn’t have any business telling her how to live her life. She married him anyway more than once.

I was probably at 14, 15. We were living in PII that time. We frequently change states. It’s almost like Christmas we’d move around, we’d move to another place. Then we’ve moved around and we’d move to another place so I became fairly decent at meeting new people but what I did not become very skillful at was making solid relationships. I don’t think that’s just because I never really seen it done and I had not seen anybody with all the conflict. I guess about 15. I was 14 when we move to PII. We moved instead of moving from state to state or for county to county we just move from town to town within the same county.

We’re in PII at that time. I lived on a different straight but I was within the same school district so I was able to attend the same school from 9th grade through 12th grade. That was helpful people got to know me but that was also at the time that I was looking for, “Oh my gosh what’s going to happen next?” When she bails on this guy what’s going to, where are we going to go, what we’re going to do. I just made up my mind in the 8th grade that I didn’t care where she move I wasn’t going with her. That was going to be home and met this little fellow. Little freckle face, long hair, parachute pants, Vans shoe wearing punk with earrings. Back in the day that was cool but the kids who were doing that then it wasn’t so cool with the adults I guess but really nice guy. Came from very affluent family so for me that just made him even more desirable because I could make 40 cents stretch for a really long time. He turned around $40 and drove a Camaro. Never mind he’s an 8th grade. Not probably, he was the smartest but man was he ever good to me. He always was very complimentary and just like right along those line. As we went into ninth grade of course we became very intimate and his parents were very welcoming. Took me on vacation with them.

When I traveled it was because I was moving not because it was a vacation. I’ve really enjoyed that about them and his mom was a really good cook and they just had an intact family. It was really nice, it was very nice for me. Along about the 10th grade things were pretty serious for us and we had this little teenage marriage. I went on some vacation with them, they go off shore and his parents had bought me this beautiful necklace and I had gotten him this leather studded
bracelet that we thought was coolest thing ever. We wrapped the bracelet around
the necklace and we buried into the sand and we just had this little ceremony and
for us that was the end of it.

We were married, we were done. Of course nobody knew about it but the two of
us. It was just a little I don’t know . . . Teenager, right? As I was approaching 16
I was looking at getting my license and I knew that I was pregnant. I was in
school craving onions.

J. Salazar:  Did I lose you?

Angela:  No. Okay. During that time I don’t know what my mother was doing because I
was not wrapped up in her drama. I do know that she had left another time and
she dated a [perfusionist 00:07:48] and she dated the principal of a local high
school. During that time we had moved. She had moved into an apartment and I
was just in and out, I just stay with friends or I stay with my boyfriend or I might
stay with her just depending on the day of the week and what my needs were. I
had a job, I worked for Food World. Best job ever. First pay check, right?
Anyway, I’m pregnant and my mother says to me, “Do you think you might be
pregnant?”

I said, “No. Why would I think that?” She said, “You’re just strange when I see
you’re different.” I said, “I don’t think I am. I know I am, how’s that?” She said,
“Oh my gosh, you need to put this baby up for adoption. You’re never going to
make it.” My boyfriend whom to this day I love him dearly and I’m very grateful
that God did not answer my prayers and make him official in my life because in
that time from my ninth grade year he got into party and there was nothing more
dangerous than middle class white kid in an urban area with money in your pocket
and time on your hands driving the Camaro. He got into some drugs and I
appealed around with it too and thank God I got pregnant because then it was like
I did not want a child to experience the same life that I had.

No one was beating me over the head with sticks and stones, no one was ever
home. No one ever really cared how I was doing in school so I frequently did not
do well in school. Lots of the absences and things like that. The year that my son
was born I had 63 absences but it wasn’t that uncommon for me being absent.

J. Salazar:  Let me ask you, before you’re pregnant what was your attitude towards school?

Angela:  School was an outlet for me. It was something that was going to be there whether
I came for six months or I came for six days I could count on that. I knew that
they were going to expect something intellectual of many. No one was going to
require me to engage in this relationship with them. It really post a lot of faith.
There’s always a meal there, always the same kids there.

J. Salazar:  What was your mom’s attitude towards school? What’s her expectation?
Angela: She didn’t have any expectation. She had left school. My mom’s school, I want to say that she was in the ninth grade maybe. It seems like that was the case sometime somewhere in the ninth grade. Maybe eighth grade she left school. My grandmother had left school. It was just expected of her that she would not finish school so she left eighth or ninth grade and I was seven. I was seven when she started thinking about getting her GED. That was the time that I had this conversation with her about the guy she was dating and how she didn’t need to bring him in to our lives. The good thing is that she did get her GED at that time and she immediately enrolled in a two year program at the local community college and was very successful. As far as school goes it was made to an end. She was really excited to have a job. I had never known her to work prior to that.

J. Salazar: Once you found out you’re pregnant, did her attitude towards school and you did that change at all?

Angela: About school? No. I don’t her attitude towards me changed either. Definitely our relationship turned very violent. Even though she didn’t have the words to say I don’t think she was fearful that I would follow in her footsteps because clearly on the outside it certainly [inaudible 00:12:44] and did her mother so as far as school goes she wanted me to quit school. She felt like that was the most appropriate thing for me to do that my choice, in fact she said my choices are put this baby up for adoption or quit school and get a job because I have this baby to support. In her mind she couldn’t see where those two things could happen at the same time.

My boyfriend I was so in love with, his mom came over and said, “Here’s where we stand. He is not ready to take care of himself much more of a baby.” Our position to him and this is what they said to him is, “You can stay with her and raise this baby but you’re not going to drive your car.” At that juncture, my mother was like, “See? You just have to give the baby up for adoption,” and my response to both of them was, “Okay, buddy. Here’s my take on the thing. Love is a verb and you can say I love you all day long and yes it’s been three years and you’re the most precious thing that I know and I don’t want you to go anywhere.

It’s going to be difficult to do I love you and if you can do it then I think that we can brave this thing together and if you don’t think that you can then now would be a really good time to leave.” At the time, I don’t know where the words came from they just came. Because I was crushed when he left and I would sleep in my car thinking oh my gosh here it is, I’m going to have this baby and I’m going to have this baby by myself. I did.

J. Salazar: Okay. Let’s see, next question you basically answered. What role did education play in your family? You said your mother dropped out eighth or ninth grade, later in life went to a two-year degree. Did any of your step-father or extended family, did you have any role models as far as education in your life?
Angela: In my family, I was the first person to finish high school and that was the only reason I finished high school because my English Language Arts teacher put me on hallway one day and said, “You know? I think you’re a lot smarter than you act. You need to get away from these people you’re around with. What I know to be truth these kids are telling me that you’re not out doing drugs. That’s a good thing. Other people may not see a lot of good things about you. I believe in you.” That was pretty powerful because I had been in the alternative schools the entire year before for fighting. Everybody has a talent and at the time that was mine.

I could read really well and I could fight really well. I guess that was a blessing because yes that was in our expression but that was also what was going on in the inside of me too. I was just a fighter, a survivor. My teacher said, “I think that you can do this.” I finished high school barely. She let me come to her house on Saturdays and study because it was hard to have a baby and work and be by yourself. I pride to be adult and at 17 you can be and he was born. I got my driver’s license and then he was born shortly after that. Just after my 17th birthday. I finished my junior year with him, my senior year I was able to do work release because my English teacher helped me set that up.

She also tapped into my interest at that time because my mother had done this nursing field thing when I was younger. I loved looking at her books, I loved her anatomy books. She had a cardiac book, I just enjoyed reading the nursing textbooks and at the time that my son was born she was working in perfusion at PII in PII Hospital. I asked her what did she do to let me see a procedure. At the time they did arteriograms and if you can imagine, they still do some but not as much because they can do MRI now. They would go to the femoral artery and just run a little wire with a little bit of dye up into the heart. It could take some pictures.

My English Language Arts teacher helped me get a model of a heart that I could take apart so that is what I did my senior research project on was Mitral valve prolapse actually and floppy valves and things like that. She encouraged me to go into the medical field but I just could not for the life of me do that because that is what my mother did. You know you have that love hate relationship, right? I just could not do it and so she said, “What you’re going to do?” I don’t know, I have no idea. She said, “We need to decide to do something fast because you’re going to finish school. I know that you will.” I did. They gave me a GED. In PII that was a graduation option so I still had to make the graduation requirements at state for my diploma in General Education diploma even though I’ve finished high school.

J. Salazar: Okay. Now, what did your family view as your role as a female?

Angela: Depending on who she was married to and whether or not they had kids.

J. Salazar: Okay.
Angela: The guys that she was with that did not have kids, they were usually very nurturing. One guy that she married, he made me a bed. It was a frame for my mattresses so my mattresses didn’t have to be on the floor and he painted a moon on the end of it and he was pretty cool guy. I liked him a lot. I didn’t have to do anything when she was married to him. He took care of us, he had a paper route. We had to get up really early in the morning and ride the paper route. He was really old, he was the one that was my grandmother’s boyfriends. He was an old, old guy. I would be really embarrassed when he would come and pick me up from school because he was so old. I hated to say, “That’s my new dad.”

Everybody else is throwing footballs and things like that. Mine, gray haired and bearded smoking Camels with the windows down of the Subaru four door Subaru. He was a good guy. He took good care of us. When she was married to the dope smoker he had this toupee, you could tell there’s this really no fond memories of him. Absolutely none. He was just not very welcoming and he had kids of his own.

J. Salazar: Okay. That changed the dynamics I can see.

Angela: The expectation was that I would change all the diapers, I would take care of the kids. They would go out on dates because their relationship was still fresh and new and they still have the tingles and all of that. I will say this, he had a good job because we moved into a townhouse and that was nice. He bought a house. One in the times that they were married he bought a house that was pretty good. Never mind it went to foreclosure but he did buy the house. That was nice.

J. Salazar: He had a good start.

Angela: There are some good things about the guy. Yes.

J. Salazar: Okay. You brought me all the way to the point where you found out you’re pregnant and your boyfriend’s mother had ultimatum. Your parents or your mom specifically had her ideas of what your decisions. My next, I’d like to go from there. From there to the point you began your undergraduate program. It sounds like I’m assuming it sounds like I’m piecing something together that you didn’t marry the father.

Angela: No.

J. Salazar: You parted ways so if you can go from there explaining where you lived and how did you go from that point to undergraduate. I lost you.

Angela: Are you with me?

J. Salazar: Yeah. It’s going in and out maybe we’re . . .
Angela: Can you hear me now?

J. Salazar: I can hear you.

Angela: Okay. What’s really the most precious part. I truly believe that had I’ve not gotten pregnant my junior year in high school I would have engaged in a lot of riskier behavior. Okay, if it wasn’t risky enough I really think that I’ve probably would have been out drinking and drug and then doing those kinds of things. My life would be very, very, very different. I’m confident that I would have been in trouble with the law. You can imagine an angry girl high. You can take the girl out of the street but you can’t take the street at a girl. I really think it would have been bad. My son was such a blessing and I’m really glad that he came from a relationship where I genuinely loved. Loved this boy and continue to wish him the very best. Okay. I’m sorry, rambling.

J. Salazar: No, you’re fine.

Angela: Thanks. I finished school, I did not marry him. I did finished high school, he did not. He got arrested and he got into some heroine, methamphetamine use, and cocaine use that kind of thing. He’s been in and out of rehab and has never had a real job in his life. It’s really sad to think such a wonderful person would be in that way. Praise God that he knows a hell lot better than me and he did not allow us, he did not say yes to my prayers that we would be together forever since last high school. After I graduated on May the 23rd of 1988 and I made a decision at Kmart getting our pictures made that I could not live on welfare and work for Food World and expect my life to be any different than hers.

I walked across the parking lot to the recruiters office and said, “This is my situation. What can I do?” He said, “The first step is to take the SFAM.” I took the SFAM, did exceptionally well on that. I had a number of options available to me. I asked my grandmother would she take care of my son while I was in basic training in AIT. She agreed to do that so I left in September of 1988 and I did basic training and oh my gosh PII. It’s right outside PII and then I did AIT at PII in PII. Loved that place, way different, way different. It was really nice. Everybody is in boots. There was just a normalcy and just a sense of empowerment that came from basic training in AIT.

It gave me some skills. I was in personnel management of the 75 Charlie active duty. My first duty station was PII. My drill sergeant at AIT was very aware of my circumstances. While I was in AIT my mother tried to petition the court for custody of my son. You can imagine what the judge said to that. He was very complimentary of me and surprisingly my boyfriend the one that I had separated with, his whole family was there on the front row when I got there and they gave me leave to go down because I’ve gotten this court order to appear in court and I did. I had all of my military orders with me and so the judge laughed at her and told her that he was surprised that I was still living.
That there was no way that she would ever be awarded custody that she really just needed to let go of that. I still had two more weeks for the AIT at that time so it was no big deal. Nothing changed. My grandmother took my son back home with her but it was great that I got to see him before I finish AIT so that was really nice and had four days to do it so that was super nice. Drove back, finished my AIT but at that juncture I was pissed. I wasn’t sad, I wasn’t angry in a way that I felt like I had no control. I was pissed in a way that’s . . .

J. Salazar: I lost you again. There you go.

Angela: Okay. Okay?

J. Salazar: Yes, go ahead.

Angela: Okay.

J. Salazar: You said you are pissed in a way that . . .

Angela: Just said, “I need some healthy boundaries” because clearly I’m strong enough, I’m smart enough to do much more than she ever has dreamed of doing and a good mother would want that for her child. When I finished AIT my drill sergeant was amazing. She secured housing for me at PII before I even got there. I had an address, PII before I even left AIT. My grandmother helped me move with the U-Haul, I didn’t have anything. I had a crib and a dresser for him and then I had an old bed that my grandmother has given me. It was nice to have a frame, I didn’t have to be on the floor or anything like that.

I moved into housing which was probably the nicest place I’d ever lived, running water, everything. It was great. It was great. It was really, really good. I would get up in the morning and I would take him to have child care out. You are familiar with military installations.

J. Salazar: Right.

Angela: I would take him to the day care. I would go to PT, I will come back, take a shower, braid my hair and go to work. Get off. Go pick him up and it was good. I was at PII. It was [all male unit 00:29:27] when I got up there. I was one of the 25 females that were on that installation so you can imagine what that was like. Lots of guys have been in the field for 90 days and they want a home cooked meal. They are from all over the world so I was promoted very quickly. I’m proud of that by the way I’m proud of that. I got promoted to specialist very, very quickly. I work for PII and he was amazing.

He taught me a lot about organizing and thinking about things in terms of what do you want not today, what do you want not a week from now but what do you want ten years from now and then making today connect to that. Great man, enjoyed
working with him. I loved all of them. When our country was faced with Desert Shield.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Angela: My job as personnel management was duration and the permits. That was tough because I had to separate families. 12 Charlie are bridge crewman, [Bravos 00:31:05] are bridge crewman but 12 Charlie is a nuclear biological chemical warfare troop. Now, some orders . . . Going and get the listed guys that have been in for a while. They are veteran troops, those are pretty easy they know what’s coming, they’ve done it before that’s not their first rodeos. They handle it pretty well but really young officers they came to the military to go to college, they are clueless. I mean they married their high school sweetheart and they are looking at being in charge and they sure will just to manage themselves.

That was really hard to find homes because they had to make arrangements for their families to go back home but I don’t think that they do that anymore but they used to. Sometimes they will allow families to stay on post pending your return but for the first guys that were over there before we even had control of [Hiber Bay 00:32:10] right there in Kuwait that was a big deal. Just getting Kuwait was a big deal. After the 5th engineer brigade left there was really nobody on post but that was tough to see an entire brigade leave at a time PII. PII train for desert warfare year round so they were already there and our guys were woodsmen and PII at a time changed primarily bridge crewman and military place is what they did.

That was an interesting thing. It switched from with change of president from PII Bush Senior to Clinton the Clinton era. It went from Desert Shield to Desert Storm. Mid 1991 of mid war. My time was up. I was ready to ATS from active duty. I was supposed to ATS in 1992 in January of 1992 and I actually took an early our and left November and I came back to PII end of 1991. Then when I got back to PII I went to a friend. When I was very, very young I had a friend. Her name was PII and her mother was grand, absolutely grand. She was like a Girl Scout mom. I mean all the things that I would have like to have done that I could always look in to her, look through the window of her home and just be like, “Oh gosh, I wish I was her.”

I felt they were the coolest people in the world because they managed a trailer park. Hey, you know one man’s trash is another man’s treasure. They moved away and she went to a different school and then of course we moved and anyway her mom always kept up with me. In the summertime that I would hear from her, her mom and then she would just catch up with me so when I left the military and went back to PII I went to PII and I stayed, she and her mom. At that time PII was finishing her four year degree at that time and her mother suggested to me . . . The conversation was, “What are you going to do now? You’re out of military and you’re doing your reserved time now.” I had a lot of reserved time.
I had five years of reserve time. Four and a half years every third time after my active duty time. For me there was always a backup plan but it wasn’t going to be enough to sustain myself and my child and so PII, PII mother said, “Why don’t you go to college?” I burst out laughing. I barely made it through high school what are you talking about? College and they would laugh at me and there’s no way I could ever do that and she said, “No, that’s what somebody told you but that’s not what I see.” She said, “Watching you graduate from high school was a very proud moment for me and I wished that I could be your mom.”

I wish that she had have been in a way but not really because it’s what makes me who I am. I had my own life. I was blessed with my circumstances. I really was. God knew that I was going to be a stubborn feisty little thing and he knew what I needed and that’s what I got. She encouraged me to go to college and I did. I had to take five remedial classes before I can actually take my first class. There was one area, one area that I did not have to take remedial class in and you might guess what it is, English Language Arts but I really think it was the relationship that I had with my English Language Arts teacher.

What she said and what I learned from her just stuck so I did very well in reading and writing and I initially started out in psychology and learned right away in an introductory course of psychology that if there was anybody ever whacked out it was me. Then I really did not have much to offer at the time and I just needed to focus on the field. I did and they were really good because they allowed me to come in and just, they do a little bit of counseling with me and work through me, worked with me through my program so most of my projects initially were about me and my own development. As I progress through it was about my son and his development and the influence and the decisions that I had made for him because he was amazing.

Not to say that I didn’t engage in risky behavior even as a young mother like I said it’s an [all male unit 00:37:42]. I went rock climbing and rappelling with a two year old strapped to me. Nobody in the right mind does that, that’s a little odd. Can we call that abnormal in the world of psyche? Those are the things that I really at the time did not say anything wrong with them. It certainly wasn’t nearly as bad. I was trying to compare what I was doing to what I had lived and then make a judgment call as to whether or not it was right or wrong and listen, if you don’t know what’s right and wrong you don’t know where to take it out when other people are doing it because it’s hard.

If you can’t judge it on your own you don’t know that they are right or wrong. You really can’t take a stand. I grew up a lot in my four year degree, finished my four year degree in psychology and sociology and loved sociology more than I did psychology. As it were when I graduated a friend of mine said, “Hey, there’s this really cool place that I think you’re be great at. I’d like you to apply and it’s called . . . “ It’s the PII Network for Educational and Therapeutic Support. At the time you just needed to have a degree in psychology so I went over and apply for
the job. I got the job within two weeks. The first year was really, really hard because it’s almost like looking in a mirror.

The sad part is that only students who are identified as emotional, behaviorally disturbed are served. They are the very well program. I went home and every day I really had to get a grip and if that was not a reality check I don’t know what was. In that, my coordinator was Jesus Christ and human skin and our school psychologist came to me one day and I was working with a child who within a full blown restraint and when I was done and he was fine and he was sitting in the desk and we were going over some math. She comes to me and she says, “That was absolutely masterful.” I stared at her, “Me? Are you talking about me?” She said, “That was fantastic.

I don’t know that anybody has ever come in and done that well.” It didn’t take long I was the lead therapist there and that worked out well and I moved around to a couple of other centers and they pulled me out of the classroom. I became the curriculum director. That required me to be certified in education. I got certified in behavior disorders. That was phenomenal because then I could look back having my own experience in the back of my mind I could still look at somebody else’s experience and see it with fresh new eyes. To me, what I think is a deeper richer understanding and when it came down to me as some kids have some grit and can survive and other kids to come to their circumstances.

I truly don’t see themselves as rising above their circumstances. My director said, “We’d really like to do some other things with you but you need more than a four year degree.” My husband, he thought about it and he said, “Did it mean student loans?” Probably because we make no money but the good thing is that I didn’t live on Medicaid. I didn’t live on food stamps anymore. I didn’t have to worry about a wick. I didn’t have to worry about my government housing. Those things I was pass those things. Praise God I was pass those things but it worked out well for me because when families came in I could say, “Did you know this particular organization is a one stop shop.”

You come in and you can find your probation officer, you can find a wick, a health care provider, you can find an OBGYN. You can find mental health services, you could find everything you want just from this one meeting that they have every month. Anyway . . .

J. Salazar: You knew directly, you could . . . That’s awesome.

Angela: Right. When you go down and you’re receiving food stamps and at the time there was paper checks, a monetary denominations on them. They don’t tell you did you know you can sell these for 70 cents on a dollar because it’s a lot. You don’t do that but the truth is you cannot use food stamps to buy diapers. You cannot use food stamps to buy toilet paper or toothpaste or a hair brush or any other hygiene product. You run those kinds of things and you learn where those resources are
available while you don’t encourage families to do that you can at least acknowledge that those things are going on.

They’re cognizant of it as you work with the family on meeting at night. I went back to school and I got my master’s degree in interrelated special education. By that time, No Child Left Behind was fully in place and everybody should learn to read by 2014. I thought if everybody learn to read by 2014 somebody knows how to read their vacation. Of course I took that on as my goal in life to teach everybody including those students that I was charged with their care. I went back and got my master’s and I duly enrolled in their reading specialist program so I picked up a number of certifications during that program and that was very powerful for me. I learned a lot with that one.

I graduated with my master’s in interrelated special education and every content area that I picked up I have everything. I did not get, I have pre-K through 12 and three content areas but only middle grades elementary and middle grades for math.

J. Salazar: Okay. Not bad for somebody who had to take five remedial classes, right?

Angela: Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

J. Salazar: Okay, go on.

Angela: I went from there. Go ahead.

J. Salazar: How did you choose the colleges you attended? What were they? How did you choose them?

Angela: The very first college I attended I attended strictly out of convenience where I should go to college was in the town that I was living. PII lived in PII, that’s where I moved to when I was in military. My reserve unit was PII and my school was on PII. I rented a really cheap apartment and I rode a bike to and from school and I just put a baby seat on the back and I took my phone with me. Once he started school though it was even easier because he got on the bus. Praise God for public transportation. I put him on the bus and then I would just have my classes start at 8 or 8:30. I could be in class all day long and study all day long and get home at 4 before he got off the bus at 4:30. That made life really easy and I just worked part time. That was prior to marrying my husband. Clearly, I’m still married.

J. Salazar: Okay, you’ve touched on a little bit of this. What agencies or people provided initial help? You talked about different things along the way but can you identify specific people that helped you in your life, overcome some of the obstacles that you faced?
Angela: There was a lady at church that babysat for me when I was in high school. Because I was working, I was going to school in the morning and working in the afternoon. He was born thought I just didn’t go to school but I have really good grades just from meeting up with . . . Let me take that back, it wasn’t good grades it was passing grades, okay? At that time it was good grades all right? Looking at it now it wasn’t good grades but the time it was celebratory. It was called for celebration. If I had more than one leg it’s for celebration. A lady at the church helped me with child care. She didn’t mind babysitting and I didn’t pay her for much. It’s hard to remember now thinking back but I know it wasn’t more than maybe $35 a week, 25, $35 a week if that oh my gosh Jena I really if that, she took good care of him.

J. Salazar: That’s awesome.

Angela: After high school my grandmother had him and then I went into the military. When I came out of military I went to college. PII helped babysit. PII helped babysit or he went to school with me that kind of thing.

J. Salazar: Okay. When you started your undergraduate program, did you have confidence initially in your abilities?

Angela: No.

J. Salazar: Tell me about that.

Angela: Just the idea that I was taking remedial classes, I knew that I had some ground to cover. I had a sense of even if I don’t finish them by golly I will finish this because that would mean that I really earn the high school diploma so they had meaning. They were hard. They were hard but they weren’t so difficult that I just couldn’t do them.

J. Salazar: Did your confidence grow as you went along?

Angela: Yes. Definitely. When I got, thank God the people who took remedial classes they did not just stick a grade on your paper and handed it back to you. They wrote feedback on your paper and handed it back to you. At the time I didn’t have words for it but now I do, they approach instruction with a growth mindset. Because there was no failure there was just growth. I honestly think and I don’t know this to be true but I honestly think that the presented the entire curriculum within the first five days and then just kept giving it to us and giving it to us and giving it to us and giving us feedback. Because as we went along there were people who did not have to attend classes as much as I did.

Which is a good thing because that meant that I had the teacher all to myself. Then I knew when the class ended and I knew what needed to be done by the time that the class ended. That was good and at the college level, when you’re told
about taking remedial classes you’re not talking about taking an easy show up sit
down science. You’re talking about biology with a lab. You’re talking about
chemistry and we’re making a lotion. We’re balancing equations and I didn’t
know any of that. I didn’t know, I didn’t know anything about balancing equation
but I did surprisingly intuitively know a lot about biology but I think it was
because I had read those nursing text books when I was nine. It just kept my
interest as far as biology went, that was okay. Chemistry was harder.

J. Salazar: Okay. What was your primary motivation initially? You touched on a little bit but
what was your primary motivation initially to continue on with your education?
High school didn’t go so well. What was your thinking? What was your thought
process to start college? What was your motivation?

Angela: PII told me, “You can’t live on welfare your whole life and you’re doing so well.
Just keep going.” So I did. Just having somebody believe in me I think and just
say that whether you think so or not I think that you can do this. You don’t have
to approach it with the idea that you’re going to graduate, approach it with the
idea that you’re just going to complete the first class. Which to me has been a
lifelong lesson that I don’t have to have my whole life mapped out. I just have to
know the next step.

J. Salazar: Isn’t that the truth. Okay. Again you’re talking about that child care was a definite
struggle. Something that, you were talking about something that you had to
continue to work out along the path. What other challenges did you face as you’re
going to school?

Angela: Gosh, study time because when he would come home he was little and he needed
play time, he needed a safe place to play. You can imagine that public housing is
not the safest place. When the sun goes down the freaks come out. They stay out
until the morning, until the time you’re trying to get up. In the meantime your kid
is trying to sleep just safe living arrangements was not necessarily challenging but
you always had to be conscious of where you were. It wasn’t like you could ask
your neighbor to watch your kid. That was dangerous because your neighbor
probably lost their kids that’s why they are there living in public housing.

Everybody has their own story. I did not find any neighbors that I would have left
my child with. Childcare, living arrangements, having enough money to eat, buy
your text books after your grant money runs out and always afraid to take out
student loans because I was afraid that I would not finish school and then I would
not be able to pay them back. I did not take out loans but PII was really good with
money and so she said, “It’s better to have little along the way and the approach
to it was once you have one you’re done then to overindulge now and then regret
having wallowed in that.” Praise God I did not take out a lot of student loans to
make and meet, I worked.
When I wasn’t in school I was working and that was the biggest thing. Childcare, housing, food. One Christmas I asked my dad my biological father I said . . . Gosh, I was approaching 25. I was getting ready to graduate with my four year degree when I called him and said, I don’t remember ever asking you for anything but if you don’t mind my kid really need some clothes and I cannot afford it. I can’t. I have two pairs of pants, two shirts, I’m working, I’m going to school, I’m doing what I can and I would really, really appreciate if he got some clothes that fit. Goodwill is great place because you can find good stuff for two bucks but when you don’t have two bucks I mean come on.

I told him, “I’m not asking you for money, I’m not asking for a hand out, I’m asking you to take my kid and buy some clothes.” My mother was so thrilled by that request my child got oh my gosh pajamas. We just sleep in our underwear, t-shirt but he got shoes, he got a nice pair of shoes, he got a pair of tennis shoes, he got some slippers, he got some pajamas, he got some t-shirts, he got some jeans. He got more clothes than I think he’d ever had in his whole life. That was a huge blessing just because at that juncture I was about to graduate and I did have a small student loan. It wasn’t much but I did have a small student loan at that time. Just basic necessities.

J. Salazar: Okay. Again, you touched on this a little bit but as far as what social or institutional factors can you identify as making a difference in your life as you continued on with your education? It goes along with the next question as well. Were you involved in school at all? Did you just go to class? Were you a part of any group or those kinds of things?

Angela: No. That is an emphatic no. I did not participate in anything. I rode my bike to school, I went to school, I went to the library, I sat in my professor’s . . . No joke I would sit by my professor’s door and wait for them to come so I can ask questions during the day because I didn’t have time to go sit in a philosophy circle and ask questions. While they are, they were my same age peers I did not view them that way. They were kids. I mean, honestly their conversations were about where they were going to go drinking on Thursday night and whether or not they were going to go to border for dinner. When I have enjoyed going to the border for dinner, oh my gosh yes but if I had gone to the border for dinner guess what? I would have been wiping my [tail end 00:56:39] with some lease because we wouldn’t have any money.

J. Salazar: I mean, the answer. You went to school there was no online opportunities you went to school in the physical classroom. Okay.

Angela: Yes.

J. Salazar: Okay, my study is geared on two percent of girls are successful to graduate college by 30. Why do you think you are compelled or motivated to achieve such a high level of education?
Initially to provide for my child. Make a better life. Initially. At the master’s level to prove to myself that I wasn’t stupid. At the specialist level, I really think that I should have gone ahead and just done my doctorate then but even then I didn’t think I could. I did my specialist. Even with the department care was like, “Angela, don’t do the specialist just go for your doctorate and if you don’t make it then you stop. You’ve not spin your wheels and you don’t have to go back and do this classes over. It doesn’t make sense.” Even then, remarried, a beautiful home, a beautiful family, successful in terms of way society would define success I still said to him I’m afraid I won’t make it.

I’m afraid I won’t make it. I did my specialist. At the doctoral level, it was almost like starting over again. My friend PII, PII daughter while I was doing my specialist degree she already had hers. She was the youngest director of a behavior health center ever in the [inaudible 00:58:56]. She’s amazing. She was diagnosed with cancer more than once. Metastasized, she died. Then, I’m so glad I got to be with her and walk her to her death and that was amazing because she died in February. I had already in the fall when we knew that it was coming well let me back up. The summer before we knew it was coming I asked her, “We started this life together, what do you want to do? How do you want this to go?”

Because I’m out here I’ll make this happen. The journey to the end of this thing, what do you want that to look like? She said, “Are you asking me do I have a bucket list?” Yeah, if you can go anywhere what would you do? She said, “I want to go to the Grand Teton, go down by the river. Lay in the grass and be next to God.” I said, “Girl, that’s it? Dream big.” After all that’s what she told me and she said, “Okay. If I could dream big then I would want to travel the United Kingdom.” I’m like, “Okay, where like Edinburgh, Scotland, Ireland? What do you have in mind?” She said, “No, all of the United Kingdom.” At that juncture she needed blood transfusion just to be alive, one of her vertebra had imploded so her back was broken in the spot. We had to be very, very careful with her but that’s what she wanted to do. We did several blood transfusions back to back and we flew to Scotland. We flew in to Edinburgh, initially Amsterdam and then Edinburgh. You can imagine.

J. Salazar: Beautiful.

We had an absolute blast. We got back, we were gone for four weeks and when we got back she said, “All right, that’s it. I’m ready for whatever this is.” I said, “Okay.” She said, “What’s your bucket list?” I said I’m going to finish that doctor degree that you should have already gotten. If you haven’t been sick then you would have. I applied like Christmas time and that fall, after we came back from PII I applied at a couple of different places and one place I was going to have to pay a lot of out of state tuition. My husband is like, “I don’t know. We want to make this commitment to you and to your school and things like that but I understand why you want to do it. We’ll do this thing.”
PII had accepted me, I was very afraid of the online hybrid model but my husband found that very enticing for him. It was very for him that was the best way because I could still be home, I could cook, I could do it on my own time. I could do that midnight whatever and it would not take me away from my family. I chose PII not knowing that if you are a veteran and you have an honorable discharge you get a 50% discount and you don’t have to pay your [inaudible 01:02:25]. Oh my gosh, it was amazing. Again I did not have to take out tons of students loans. I have had to take out some but not so much along the way and it has been very slow, it’s been very difficult.

Every class I’ve taken I’ve gone into thinking, one day at a time girl. One day at a time. Now that I’m at the end of it I’m just like, “Are you kidding me? This is really happening? I’ve really done this.” The beauty of it is that my kids see it. My kids, my mother is a full-fledged alcoholic. She started drinking at 4:30 in the morning. She got a pot of coffee and a case of beer and she’s still nursing mind you. Lost several jobs but she’s still nursing. My daughter said, “I think that I’ll go into the medical field.” I’m like, “Just don’t do things the way I did it. I want better for you because I see it in you.” As it turns out she’s 16 and she just started college. I’m proud of her. I’m really proud of her.

J. Salazar: Why do you think that 98%, the reverse 98% of girls in very similar situations as yours weren’t able to achieve what you did? Why do you think that is? Why do you think 98% of the girls are unable to graduate in college or achieve their academic goals?

Angela: Because they focused on finding . . .

J. Salazar: I lost you.

Angela: A relation because . . . Are you with me?


Angela: They focused on finding a relationship, finding somebody to take care of them rather than standing around through fate. Now, that is strictly an opinion. I don’t know that that is true for everybody but I do know that the girls and I know two others who’ve gone to college and were teen moms. They are so focused on getting that next relationship, that next fix, that next who’s going to take care of me kind of thing and inevitably in doing that they have more children. Which compounds their problems. It’s almost like they shoot themselves in the foot. They self-defeating in an effort to move towards what they think is the right thing to do they make choices that prevent them from moving forward. I don’t know that that’s true for everyone. That is just my perspective.

J. Salazar: Okay. What was your expectation once you finished your college degree?
Angela: Which one?

J. Salazar: Your four year, your undergrad.

Angela: I really thought that if I could get a job, if I could secure an entry level job 23, $25,000 a year I would have reached the apex of my life.

J. Salazar: You didn’t see grad school, you didn’t see that . . .

Angela: No.

J. Salazar: Still you’re at that point in your thinking that you couldn’t do it or you didn’t have the ability to move on to go forward, right? You’re frozen again. I can see you.

Angela: Okay. Everything that I’ve done, every position that I’ve taken on, everything that I’ve done, I served five different counties and man is it easier to work with kids than it is to work with adults? I did enjoy that. I really did and I learned a lot about leadership. At that juncture I had mastered myself in a number of ways. Which is why I was selected to do this things, to write standard toward the state, I don’t write those to close and restraint laws for our state but I think I was selected to do this things because I had mastered myself. Those three years of working with other teachers and traveling around I learned a lot about how to lead others.

I’m still learning that every single day I learn something new. It maybe something small or not. It might be something bigger but everyday I’m still learning that. Still learning that.

J. Salazar: Just for clarification. At what age were you when you received your undergrad?

Angela: It was 1996, it was May of 1996 so I would have been 26.


Angela: It took me . . . Right at four years I guess.

J. Salazar: Okay. That concludes my questions.

INTERVIEW 7

J. Salazar: My name is Jena Salazar and I am here with, can you say and spell your name?

Samantha: My name is Samantha S-A-M-A-N-T-H-A
J. Salazar: OK, well thank you very much. The first question is please describe your life before becoming pregnant. Tell me about your family.

Samantha: Well, I have an older brother and a younger sister. We’re all very close in age. Was always a good student. We were in a rural area so there was not really a whole lot of [inaudible 00:43].

I was never really interested in sports. I did a few, I guess academic things after school. Yeah, I was pretty much just a good little child.

J. Salazar: OK. Both your mom and dad in the home?

Samantha: Right. They were both in the home.

J. Salazar: OK. Prior to finding out you were pregnant, what was your attitude towards school or education in general?

Samantha: My goal, my dream since I was little has always been to get a Master’s Degree. I always knew I was going to college. I was always an honor student without trying, so I was pretty positive towards school.

J. Salazar: OK. Prior to you finding out you were pregnant, how did your parents feel about education?

Samantha: My parents had always valued education. My mom has her high school diploma. My dad I remember when I was little, he got his Bachelor’s degree and he always talked about sending my mom back to college.

She was never interested in going to college, but always appreciated that he was interested in sending her.

J. Salazar: OK. How did they feel about college for you?

Samantha: They always told me I would do whatever I wanted to do when I grew up. That everything was within reach.

J. Salazar: Did that change at all when they found out you were pregnant?

Samantha: No, I actually lived with my parents and went to the four year college that was 30 minutes down the road.

J. Salazar: OK.

Samantha: They still helped me get through everything I needed to do.
J. Salazar: What was their expectation in terms of you going to college? You said you wanted to have your Masters degree. Was that something that they saw in your future? What was their expectation of you as a member of their family?

Samantha: Yeah. They’ve always known that I was going to. I remember when I found out that I was pregnant, my mom asked what we were going to do and I was like well, I can just get a job as a secretary somewhere. My mom said no, you won’t. You won’t be happy that way. You’re going to go to college and get your degree. That’s the only way you’ll be happy in life.

J. Salazar: OK. What role did education play in your family? Your siblings and your parents? You said your mom graduated high school and dad went back for his Bachelor’s degree after he had children it sounds like. Right?

Samantha: Right.

J. Salazar: What about your siblings?

Samantha: My younger sister has started three or four different programs and given up on all of them within a matter of months. My brother went to a culinary school and got a, I think it’s like a certification. I think it’s probably two to three years worth of college.

J. Salazar: OK.

Samantha: He did what he wanted to do. I’m not sure how hers lines up with her actual plans.

J. Salazar: OK. What did your family view as your role as a female?

Samantha: You’re going to have to be a little more specific on that. I’m not sure I understand.

J. Salazar: Did they have any sort of gender specific ideas of what was expected of you versus your brother or what’s sort of your role, especially as a mom?

Samantha: No, my family’s always been more about being who you are and I guess my younger sister, she was always the tomboy and I was always more of the girly girl. I got to have fun. I can’t believe I thought it was fun cleaning the house with my mom on the weekends, while she went to help my grandfather on the farm.

J. Salazar: OK.

Samantha: We sort of developed our own personalities and the expectations came along with those.
J. Salazar: OK. The next is basically your whole story. What I want to know is I want you to describe your experience from the time you found out you were pregnant to the time you entered undergraduate school.

The circumstances surrounding the baby’s father, what happened once you found out as far as that relationship, how did you go to school? All of those things. Just your whole story. How you told your parents you were pregnant.

Samantha: OK. I guess he was my first serious boyfriend. I was 14 when we met. He was 17. I remember the first time we met somebody, one of my friends saw us talking and said, hey, you probably shouldn’t be talking to him.

So of course I went back and had another conversation with him. It was a pretty small county. There was one high school for the entire county. Very small. He was in the same grade or maybe a grade above my brother, so a lot of my brother’s friends knew him.

My brother knew he was probably not the best guy to be around, but again, I didn’t really pay any attention.

We dated pretty steady, I mean it was high school, so it was probably off and on, but we dated pretty steady up until I turned 16. So for the better part of a year. Then he enlisted in the Army and I broke up with him.

As soon as he left I found out I was pregnant. We decided I would write him a letter, explained everything and he decided it would be best for us to be back together again.

I remember I was at the beach that weekend and started throwing up. I went straight from the beach to summer camp and I was at summer camp throwing up every morning. I got back from summer camp and I told my mother and she said no you’re not. Don’t say that.

She went out and bought a test. I had my driver’s ed test that afternoon and as soon as I finished the driver’s ed test I took the pregnancy test. Then we went and told my dad. The two of them busted out in tears together. I’m sure I was crying right there with them.

J. Salazar: You were 16?

Samantha: I was 16. I guess it was probably July, early July, maybe late June when I found out. We went and we told my grandparents after we had the first ultrasound picture. My family’s all very close together. My mom and most of her sisters and my grandparents all live within like two minutes of each other.
My aunt had been trying to have a baby and when I went and told them she said well you know, we could adopt the baby and he’d still be a part, like I don’t think I’ll be able to do that. My mom talked for a little while about adoption. I was like I don’t think I can do that.

I guess growing up I was always ambitious. I never really expected I would ever have kids. I was always sort of like, if kids were ever in my future I would adopt a kid that needed a family or something like that. I never really planned on having one.

J. Salazar: So he’s in the Army at this point and you decide to get back together, so he’s at Basic Training when he finds out. What happens from there?

Samantha: We stayed in touch while he was in the Basic Training then the whatever, extra school after that. I think he had two weeks break between the two and he was allowed to come home for that. We were sort of engaged. We hadn’t really started making any plans but we were saying we were engaged and going to get married.

Let’s see. I remember him coming home in October because he was there for the ultrasound when we found out that we’d be having a boy. He was living at PII at the time after he finished all his school he went down to PII, which was only like four hours from where I lived so it wasn’t a big deal. He’d come back on weekends.

Then my sister started dating one of his friends that he brought home over the weekend. The friend started telling me all these stories about stuff that was going on down there.

I think he was always sort of angry about everything. I remember crying a lot when I was pregnant. I have no idea if it would have been as bad without the pregnancy hormones, but let’s see.

I had the baby and he wasn’t able to be there right then. He was there within like 12 hours I think. He had to wait until he could leave the base.

He was born February 12th. I think he left on Valentine’s Day to go back down to PII. He was deploying four months later so there was some time between when my son was born and the father deployed. He spent a month in PII for some sort of training because he was going over to Afghanistan and Iraq or whichever one was big at the time.

They had to do some sort of professional combat training for that. That was where the tensions really rose. Then I think my son was three months when I just said I couldn’t do it anymore.
I broke up with him. I told him it was the best thing for us. I guess I was 17 at that point.

J. Salazar: What grade were you in and did you have any break in your education?

Samantha: No, actually when I was pregnant one of my teachers lived very close to the house and so he brought all of, I used to babysit his kids in high school and he brought all of my books and all of my work and made arrangements with all of my teachers for anything I needed.

I was in eleventh grade when I had to [inaudible 13:33] school. I think, yeah, in April, so I was in eleventh grade. Then in twelfth grade, yeah, we split up before I started twelfth grade.

J. Salazar: OK.

Samantha: Then I started twelfth grade that fall. I did classes, an independent study through that same teacher. It was Anatomy. He was a professor through the college in Anatomy so he let me take that course through him. I just don’t remember if I got the college credit for it or not.

I did a few other just general requirements that I needed for my twelfth grade classes. I started college my last semester of my senior year in high school.

J. Salazar: OK.

Samantha: I started PII, January 2010, I graduated from high school June of 2010. I made arrangements starting that at the end of my eleventh grade year with my guidance counselor making sure everything, all of my requirements would be met and I needed it. I didn’t want to sit around and take a bunch of easy classes I didn’t really need to be there for. I know I’ll just lose my steam doing that.

With PII I just sort of wanted to get everything done and underway.

J. Salazar: OK. You started January of what would be your senior year taking courses at the university. Was there any break in your education during your Bachelor’s degree program?

Samantha: No, actually there was no break. My summer, my first summer in college I didn’t take any classes and I took classes every summer and Christmas intercession and I had no less than 15 credits a semester. I was working at least one job through the entire thing.

J. Salazar: OK, and how old were you when you graduated?

Samantha: I graduated last May, I was 21.
J. Salazar: Awesome.

Samantha: I did it in three and a half years.

J. Salazar: That’s great. OK. How did you choose the college that you attended?

Samantha: Because it was 30 minutes from my parent’s house and I knew I couldn’t have done it if I wasn’t living at home with them.

J. Salazar: Right. OK. Please describe any events or agencies or people that gave you initial support. So you had your parents. Did they provide daycare while you were in school?

Samantha: No, my grandmother, she was retired. She retired probably a year or so before I got pregnant. She kept my son the entire time for the first two years. When he was two he started going to daycare once a week and then twice a week and then three days a week.

He had a daycare in town when I started taking him to the daycare. There was a PII in PII when I was pregnant. They did some little counseling sessions and I think I met with them six times over a period of like four or five months.

They run a little thrift shop and at the end of the time they asked what I needed that I hadn’t got from the baby showers and they sent me home with a duffel bag full of stuff. Everything that I didn’t have or that I may need down the road.

J. Salazar: That’s awesome.

Samantha: It was.

J. Salazar: OK. Did you have confidence initially in your ability to continue with your education or did that increase over time?

Samantha: I don’t think it ever decreased. I think it was always there, but it definitely got a lot stronger as I got closer to the end. I’m actually still in classes now somewhat. I’m working towards my CPA license and I just now before we started talking, finished an exam for that. I’m two semesters away from being completely done with this. Then all the hard stuff is behind me.

J. Salazar: Right.

Samantha: Now it’s sort of at the surreal part of it.

J. Salazar: What’s your undergraduate degree?

Samantha: My undergrad’s in Accounting.
J. Salazar: Awesome. What were your primary motivations for continuing with your education?

Samantha: Because I would never let myself live it down if I didn’t. Like I said, it’s always been something I’ve wanted to do and now I think after I had PII I just knew that I didn’t want to waitress forever and be one of those people that is always just so unhappy to wake up and go to work in the morning.

J. Salazar: OK. Is it fair to say that you saw a correlation between going to college and kind of paying the price now for the future that you wanted?

Samantha: Definitely. I used tell my mom, during college, my last two years of college I worked 35 to 45 hours a week and I still had I, think those semesters I had up to 24 credit hours a semester.

I had a lot of waitressing shifts in the evening and I worked at an office doing bookkeeping work between classes. My mom said something to me about how busy my whole schedule seemed and how I still had time when I came home just to play Legos or whatever.

I was like you know, the whole rest of my life is going to be like a vacation compared to this. I guess I definitely saw to pay the price now and get the benefits later.

J. Salazar: Awesome. What social or institutional factors can you identify in helping you make a difference while you continued with your education?

Did you take advantage of any sort of tutoring, any kind of socializing groups that you were involved in or anything that kind of helped you along the path? Or were you pretty self motivated and was able to do it on your own?

Samantha: No, my social life has always been behind. I have never been an outgoing person. My social life definitely suffered after I had PII. I had, I guess in high school friendships are a lot more shallow. I had a lot of friendships fall apart just right off the get go, because we were spending time doing different things.

Then it became much less important to me to try. So I had a few close friends from college and there’s really . . . That’s about it. I never spent a lot of time socializing. The people that I was friends with, I was friends with while I was doing whatever we did together and then that was it.

J. Salazar: OK.

Samantha: I didn’t do any social groups. No clubs in college, no actual socializing clubs in college. I was a member of a few Honors Fraternities of AI fraternity of a . . . I
also worked with a CPA exam review company promoting their product on campus. That’s about it.

J. Salazar: OK. Did you attend school physically or did you go online?

Samantha: Mostly physically.

J. Salazar: OK.

Samantha: There were a few online classes.

J. Salazar: Why do you think you were compelled or motivated to achieve such a high level of education? The fact of the matter is the reason for my study is 98% of girls who are pregnant 17 or younger, such as yourself, do not go on. Why are you? Why were you part of the 2% motivated to go on?

Samantha: I think it’s my personality. I really do. Like I said, it’s always been something that I wanted. I like to get what I want. I am not a patient person. I don’t believe in waiting and doing it later on.

If it’s something within reach, I expect it to be done. I just do. I’ve always been a good student, so school was never really work for me and I just, I don’t know. PII was just that last little bit of motivation. I knew if I took a break I was not going to be able to finish and that was not OK with me.

J. Salazar: OK. Why do you think you were able to achieve your college degree, but yet so many people in your situation did not or can’t?

Samantha: I had an amazing support system. I really did.

J. Salazar: That consisted of who?

Samantha: My parents were definitely there anytime I needed them. Anytime I needed to cram for a last minute test, they were always there to help out. They were there when I needed to work a late Friday night shift or something like that. If I needed just a minute of me time, they were there.

My grandmother definitely helped out because daycare is ridiculously expensive. I guess I was able to get out of it without a whole lot of financial burden. I did scholarships. I got out of college with less than $10,000 in loans.

I didn’t have to pay off a lot of daycare expenses because of my grandmother. I was able to work. I had some really great bosses. I had my parents, my grandparents, they were all there to help whenever I needed anything.
So I think that definitely them combined with being able to get out of it without the whole 30,000, 40,000, $50,000 in student loans hanging over my head definitely helped too.

J. Salazar: Can you identify looking back the specific obstacles or challenges that you faced during this process?

Samantha: I think that my biggest obstacle, I’m not a person that likes confrontation and PII father and I have had some pretty heated confrontations. He’s pretty much all but out of the picture at this point, as in we hear from him about once a year.

I think that when things were a little bit more fresh, it was probably a lot harder because he likes confrontation. He likes drama and I don’t. I don’t want any of it around and he was always trying to force it.

That was probably my biggest thing, is that was a whole level of stress or a level of emotion really, that I just didn’t want any part of. That sort of didn’t help when I was trying to get everything done.

J. Salazar: Right. How old is PII now?

Samantha: He’s five.


INTERVIEW 8

J. Salazar: Okay. I’m Jena Salazar. I am here with? Can you state your first name?

Marrika: Marrika

J. Salazar: Can you spell that for me?

Marrika: M-A-R-R-I-

J. Salazar: Very good. Well, I appreciate you working with me and answering my questions tonight.

Marrika: Okay.

J. Salazar: Let’s see. Question number one, please describe your life before becoming a pregnant teenager. What was life like for you?

Marrika: I lived with my mother. She worked in administration with the government agency here, pretty regular, middle class. I was in high school and not taking it
too seriously. I had a few advanced classes, but mainly just so I wouldn’t have to do too many papers. The advanced classes were more discussion. I like that. I had a few friends, not too social, didn’t do too much. I’m trying to think what else. I wasn’t a bad kid. I just didn’t really think about the consequences of my actions. That was pretty much how my life was. I would skip school sometimes, did a few things like . . . I don’t think I was out of control, but I probably did the average stuff that teenagers do.

J. Salazar: Okay. Prior to finding out you’re pregnant, what was your attitude towards school or education, generally?

Marrika: I just thought you had to go and pass the class. I wasn’t trying to excel or anything. I just thought, “If I pass, that’s good enough. Maybe my mom will get off my back.” That kind of thing. Everybody in my family goes to college, so I just thought it was something you had to do. I didn’t care what I majored at. It was just like, something I knew I would be doing but didn’t really put a lot of thought into it.

J. Salazar: Okay. Prior to your parents, your mom, finding out that you are pregnant, how did she feel about school as far as, you said it was expected of you, so what was her attitude about you and your education?

Marrika: She got her college degree from PII in PII right before I was born, when she was 33. She always told me, “If I could do it, you can do it.” She had my brother. He’s 12 years older than me. She was saying how she was a single mom, she went to school and always told me before I had any children, if she could do it, I could do it. There was no excuses. My mom is really like OCD, so she kept on me constantly to the point I couldn’t even . . . I just toned her out completely. I think it had a negative result on me because I would just say, “Mom, I don’t care. I don’t care. I don’t care.”

J. Salazar: Now, did her attitude as far as your education changed when she found out about the baby?

Marrika: I think so. Well, before I got pregnant, she told me in my senior year, she said, “If you get on A/B honor roll, I’ll get you a car.” That was my motivation. I actually got on the A/B honor roll right before I found out I was pregnant, but I didn’t get a car.

J. Salazar: You did?

Marrika: I didn’t, until PII was born. Yeah, I didn’t get one. The sole purpose of me getting one later was just to transport her around. I was kind of disappointed. That was the first time ever, I think, in high school that I’ve gotten on the A/B honor roll. Yeah.
J. Salazar: What was their expectation in terms of education? You said that the people in your family go to school, went to college, is that both for male and female?

Marrika: It’s mainly males in my family.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Marrika: We have one female cousin and she did not go to college. She’s worked on a warehouse her entire life and that’s definitely not what I wanted. My grandparents and my aunts, I have five aunts and they all have really high expectations of us and just seeing all the boys do everything, I think I was expected as the one girl. My cousin, she was raised by my grandparents and kind of adopted, so I don’t know if they have the same expectations of her as they had of me, but I always felt like in comparison to my cousins in having to do as well as what they’ve done.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Marrika: It was a lot of pressure.

J. Salazar: Right. What role did education play in your family? Now, you mentioned a little bit about that, but do you have siblings and do they have a college degree? Was it something that was discussed in your home? What role did education have in your immediate family?

Marrika: Well, I have a brother and he went to the navy at 18, but he did get his college degree. My mother has her college degree. My father does not have his college degree. Basically, either everyone in my family went into the military or they went to college or they ended up at the bottom run and just having like a minimum wage job.

J. Salazar: Happening in between.

Marrika: [Inaudible 00:05:29].

J. Salazar: Okay. What did your family view as your role as a female in life?

Marrika: I think I had the same expectations as my cousins and my brother to be successful and have a career, but I have more of like I should be married at this time, I should have . . . Most of my cousins don’t have children. They’re into their 40s and late 30s and don’t have any children, never been married and it’s like, they don’t get the same pressure I do when I come home. It’s like, “Are you dating? What’s going on?” That’s the only difference, I think, but it’s still the same educationally.
J. Salazar: Okay. The next question is sort of the all encompassing question. I would like to know . . . I would like for you, rather, to describe your experiences from the time you found out you were pregnant to the time you entered your undergraduate program. Your whole story. How did you tell your mom? What was her reaction? How old were you? What stage in life? When did you start college? Just really go through the timeline of what happened from the time you found out to the time you started college.

Marrika: Okay. Well, I found out . . . It was only sexual encounter. I mean, it wasn’t my first, but I had been pretty good before then. It was one sexual encounter with a guy that I have been speaking to before as a sophomore, but we kind of hooked up that one night. I didn’t think anything else about it after the fact. It’s just me and my mom and the household, so two women. She knows everything about me and it was always hard to hide from here. At that time I remember, I was a Governor’s page for the whole week. I think at the end of the week or something you get like a hundred dollars, so I bought some shoes and I went to PII and got a pregnancy test with that money, I remember that, and they told me I was pregnant.

When I came home, I told her that I went to the library. I think I went for maybe like a week and she told me, she’s like, “You haven’t had a period, what’s going on?” I figured, I’m 17, I’m almost grown, I’m out here. I was like, “Well, I’m pregnant.” That’s what it is. She basically said she would stand by me whatever my decision was. I figured I was almost an adult so I could take care of it and I said, “I’m going to have the baby.” I didn’t realize that I’d get a condition called hyperemesis gravidarum which means you cannot eat, you can’t drink, you can’t hold down anything.

J. Salazar: Wow.

Marrika: I had to be hospitalized several times. It was hard to be in class with that and having test and midterms and all that stuff. My mom had to constantly take off work to take me to the hospital or take me to the doctor, which was really hard on her being a single parent and being the sole provider. I felt really bad. That’s when I felt really guilty. I felt really depressed that my actions had caused her all of this trouble, so I took it upon myself to look for other options. I found a maternity home that would take me, so that way, she wouldn’t have to take me to the doctor and take me to all those stuff, and they would do it.

The only thing is, it was a like a Christian type place and you couldn’t listen to any music, you couldn’t make phone calls to anybody without their permission. It’s like jail a little bit, but they were really sweet, really nice, but as a teenager it’s like I couldn’t deal, but I stayed there. I said I would do it and I stayed there. She didn’t want me to go, but I saw the toll that it was taking on her, so I decided to be there. I had to transfer schools in the middle of my senior year, transfer to a different school. No friends, like I would just leave campus and just go eat by myself on a bench somewhere. It was just horrible.
Then, at that time, that was like ‘98, I didn’t know anybody that was pregnant. I didn’t people that were pregnant. Now, it’s pretty common, but I felt like I was the only one. They made us go to this teen group, teen support team, support group every week and they would call over the loud speaker and it was like so embarrassing. The only people I knew that were pregnant were in this teen group, but I didn’t know them. I didn’t want to know them. They weren’t my friends. I was new to this school, so I didn’t care. I just wanted to graduate.

I did graduate from PII here which is different. I went to my other high school the whole three and a half years and I was only there for half a semester. That really bummed me out. I didn’t get to graduate with everybody I went to middle school with, high school with, and I didn’t want them to know I was pregnant so I hid it from everybody. I didn’t know that my old school’s graduation was right after mine, so I ran into them after the graduation.

Everybody found out I was pregnant. Obviously, I was nine months when I graduated. I was really small because I got so sick, I actually lost weight. It was probably hard to tell especially with the gown on, but people found out that summer. When I told the baby’s father, which later became my husband, if you believe that, it’s crazy. I told him and he really didn’t want to have anything to do with me, denied it the whole time. We didn’t have any support from him. I had a boyfriend that I talked to from my old school . . .

J. Salazar: Hold on a minute. Hold on.

Marrika: . . . but of course he didn’t want like baby [inaudible 00:11:38].

J. Salazar: You’re going in and out so just give it a second to catch up for a second.

Marrika: Okay.

J. Salazar: I’m not sure what’s happening. That’s strange. It was good and now all of a sudden it started going crazy. Can you hear me?

Marrika: Okay. I can hear you.


Marrika: Yeah. We stopped talking when I delivered and I felt like he didn’t want to be with him [inaudible 00:12:11], but I did not like him in that way. I realized that [inaudible 00:12:15]. Then, of course he knew my baby’s father, so it was a whole conflict with that. It just made the situation worse. He heard this rumor that I’m with this guy and then I have the baby, but six weeks after she was born, he finally stepped up and became a part of her life. We were together every day after that. I graduated, then my mom was like, “What are you going to do?” She lost
her job because after you deliver from the maternity home, you have to go back home.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Marrika: They don’t let you stay there. I went back home and she lost her job. Two weeks after I had my daughter, I started waitressing at this restaurant while my mom kept her and I gave her all the tips and all the money, and I was just like, “I have to do something.” I registered at PII, which is our community college. It was weird, I had applied for a couple of colleges and actually gotten accepted to one here. I always think about that like, what would have happened if I went to that like college and stayed on campus, and all that stuff. I got accepted to the community college and I could get a Pell Grant since I was a mom. I didn’t have to use my mother’s income. That was good. I started going there. I think that’s everything from the time I became pregnant up until I had her and went to school.

J. Salazar: At what point did you marry your baby’s father?

Marrika: I was 23, so it was five years.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Marrika: [Inaudible 00:13:57], but we moved. At 19, I moved out of mom’s house and moved . . . I didn’t plan to move out with him. I planned to get my own place and he kind of moved in with me after I moved out. We’re divorced now.

J. Salazar: Okay. Talk more . . .

Marrika: Of course that was [inaudible 00:14:18].

J. Salazar: Talk more about school choice and how that exact [inaudible 00:14:23] in just a minute.

Marrika: Okay.

J. Salazar: Okay. How did you choose the college you attended? You initially went to Wake Tech because it was close by, money was probably a factor, I’d imagine.

Marrika: Yeah. They offered [inaudible 00:14:45].

J. Salazar: I don’t know why I can’t hear you. You’re going in and out.

Marrika: I [inaudible 00:14:52] later.

J. Salazar: Hold on. Let’s just . . .
Marrika: I had to get [inaudible 00:14:57] that were [inaudible 00:14:57].

J. Salazar: I can’t hear your answer. I don’t know what’s going on, why it’s having a hard time.

Marrika: Okay. Can you hear me?

J. Salazar: Yeah. I can hear you now.

Marrika: Okay.

J. Salazar: Go ahead.

Marrika: I kind of got the left over classes, so I was going back and forth and wasting a lot of gas, and was totally broke trying to go to school and then I had to find . . . My mom started working again, so I had do find a babysitter. I found this lady that charged $40 a week for full time care and it was horrible. My daughter stayed in the car seat all day, but that’s all I could afford. Once I started going to class, I felt like I was getting [inaudible 00:15:48] life a little bit. I was able to get around other people and know that I was working towards something eventually. I didn’t want to give up school because that’s my only life ahead outside of being a mom, and my little part time job and stuff.

J. Salazar: Right. Okay. Please describe any events or agencies or people in your life that provided initial support. You had your mom, were there any other agencies or people who were involved in providing support for you?

Marrika: When I was at the maternity home, the house parents were really helpful and supportive. They were a slightly religious, I guess somewhat spiritual, but they were really hard core so it was kind of hard to talk to them about a lot of things that I was feeling and what was going on. I had a best friend that I’ve had since I was 10 and she was really supportive. It was weird, she was supportive but then she was like doing her own thing. I was really jealous of her, but she stayed there when a lot of my friends stopped hanging around me.

Agencies? The reason I became a social worker is because I had such bad experiences with every agency. My mom, she’s never received any social services, but when I joined the maternity home, they said I had to apply for Medicaid to pay for that, so I applied there and it’s like, I just remembered it being horrible and being treated horribly. I thought if I can help somebody and be different, I would want to do that. After I had my daughter, I applied for a program Work First, I think they call it welfare or [inaudible 00:17:36] or whatever.

It was just horrible. It was like sitting in a room all day and just being embarrassed and looking at other people that need the same service and just
wanted to cry. It was just a horrible experience. I only got it for like a couple of months. It was terrible. I really have a small circle. My ex’s family was really helpful, but they really wanted to take over as far as my daughter was concerned and I didn’t like that at all. Really, they liked that I was doing something with my life, but they are always thinking like I wanted to be better than him or that I was treating him differently. They made me feel bad for wanting more for my life and he wasn’t doing the same.

J. Salazar: Did you have confidence initially in your abilities to go to college or did they increase over time?

Marrika: I’m always tested, gifted or academically gifted or whatever. I didn’t think too much of it, but I found it pretty easy to go to school and to have discussions and do papers. The professors always told me that I was a pretty good student. I never thought it would be hard. Now, masters level was like horrible, but before then, I didn’t see it as a problem. It was more of a scheduling thing and just being tired, and just not wanting to be there a lot of the time.

J. Salazar: Okay. What were your primary motivations for continuing with your degree, with your education in general?

Marrika: Applying for jobs. When I apply for a job, I always wanted to know that there were no barriers in me getting that job. If I had an associates and they said they needed a Bachelor’s, I was like, “I need to get my bachelors.” If they said they need a Master’s, I need to get my Master’s. If that’s the job I want, I want to get it and I don’t want anything to be in the way of that especially because I know I’m capable. It’s not like I can’t do it and I had enough support, just enough to be able to get it done, so why not utilize those people while I could.

J. Salazar: Absolutely. Could you recognize the correlation between your choices and your actions and the future that you wanted?

Marrika: Yeah. I think if I didn’t have my daughter, I don’t know if I would have pursued a lot of that stuff. I probably would have taken like a five-year hiatus after high school. I had zero motivation at all to do anything. I mean, it was bad situation but the timing worked out. I don’t know if I would have been able to graduate high school if I had her while in high school. I had her like two weeks after graduation. I think things worked out pretty well and she really motivated me because I knew I want to provide at least the level of income that my mother did, if I couldn’t at least give her the life that I had, I want to give her more than that, but that should be the minimum to at least give her the life that I had.

J. Salazar: Right. Okay. Please describe the challenges you faced while working toward your degree. You talked about of course scheduling and being tired, were there any other challenges that you can identify as you’re working through that process?
Marrika: I’m just always having to work. I’ve never just been able to be a student. I’ve always had to have a full time job, sometimes a full time and a part time job, and working. I felt like I wasn’t being a mother. I mean, I knew my goal was to provide for her a better life, but I felt like I wasn’t being a mother and being there for her. I’ve taken a lot of breaks from my education even though I did graduate before 30. There’s a lot of breaks in there.

J. Salazar: Right.

Marrika: I got my bachelors at 27 and my associates at 23. Every time I graduate I take a couple of years off and it’s not because I can’t go school, it’s like mentally I just need a break.

J. Salazar: Just need to recuperate.

Marrika: Yeah.

J. Salazar: Okay. What social, cognitive, or institutional factors can you identify is making a difference in your life as you continue with your education? What I mean by that, were there any sort of activities that you were involved in that helped provide motivation or were there . . . I mean, you had said that school came relatively easy for you so there wasn’t any cognitive deficiencies that made it difficult, so that’s good. What about school? Any sort of clubs or anything that you were involved in that allowed you to keep that motivation up?

Marrika: When I was younger like elementary and middle school, I was a big reader, big writer like huge nerd, just every club my mom could put me in. When I went in to high school, I was involved in zero stuff. I could have been. I was in the Debate Club, like I was in cheerleading


Marrika: Okay.

J. Salazar: Okay, go ahead. Sorry.

Marrika: Once I got to high school, all I cared about was people liking me and having friends and trying to be popular, which I never could grasp how people become popular. All of my friends that were in the academically gifted programs with me in middle school, I kind of just ditched them to be around people that were drinking, partying, smoking, anything that would make me popular. That was my goal in life at that time. I didn’t see anything else. Any club that I could be in that couldn’t make me popular, I wasn’t interested in it.

J. Salazar: Did that change in college?
Marrika: I’m sorry?

J. Salazar: Did that change in college?

Marrika: The only things I really joined was Social Work Club and because I didn’t have time to really devote to any other things. If I could, I’d tell my daughter, she’s a sophomore now in high school, she’s involved in five different things. I want her to enhance her college transcript and resume, whatever. I can’t say I was involved in too much.

J. Salazar: Okay. Basically, did you go to school online or on campus?

Marrika: On campus. I had maybe three online classes my whole career. It was a lot of on campus classes, a lot of work, a lot of driving.

J. Salazar: Okay. It’s fair to say that you went to campus, you went to class and you went home or you went to another job, you didn’t involve yourself in extracurricular as well in college.

Marrika: No. I was an old lady. I was an old married lady and didn’t do anything until I got divorced.

J. Salazar: Why do you think you were compelled or motivated to achieve a high level of academic success? This study that I’m doing is focusing on those 2% of women, 2%, you’re part of that, that found the motivation to continue on. Why do you think you were able to do that?

Marrika: I never thought I couldn’t do it. It’s surprising to hear that number because I didn’t think of myself as different as anyone else. I thought it was bad that I got my degree at 27, it should have happened at 22. To me, I felt bad that it took so long. I just knew it was something I didn’t want my daughter to say, “My mom has a high school diploma.” I was able to say, “My mom went to college.” I didn’t want her to . . . I think that was my main thing like for her to be proud of me, to kind of correct the situation like, “Even though I had you as a teenager, see how much I’ve done and you should have no excuse.”

My mom always told me and it kind of went in one ear and out the other. Now, I could say you have no excuse. I even was thinking about joining the army. I took the test and everything, but I would have had to leave her with my mom and I didn’t want to do that, so I said, “Well, that’s out. I have to think of another option.” School was my way to be able to provide for her and do the best for her.

J. Salazar: Okay. On the flip side of that, you were able to finish, you were part of that elite 2%. Why do you think that 98% who are in the very same situation you are, similar stories, are not able to continue with their education? Why do you think that is?
Marrika: I work with pregnant women and I’ve seen a lot of them probably wouldn’t, and not to say I’m flipping or something, maybe I should. I would say a good number of them may not have finished, anyway, school with or without a child. That’s one part of it. Another part is people just . . . They hate school. Some people get to a point they just don’t want to do anymore school. If they can think of another option to make money, and there’s plenty of professions you can do without a college education and make pretty good money. Then also, I see a lot of women that don’t want to go further than the man that they’re with, which was, probably if I had listened to his family, because I remember when I got my bachelors degree and her grandma said, “If she gets one more degree, she’s not going to need you anymore.”

He asked me, he’s like, “Do you think that’s going to happen?” I said, “No,” but it did happen later on. I’ve seen that a lot where you’re just comfortable in whatever is going on in your life right now is acceptable to you and I never found, even at this point of my life, I don’t feel that’s acceptable. I feel like I can do more. That’s just me and my personal, you know. Some people can be happy with the job making $10 an hour as long as it’s meeting their needs and I’ve never felt like that.

J. Salazar: You have intrinsic drive.

Marrika: Yeah. I get bored easily. It might be my ADD, but it’s like I have to get different jobs, I have to be in different . . . work with different populations, just get the most out of life, I feel. I don’t want to be stuck somewhere. I’ve had family that have worked at the post office or relatively good job that doesn’t need a college education and if they lay off, so what do you do next? You’re really kind of stuck. I’ve seen that. I don’t want that to happen to me.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Marrika: Even if I don’t have a job, I can always say, “I have a degree in social work.”

J. Salazar: Right.

Marrika: That kind of defines you.

J. Salazar: Okay. What expectations did you have for yourself upon graduation?

Marrika: I always wanted to work with pregnant women, specifically, I wanted to be a social worker. I was glad I’ve never had a problem finding a job until now. I think the higher you get, the harder it is, the more competition. Before, it was like jobs were just being handed to me. I really loved it. It seemed like as soon as I graduated, I will get the next job. I never waited in between. It’s like, once I got that diploma, I was ready for the next position. I found it very helpful. Just meeting people in school and getting those connections, you have those for life.
INTERVIEW 9

J. Salazar: I’m Jena Salazar and I am here with, can you please state your name?

Brenda: Brenda

J. Salazar: Can you spell your name for me?

Brenda: B-R-E-N-D-A

J. Salazar: Thank you for meeting with me today. I appreciate it. I’m going to be asking you a series of 18 questions and again if you could retrospectively look at where you were at the time. I appreciate you signing the consent form and we’ll go ahead and get started. Number one, please describe your life before becoming pregnant as a teenager.

Brenda: I live with my mom, my dad. I had two brothers and two sisters. We lived in a house. It was an average family. My dad worked for the military. He was military police. My mother was in and out hospitals. She’s bipolar manic depressive, so it was give and take with her, but we all had chores. We all had work. It was old-fashioned, old school.

J. Salazar: Prior to finding out you were pregnant, what was your attitude towards school or education generally?

Brenda: I loved it. I loved it. I always wanted to be in school. It was my safe haven.

J. Salazar: Were you a good student?

Brenda: Yes, maintaining B average. I wasn’t super intelligent, but I did my work.

J. Salazar: Prior to your parents finding out that you were pregnant, how did they feel about school?

Brenda: They paid no mind to it. Neither one of them graduated high school, got a GED. My dad went straight to the Vietnam War in the military and my mother was a stay-at-home wife.

J. Salazar: Once they found out you were pregnant, did their attitude towards school change?
Brenda: No. I just left home as soon as they found out.

J. Salazar: What were their expectations for you in terms of education?

Brenda: To graduate high school and get a job. They never talked about college or anything like that with us.

J. Salazar: What role did education play in your family as far as, you said your parents, neither one graduated from high school, or just graduated?

Brenda: No, they didn’t graduate high school. They didn’t get a GED. My brother is the third child that my parents had together. He was the only one that graduated high school. My sisters were dropouts and then my other brother, he got his GED and went straight into the military.

J. Salazar: The example you had as far as education was pretty bleak?

Brenda: Yes, yes.

J. Salazar: What did your family view as your role as a female?

Brenda: Cook, clean, keep the house. My mother never worked. My grandmother never worked. My aunts never worked. The female was basically baby-making machines and housekeepers.

J. Salazar: Number seven is the all encompassing question. I would like for you to describe your experience. Take me from the time you found out you were pregnant, the situation surrounding it, how did you tell your parents, what was their reaction to it. Then take me from that point all the way to the time you began your undergrad.

Brenda: I was looking for love in the wrong age, wrong place. I was 15. A boy named PII offered me love, take me away, whisk me away, put me in a castle, make me his wife. First time I had sex, I got pregnant. Didn’t have sex again until my daughter was six months old. I went to the doctor first to find out if I was pregnant because I was scared to tell my parents. The doctor laughed at me, thought that I didn’t know what I was talking about, but it turned out that I was pregnant. I went home and my dad was at his job, and I told my mom. I was scared. She told me I had two options, abortion or get out. I went in my room, sat down and cried more, packed a bag, and walked out. I slept in a park bench for three days, hitchhiked to PII, stayed at a church, and went to work. They helped me get a job. I worked at PII for a year, just living in the basement of a church, working at PII, nine months I should say because by the time my daughter was born, I became a manager at PII. I got my own place. It was a one bedroom. I shared a room with her, this little baby. I stayed with her until I met, I was with him, but we got together, we got married, my ex-husband.
J. Salazar: Is the father of the baby?

Brenda: No. He’s the father of my other two children. He turned out to be worse than my mother was. He was an alcoholic with a hand problem. I just sat down and didn’t want that life and I just had to figure a way to get back to school, but I had to work because PII doesn’t pay. I was I think 23 years old and I got cancer, went through chemotherapy and all of that. I survived, so I said I wanted to do something better for myself and for my kids. That’s when I went and took the GED test.

J. Salazar: You were 23, mother of three?

Brenda: Yes.

J. Salazar: Married?

Brenda: Yes. I was shocked because they called me up and told me I got a Minerva award. I made the third highest in all five boroughs of PII. I was like wow because never going to high school, never studying for the years that I was out of school, when they told me that, I was like wow. I went and got an award, did the graduation for the GED program and I felt so, how do you say it, strong and [crosstalk 06:01]

J. Salazar: Empowered?

Brenda: Empowered. I was like, if I can do this, I can do this. That’s when I enrolled in college. They told me they would pay for the first year financial aid, so I got financial aid, and I worked at night. I brought my kids with me to school. They sat in the classroom next door and I went to school. It was the hardest thing I ever had to do. Days I wanted to quit. Days I just said I couldn’t. Divorced my ex-husband after he was arrested for breaking my ribs. Then I just kept going.

My kids always had to come to the school with me. I couldn’t go to school without them because I didn’t have a sitter. I couldn’t trust anybody. Then I graduated. Then I got a teaching job and I was so oh my gosh.

J. Salazar: You were how old when you graduated from college?

Brenda: Twenty-nine, twenty-nine. In PII, you have to get your master’s, but I was working and the kids were in school by now, so I could do it. I did. I got my master’s. It took me three years because I only could go part-time because I was still a single mom. Then I got my master’s degree, but I didn’t go to the graduation or anything like that. I just got the paper work. Then I just continued on since then.

J. Salazar: Fantastic. You said your mom, her response was, but you didn’t say what your father, did have any sort of [crosstalk 07:33] opinion about it?
Brenda: My mother, she was very sick. She was like I said, bipolar, manic depressive. She was very abusive. If she told you to get out, you didn’t stick around to wait and me being pregnant, I knew that she would have beat me to death or whatever, so I left before he came home from work. I never turned around and looked back. The negative about me is that if I walk away from something, I walk away from it and I don’t turn back to it ever. I’ve only learned forgiveness in the last two and a half years.

J. Salazar: How did you choose the college that you attended?

Brenda: It was there.

J. Salazar: Geographically.

Brenda: It was close enough and then I was always going past it because I lived in the projects in PII and I was always going past it and it was just okay, that was my start.

J. Salazar: What was the name of the university?

Brenda: It was PII. It was a community college. Then it became the PII and that’s how I got my master’s.

J. Salazar: Please describe any events or agencies or people in your life that provided initial support.

Brenda: I don’t know if this applies for initial support, but my second grade teacher is the reason why I wanted to do what I did. She was always there for me. Other than that, it was more of showing my family that I could do it because I became the one that could never accomplish anything, never do anything. I was a high school dropout, pregnant, and they had me destined to be a welfare mom and it was more of their negative that pushed me to make it, but the church helped me in PII.

It was a holy roller Baptist church. That’s not the name, but that’s [inaudible 09:40]. It was nobody until really three years ago when I moved to PII that they became more of, I stayed away from people.

J. Salazar: Were you on any sort of public assistance during the time that you were in school?

Brenda: No.

J. Salazar: Did you have things like, WIC, or anything like that, any kind of programs that supplemented so that you could [crosstalk 10:05].
Brenda: I worked, since I worked in PII and then I worked in a laundry mat, I got public housing, but I had to pay my rent. I had to work, but no, I never went on welfare. My kids were on Medicaid, but that’s because automatically if they’re born into poverty in PII, they ongoing on Medicaid, but I never personally applied for it. No, I never got WIC, never got any of that. Medicaid paid for when I had cancer too.

J.Salazar: Did you have confidence initially in your abilities? I’m talking about when you started college. Did you have confidence in your abilities initially or did your confidence grow over time?

Brenda: I want to say I had confidence. I knew I could it because of what I did with the GED. That was for me phenomenal, but I had a lot of self doubt, but perseverance won. It was more of I got to do this. This is something. I failed math twice in college, but I was determined. I teeter on self confidence.

J.Salazar: What was your primary motivation for continuing with your education?

Brenda: I like to learn something new every day. That’s one thing, but basically it was just to show the world that I was somebody, that I could be somebody. My second grade teacher, I’ll never forget PII.

J.Salazar: She was a huge motivator?

Brenda: Oh yes. She gave me an apple. She fed me on a morning that I came in hungry.

J.Salazar: Please describe the challenges that you faced while working towards your college degree. Throughout your undergraduate program, what were the main challenges you had to overcome?

Brenda: Childcare, working. It was hard because I would go to school during the day because you’ve got to take teaching courses during the day. I would go to school during the day, get out at 3:00 and then have to be at work at 5:00. Then I would get home midnight, 1:00. It was challenging for me and then it was guilt because of my kids. Not having a babysitter, my kids went to school with me. They sat in a classroom and they got to play in the empty classroom or they got to go, but they stayed right there.

Then when I went to work, they came with me. At work, they got to play a little bit more because I could hide them in the back office. It was childcare, having enough money to do it, books, and no support. It was a road I never want to take again.

J.Salazar: What social or cognitive or institutional factors can you identify as making a difference in your life that made continuing on with your education possible? You had said cognitively you knew that you had the ability. You demonstrated that in
your GED test. Institutionally, were there any kind of tutoring or anything that you took advantage of that helped you out? You said you failed math twice. Did you have help?

Brenda: I had a friend. In my math class, I made a friend with someone who they saw the kids there. It was an old, old man. He saw the kids there and he was telling me that he could tutor me. I had no money, barely making it, I couldn’t afford tutoring. He helped me out in the classroom and he sat next to me and he helped me out a lot with that. If it wasn’t for him, I would have never passed math and would never have gotten out because math really is hard.

J.Salazar: You had mentioned, did you have any sort of friends or a support system at this point that you gathered while in college or were you pretty still isolated?

Brenda: I want to say my third year in college, I met and her and I are still really close. She’s single. She lived with her mom, but she took care of her mom and her and I bonded in my third year. Up until about the third year, I wouldn’t talk to anybody. I was married to an abusive man in the first few years. If I looked at somebody, all that fear came back to me. Then when I finally had the courage to leave him, I made a friend. She helped me, just becoming friends, and we grew so close, but that was mainly, I have very serious trust issues with people.

J.Salazar: Did you involve yourself in any campus activities other than attending class or was it just pretty much class?

Brenda: When they had a picnic, if I didn’t have to work and I could bring the kids to it, because I wanted to do as much as I could with the kids.

J.Salazar: I think I know the answer to this, but did you attend school physically or did you take any classes on-line?

Brenda: No classes on-line.

J.Salazar: The big question here is why do you think you were compelled or motivated to achieve such a high level of academic success? When you think about my study, the statistic that I’m working off of is that 2%, that’s it, 2% of women who become pregnant prior to 18 go on to graduate college by the age of 30. That means 98% who were in the exact same situation that you were in did not. Why? Why were you able to do it?

Brenda: I think more because, it’s like I said, my second grade teacher, I’ve got to tell the story. My second grade teacher, she was the only teacher that noticed. My kindergarten teacher, my first grade teacher, they’ve had my brothers and sisters. I was the baby of five. They never noticed. They never noticed. They never noticed. They never picked up on the fact that my mother was abusive to us kids. Never picked up the fact
that she was sick. She was being depressed. She wouldn’t get up in the mornings and feed us.

We had the whole outlook, everybody would look in at us and see that we were the best family in the world, an army dad, MP, money, house, everything, but no one knew what was happening inside. When she fed me breakfast every single morning, she wouldn’t say anything to me to embarrass me, but she left me a piece of fruit on my desk. I grew up like that, not realizing until it was time for me to go back to school and I said I need to give back what she gave. I think it was just that one incident that stuck with me.

Then everybody else bringing me down. I know what it’s like. When you know what it’s like, you don’t want to see someone else suffer. I knew that if I kept going with my education, eventually there will be somebody that I could help. [inaudible 17:12]. I don’t want to cry.

J.Salazar: It’s okay.

Brenda: That’s basically why.

J.Salazar: When you looked at your life back then, do you think you understood the correlation between if I do this, then the result is this. Did you have an actual end goal in mind as you were working through?

Brenda: When it first started, I don’t know if that was my first. My first thing was I’ve got to make a better life for my kids. I didn’t want them to experience what I did, so it was more I’ve got to make a better life for them. You always want better for your kids. Secondly, then it became if I could do this for my kids. My kids, they understood. They saw. They suffered. I could help someone else so that they won’t have to do it. When you’re pregnant, you feel like, and everybody tells you that, the world is over.

You destroyed your life. They were telling me that in the hospital when I had my daughter. Your world is over. Give her to another family. Let them take care of her because you destroyed yourself. It’s not a good thing. Most girls, they believe it. I think it was just this self determination. Being told that day after day, I just got angry. I got angry at the world. I was like, I’m doing it. It was a mixture of reasons, but financially, yeah, I wanted to give my kids better.

When I first set out, it was I want a better life for my kids. They’re not going to grow up in the projects. I want a house. I want this. Then eventually, it turned into I did it. Let me help someone else do it. That’s why I continued on.

J.Salazar: The reverse, you’ve talked a little bit about this, 98% of girls don’t. Why do you think that they’re not able to do what you were able to do?
Brenda: Because you feel degraded on the inside, but you can’t tell people. It’s hard for people to say I made a mistake. I did this. Then if you don’t have the help that you need, the smallest words of discouragement stick with you more than encouragement. It’s challenging. If you don’t have someone to trust to watch your kids, you don’t have the money to do it, it’s hard. It’s not an easy route to take so it’s easier to sit back. When the welfare system the way it is, it’s easier to sit back, but you’ve got to have self determination.

It’s a hard road. I can understand why people wouldn’t do it. They don’t see the future. They don’t see, but I don’t think it’s because they don’t want to. It’s because they’re always put down. I believe that society, not just their parents, not just families, society. You tell them I’m 15 and pregnant. They look at you like “Oh my god, what a ho.” You sleep around a lot. That’s just not the case. Then you get embarrassed. Then you don’t want to tell people. I’m not ashamed of it because it made me who I am today, but there are people that are ashamed of it.

In the beginning, there was times where I was. Do I want to tell them? I had my kid six days after my 16th birthday. It’s the hardest thing. Then you don’t get it. You get looked upon. It’s more of a stereotype, what a bad person you are.

J.Salazar: What expectations did you have for your future when you graduated from college? What did you think you were going to do?

Brenda: I wanted to be in the classroom. I wanted to help anybody I could. I wanted to be important to somebody. I just wanted that. I had my kids, but it’s different when you have 30 new kids every year or 20. I knew what I wanted. I wanted to be a teacher.

J.Salazar: Very good. This is a not a question on my thing, but I’m interested. Do you think that being, you said that it made you who you are, do you think you might have achieved more because you were a teen mom versus had you not been a teen mom? Do you think it compelled you to even go further than you might have otherwise?

Brenda: Someone else asked me that and I forget what it was for, but I think it was more because of the fact that I was a teen mom and because my mother was sick. I think it was both of them because I was always put down so I had to show the world, and it was being a teen mom too because you keep hearing the stories, oh my God, you had your kid at 16, well look at what I did. This is what I did. I’m showing you what I did. Don’t tell me what I did wrong. Look at what I did right. People don’t do that.

I think that’s why I kept doing it. When I graduated with my bachelor’s degree, it was me and my children. I invited my family and I hadn’t talked to them for years so I knew they wouldn’t go, but I got no response back. I was like here look, look at what I did. They didn’t acknowledge it. Then when I got my master’s degree, I
finally talked to my dad again and I told him I’m going to get my master’s. Do you want to come to my graduation? He was like why? Then I didn’t go.

Then I was like, you know what? I want to show them. I want to show them. You can’t do it because you’re pregnant. You can’t do it because you’re a mom. You can’t do it because of this. Yeah, it was I’m showing you what I did. Then I wanted to show my ex-husband that I made it. I guess that’s why I keep going.

J. Salazar: That is the conclusion. I’m going to go ahead and stop this for now.

**INTERVIEW 10**

J. Salazar: Can you please tell me first name?

Mollie: It’s Mollie

J. Salazar: Can you spell that for me?

Mollie: M-O-L-L-I-E

J. Salazar: I appreciate you meeting with me this afternoon. I’m going to ask you 18 questions and if you could answer them as thorough as possible I’d appreciate it. Number 1; please describe your life before becoming pregnant as a teenager.

Mollie: I was in junior high so just junior high; homework, school, friends, talked on the phone a lot, just things in that nature, just junior high.

J. Salazar: Who lived in your home at the time?

Mollie: It was my mother and I.

J. Salazar: Prior to finding out you were pregnant, what was your attitude towards school or education generally?

Mollie: I loved school.

J. Salazar: Were you a good student?

Mollie: Yes.

J. Salazar: Prior to your mom finding out that you were pregnant, how did she feel about school?
Mollie: She was very positive about school as well because she got her bachelor’s and master’s degree so I call that just the positiveness that’s school and how important it is.

J. Salazar: When she found out that you were pregnant did that change at all? Did her expectation or attitude towards school in regard to you change?

Mollie: No.

J. Salazar: There was no different path that she expected from you simply because you were pregnant?

Mollie: No.

J. Salazar: What was your parent’s expectations for you in terms of your education?

Mollie: I actually never really talked about it. She didn’t say, “I expect you to do X, Y, and Z,” and the reason why I say that is because I do know people that they really push their kids in school, I guess and, you know, “You’re going to go to school here when you graduate. You’re going to do this. You’re going to do that,” kind of thing. My mom never did that so I think it was just seeing by example, maybe, but my mom was also really passionate about doing the things that you want to do and the things that make you happy as far as your career and what you want to go to school to do and all that stuff.

J. Salazar: Was college ever discussed?

Mollie: No.

J. Salazar: What role did education play in your family? You said your mom had a bachelor’s degree and then went on for her master’s.

Mollie: Then she was working on her PhD.

J. Salazar: What about siblings or family members? What role, as you were growing up, did you see as far as your surrounding family as far as education played?

Mollie: It was just my mother and I growing up. All of my other family live in PII and so I never was around them, but when I did go visit them they talked very highly about school and college and things of that nature. My brother, he and my sister both have never been to college.

J. Salazar: You went but your brother and sister had not.
Mollie: They’re older than I am like by seven or six years and they didn’t want to live with my mom. They lived with their dad. I still saw them all the time and everything. Then at a later time when my sister was a senior in high school she moved in with my mother and so she finished high school but she didn’t continue on after that.

J. Salazar: How did your family view your role as being a girl, a female? Was there any sort of different expectations set on you?

Mollie: No. It was just my mother and I, so no.

J. Salazar: Number seven is the all-encompassing, big question. What I would like for you to do is take me from the time you found out you were pregnant, so the ages, the circumstances, the father, just everything surrounding it, how you told your mom, what her reaction was, and then all the way through until you began your undergraduate program, so just the story, if you will.

Mollie: In a nutshell, I guess, I found out I was pregnant when I was 15 and actually I didn’t really think I was pregnant. My mom was the one that told me that I was pregnant, though. She felt something was different. She told me she would take me to the doctor to find out if I was pregnant or not, and I was. My son’s father was not involved. I still went to school; went to junior high. I was actually really into music and I played the clarinet, bass clarinet and the bassoon, so my passion was music. I had my son when I was ... I was pregnant in the ninth grade and I had him in the summer of ninth grade, but those years that I was pregnant I also tried out for [inaudible 00:06:02] for bassoon and I got into it so I played bassoon with [inaudible 00:06:06] when I was pregnant. Then when I had him in the summer then my freshman year I still played [inaudible 00:06:14] symphony all the way for those three years. It was in high school and really involved in music in high school, but still with my mother. Then when I was 17 I got pregnant again with my daughter and I was a senior in high school then and I did end up dropping out in high school. I think it was like half a year into my senior year. After that I got my GED right away. It was like two weeks after that I got my GED and I started college right away. My thing was because I had to because I wanted to hurry up and start my career. That’s why I decided to get my GED, so started college right away so when I was going to be in my senior year in high school I was already starting college. Then I think I went for half a year of college and did figure out that it was too hard to take care of the two and going to college and try to work so I worked for quite some time. I worked at the preschool that they were going to so I could still be with them. My daughter was the younger one. When she was in kindergarten then I decided to go back to college because they were going to be in school all day long. I went to PII and then worked part time and when I worked part
time I was still with them because I worked at the preschool. I got my associate’s degree in physical technology and then I worked at PII Hospital right after I graduated with my associate’s degree.

I also knew that I . . . because I went to a school and it was just kind of like just a stepping stone in medical field. I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do in the medical field and that program was only 18 months long. I started doing that and then a year into the [inaudible 00:08:20] surgical technologist I started my transfer program at the community colleges. [The office of 00:08:27] community college then transferred my credits to PII to get my bachelor’s degree, and at that point in time [crosstalk 00:08:33] . . .

J. Salazar: University of PII?

Mollie: Yeah, in PII. I got my academic transfer program completed, transferred to the University of PII. I was still not sure what I wanted my undergraduate to be, but my intention was to go to medical school. I really wanted to finish a lot of my premed recs there. I did finish [inaudible 00:09:07] but some of the bigger [inaudible 00:09:09] at the university. As I was going there to do my premed, I also got married and I really decided, not really decided, but was really thinking about a lot of things. I thought maybe that school wasn’t the thing that I wanted to do. It was [inaudible 00:09:31] to me at the time because I knew I wanted to have more kids, but my two older kids were so much older and I figured that I can really go to med school and do what I wanted to do because it was just going to be me all by myself, but then my life changed for me and getting married and knowing that we wanted to have a family as well, some more children. I decided not to do med school, just the time was [inaudible 00:09:55] and that meant that, you know, even moving [inaudible 00:09:58] I wanted to move out of PII and all that stuff though. I really, with the different options of what I . . . I took healthcare and I really saw what I did like in healthcare and what I wanted to learn more in healthcare and just [they took 00:10:13] my career path away. I decided to do healthcare management as my bachelor’s degree from the PII University. That was another thing is I couldn’t afford to go to PII anymore. I mean, being in class all day long, I was not able to work that much. I decided on PII University because it was an all-online program. Then at that time I started working full time again at PII as a surgical technologist and then I would do my classes at night and on the weekends. Their program was also an accelerated program. Since I had a lot of credits already I was able to get my bachelor’s degree completed with just my [inaudible 00:10:57] so I felt like it was pretty feasible for me to go ahead and do that because I also wanted to get my master’s degree and do that. I got my master’s degree in healthcare management and I got a new role at PII as their coordinator [inaudible 00:11:15] surgery.
I did that for about a year and then I started working at PII, which is PII, working with long term care so I wanted to learn a different side of healthcare. [Inaudible 00:11:29] it was just what I wanted to learn, the long term care side of it. I worked there for two years and within that time I was still getting my master’s degree from PII. I got my master’s two years after that in healthcare administration. Now I work at PII as the accreditation specialist there using my master’s degree. That’s all in a nutshell.

J. Salazar: Yeah, thank you. Is your husband the father of either of the two oldest children?

Mollie: No. They’re my two younger children.

J. Salazar: You said you had attended school. My next question is how did you choose the colleges you attended. It sounds like you chose geographically at first and then financially.

Mollie: Yeah. I chose the university PII . . . I also PII Community College because of the 10-week courses and the flexibility that it gave for me, you know, just the academic transfer; doing 10 weeks instead of a semester for one class. I just wanted to get things done. I’m also really good at school so I just felt that was better for me. Then I chose PII because I was doing premed and that was the only place, I mean here, that I was living that I could do more of my science classes before my premed recs and that’s why I chose PII, but I really did not like PII. I mean, talk about being the non-tradition student, that was definitely not the best experience for me at all.

J. Salazar: We’re going to talk a little bit more about that in a minute.

Mollie: Yeah, and so then I chose PII because of the online and the accelerated program that they had and the all online was just awesome.

J. Salazar: Please describe any events, agencies, or people in your life that provided initial support. From the time you started going to college, what support systems were in place for you?

Mollie: When I had my son, my first one, I was in a program called Teen Moms and it was at the YWCA. That program, they picked me up after school, I think it was two times out of the week and I worked there and they provided daycare, but we did life-building skills and I guess school-building skills, mostly. We had a lot of hands on things, community things. People came from the community, even past teen moms came that were successful, things of that nature. I really liked that program because a lot of other teen moms that went to that program, I think they had to go to
the program because they were like in a TLC program or they do work for
state or something.
I think my mom registered me for that program and I really liked it a lot
and so I just went. I also really, when I got pregnant I really didn’t like all
of this, like there were stereotype teen moms and just things that
[inaudible 00:15:13] telling me to do, you know, “You’re never going to
go to school. You’re never going to . . .” you know, just all of the
stereotypes that are out there. I always wanted to prove those stereotypes
wrong, I guess. I don’t know. That program really did help with that
because there was also other teen moms that were successful.
It was just neat to see that. That was a big one, and I was in that program
all the way . . . even after my . . . They helped me with my GED when I
told them what my plan was. I said I just want to test good and so they’re
the ones that helped me to get that accomplished within the goals that I
wanted. Then also, I think I was there even throughout the first year, or the
half year of college that I went to.
Then after when I was stopped going to college I had to start paying back
some of those student loans because I didn’t go back right away and I
couldn’t afford to do that, the coverage, like it was a deferment and in
order for me to go back to college when I decided to go back to college I
had to pay a whole semester by myself and that’s something that I could
not afford to do. I just felt like it was being pushed back and pushed back.
Then there was this agency called . . . I think it was PII. I’m pretty sure
that’s what it was called and they had a program . . .

J. Salazar: Can you repeat that?

Mollie: It was PII.

J. Salazar: Okay.

Mollie: Within that program based on the scholarship that helped pay for my
school that I couldn’t pay for out of my own pocket until I was able to get
my [inaudible 00:17:02] again. If it wasn’t for that program and the
scholarship that I got I would have never been able to do it, like to go back
to pay for that semester by myself, and they helped me with my books and
all that stuff. Actually, that scholarship actually ran all the way through
my surgical technology degree. I know I would’ve gotten program for, but
I didn’t even need any of that because the scholarship pays for all that so I
didn’t even have to get a loan or anything.

J. Salazar: People in your life, who provided help, daycare assistance or any kind of
help that you might’ve needed along the way?
Mollie: It was my mom the entire time until I was 17. She was honestly the biggest support, bought everything that my first one needed, and then I was on state assistance for daycare.

J. Salazar: Did you take advantage of things like WIC, any other sort of program?

Mollie: Yeah, I was on WIC, and just all the state assistance, Medicaid.

J. Salazar: Perfect. Did you have confidence in your abilities at first to go to college, or did that increase over time?

Mollie: I’m not trying to be conceited or anything, but I did feel like I really had confidence. It was something that I really wanted. Even when my oldest son, even when he started college I felt kind of bad because I didn’t . . . He would call me [inaudible 00:18:56], “Mom I really need help registering.” In my head I’m like, “I registered by myself.” I did everything by myself when I started out for college and, you know, talking to the counselors and everything, so I just had to . . . it kind of took me by surprise when he was like, “Help me,” and I’m like, “Yeah, but I probably shouldn’t but, you know, I do need to help him, but I never got the help when I was younger [inaudible 00:19:22] because I just knew what I wanted and I’m just the type of person that find out how it needs to be done. I don’t know. [Inaudible 00:19:30].

J. Salazar: What was your primary motivation, initially, to go back to college, and then continue?

Mollie: My initial for all of it was . . . I know this sound so weird, but it was those stereotypes, like not being the norm, I guess, and not being part of those statistics.

J. Salazar: You had that motivation to prove people wrong, number 1, but also to show that this baby wasn’t going to stop you.

Mollie: Correct.

J. Salazar: Do you think that having a child so young, do you think that it might’ve motivated you to do more than you might have if you weren’t a teen mom? Does that make sense?

Mollie: Yes, most definitely. I’m 100% sure that if I would not have had my son at the age of 15 I would not be where I’m at all.

J. Salazar: Please describe the challenges you faced while working toward your degree.
Mollie: I think the biggest thing is financial, also being financially dependent on just even the state, Medicaid, food stamps, just all that was really stressful for me; even just housing. It wasn’t really like, “Oh, can I pay my rent this month,” because I was on housing and so it wasn’t like that kind of stress because I knew that we had a place to live. I knew that our rent was cheap enough that I could afford. It was just keeping up with all of the agencies to be able to get, to make sure that everything was still okay. Then also, too, time, you know, time between work and time between school, and then time with kids, you know, just finding that balance of everything. Your children come first but then you have a paper that’s due tomorrow morning that you’re just like . . . It’s very stressful trying to figure out how you’re going to do everything.

J. Salazar: What social, cognitive, or institutional factor . . . specifically university resources I guess you could say . . . can you identify as making a difference in your life that made continuing on with your education possible? For example, did you take advantage in any sort of tutoring resources . . .

Mollie: No . . .

J. Salazar: . . . or anything, any clubs or anything that you were involved in that might’ve made continuing on with your education possible or motivating in any way?

Mollie: No. When I was in junior high school, you know, in high school just the music, but once I got to college I did not take advantage of any tutoring, anything like that. [Inaudible 00:23:02] there’s just no time, so no I didn’t. I wasn’t involved in any of that.

J. Salazar: Did you involve yourself in campus other than attending classes, and you just answered that, so you didn’t have time.

Mollie: No, schoolwork.

J. Salazar: That was it; schoolwork and kids, right?

Mollie: Yeah.

J. Salazar: I understand, okay. Number 15, did you attend school physically, or online. In your associate’s degree and for the majority of your undergrad you attended physical, you went to class, but then you began going to online and your masters was also online.

Mollie: Correct. Most of my bachelor’s was not online because I had to do so much pre recs and my transfer program, all of that was not . . . I would
take the online class here and there if they offered it, but it was probably the last half of my bachelor’s degree was online, and then all of my masters was online.

J. Salazar: The statistic that I’m running my study off of is that, I don’t know if you know this, but 98% of girls who are pregnant before the age of 18 do not go on to graduate from college by the age of 30, so you are part of the 2%. My question is why do you think you were compelled or motivated to achieve such a high level of academic success when 98% of girls who found themselves in the exact same situation you were in were not able to achieve?

Mollie: I think it’s society that tells them they can’t. It’s just really . . . I don’t know how to put it, but just even females, period, what society tells them that they can’t be successful. I know now it’s a little bit different, but I think really society tells you that being a young teen mom you’re not going to be successful and that’s just the fact. I don’t think it really depends on how much support you have or how much, just even the things that you see in your own home, I don’t think that really plays a factor either. I mean, I think it can a little bit, but I just think it comes from your own motivation and what you want in life. I don’t know.

I just know that even some people that, you know, if you take a female that’s pregnant at a very young age and lives in a home that things are instilled in their brain as far as, “You’re going to do this. You’re going to do that. You’re going to go to this school. You’re going to graduate from this, just . . . “ You know what I’m talking about, and then they become pregnant at that time. I think society, or even their parents might even go to them like, “Now you’re not going to amount to anything,” but if that person has their own motivation to prove them wrong like, “No, I still can do this. I can do X, Y, and Z. Maybe not what you want me to do, but I am going to do it.” I think they’ll be more to do it. I really don’t know. That’s how I see it for me just from my own . . .

J. Salazar: Let me ask you this. As you were going to school did you see a direct correlation between, “I am going to do this. I am going to go to college. I’m going to do this, and because of this there’s going to be a benefit. These are going to be the outcomes that I’m going to have.” Did you see that correlation that you had that responsibility to yourself . . . ?

Mollie: Yes, for sure. I also knew that I did not want to be, once again the statistics though, you know, teen moms being on welfare for the rest of their lives and Medicaid and food stamps kind of thing. That was not going to be me. I pretty much had a huge . . . I guess I was just so proud of myself that day when I didn’t have to be on housing anymore and then didn’t have to be on food stamps anymore, didn’t need the daycare paid for anymore, didn’t need food stamps and also my children didn’t need
Medicaid. That was like a huge success/goal that I had in my life, so that was a very exciting time for me.

J. Salazar: Again, a 98% of girls aren’t able to do that. What do you think, and you talked about it, but what do you think that they can’t? You’re saying society just has this diagnostic image of once you become pregnant then that’s just it. Things are over, and you think that’s something that girls believe.

Mollie: I truly believe that they think that at first. That’s how I felt at first, but it might take somebody a little bit longer, too, to get their bachelor’s degree because of, “I’m going to wait till they start kindergarten,” or, “I’m going to wait till . . . “ you know. It’s also too, statistically that teen moms, they will have a second child before they’re 19, also.

J. Salazar: Correct.

Mollie: Maybe the reason why that is because they have to even wait longer for the second child to start kindergarten or whatever the case may be to start college and then it takes them longer to finish it.

J. Salazar: Did you find, when you became pregnant with your second child, you were still a teenager, did you find that you felt even more hopeless with that second child, or more determined?

Mollie: More determined, and that’s why I battled with getting my GED or finishing out the year, but I wanted to get my GED because I wanted to start college right away. I just felt like I just needed to really get in gear then, I guess.

J. Salazar: What was your expectation for yourself once you graduated from college?

Mollie: To keep on going to college. I think that’s so weird. I really want to get my PhD. I don’t know. I just try to find the right time to do that. Even just the job that I have now, I am just so happy with where I’m at right now career-wise, but that doesn’t mean that I don’t want to continue to go to school to get my Ph.D. also.

INTERVIEW 11

J. Salazar: OK. My name is Jena Salazar and I am with . . . Can you please state your first name and spell it for me?

J. Salazar: Well thank you so much for meeting with me today, I appreciate that. I’m going to ask you a series of eighteen questions. If you could try to retroactively, retrospectively more like, remember where you were at the time, try to be as thorough as you can in the questions, and we should be good. First of all, question number one, please describe your life before becoming pregnant as a teenager.

Jamie: I grew up in a family. I have one brother, two parents. They’re very strict, very religious family. I didn’t have a lot of freedom and worked in the family business, worked and school. Is that what you’re looking for?

J. Salazar: No, that’s great. I just wanted to get an idea of the family dynamics before you were pregnant. OK, perfect. Prior to finding out you were pregnant, what was the attitude, what was your attitude towards school and education in general?

Jamie: I really wasn’t giving it my best effort. I didn’t really think about college a lot. It wasn’t a real high priority with my parents. It wasn’t really something I thought about doing. I kind of did the bare minimum in school. My grades were OK. That’s it in a nutshell.

J. Salazar: Prior to your parents finding out you were pregnant. How did they feel about school?

Jamie: They wanted us to do well, me and my brother to do well in school. Pretty much expected to get A’s and B’s. They made sure we did our homework.

J. Salazar: Did their attitude change after they found out?

Jamie: I think college became a bigger priority for them, to see me go to college. I don’t really remember it being talked about before that.

J. Salazar: OK. What role did education play in your family? Were your siblings or were your parents college graduates? What sort of examples did you have as far as education in your family?

Jamie: My father never went to college. My mother didn’t finish. My brother was younger than me. One of my grandparents had went to college and a couple of my cousins, most of my family didn’t go to college.

J. Salazar: What did your family view as being your role as a female?

Jamie: Can you ask that again?

J. Salazar: What did your family view as being your role as a female, as a girl, what did they view as your role?
Jamie: I don’t know, I guess my family had kind of stereotypical views for the most part. I had a lot of chores to clean up and my brother really did too. I didn’t see that as being because I was a girl. My mother always did most of the house work and my dad did the stuff that men do around the house. That’s it. He always made my brother help him do stuff [inaudible 04:09] inside and outside. I don’t know. I hadn’t really given that much thought.

J. Salazar: The next question sort of is the all encompassing question. If you could take me where you were at the time you found you were pregnant. What the situation was, how old were you, was the father involved, the dynamics of the birth father, how your parents reacted, what the story was from that point all the way to the point you began your undergraduate degree.

Jamie: I was fifteen. I thought that my father was probably going to kill me. I didn’t know how he was going react. I kept it hidden for a long time. My mom finally asked me when I started showing when I was like five months and I told her. She wasn’t sure how my father would react. She actually took him somewhere. They went for a ride, she didn’t even want me to be around when she told him. He took it surprisingly well initially. He came back home and he gave me a hug. He’d been crying, he was really upset, but he didn’t get angry about it for a long time until way later before he really was angry. That actually went a lot better than I had anticipated.

The father was not really . . . we broke up before I found out I was pregnant. He asked me . . . he said, “Are you sure it’s mine? Are you sure you want to keep it?” He wasn’t really interested in being a part of it at that point.

J. Salazar: Was he your same age?

Jamie: He was almost four years older than me.

J. Salazar: OK. Take me through, did you finish high school? Take me all the way up to college.

Jamie: I finished high school. I got pregnant the summer before my junior year. I was pregnant through my junior year. I ended up getting put on bed rest a month before I had PII. That was in April, so I missed the last two months of school. There was a guidance counselor at my high school that worked with pregnant girls and she would bring my assignments to me at home and proctor my tests, so I really didn’t miss anything credit wise. [inaudible 07:15] I had PII in May and so I had the whole summer before I had to go back to school. At that point, I finished my senior year. I worked and went to school. I went right to PII. At that time I was working full-time as a manager in a food court. It was during in the grand opening the PII. I was working 60, 70-hour weeks and I signed up for four classes. I bit off more than I could chew. The first semester I got like two B’s and
two C’s I think, it really wasn’t that bad. Then the second semester is when it started to wear in on me a little bit.

So I dropped a class or two. I changed jobs and it was a little better for a while. It was an assistant manager job, but then I got promoted to store manager, which I probably shouldn’t have done. That put me right back into that circle that happened every semester. Assistant manager quit or my assistant manager’s mom died and she had a nervous breakdown and it was a small store so I was having to work all the manager shifts and I dropped classes again. I did that. I finally left retail after about four years of that. My GPA was like two point something, I was on academic probation. Talk about finish. I didn’t do a lot on, I just wasn’t finishing enough of them. I ended up taking a year off at one point and then when I went back, I finally a job in HR and I was able to take evening classes. They let me go early a couple of days a week so I could make it to my classes. I did that for a year or so. I was feeling pretty good about it. They were always helpful in me getting my classes. Two at a time doesn’t get you too far but . . . then that company closed, they moved to Mexico. I was really devastated because I finally had a job where I could do school. But it ended up working out great because I qualified for programs and some good match. I forget exactly what it was now, but they paid . . . they let me get unemployment and go to school full-time. I wasn’t able to enroll in a four year program for that. They would only do vocational programs or two year associates degree programs. I went to community college and I enrolled in business. I got the rest of my general ed credits knocked out in one year. I dropped out of that program and went bank to PII. I worked part-time and I was living at home with my parents so that actually worked out pretty good.

By the time it was all said and done, it took me . . . I started in 1999 and I finally got my bachelors degree in 2009. If I hadn’t gotten to go back full-time that year, I don’t know if I ever would have finished. Then I went straight into the masters program the following year. They don’t play around in grad school. You get it done in three years or they kick you out anyway. I worked full-time while I was doing that and finished it in two years. I finished that in 2011.

J. Salazar: OK. You stayed with your parents all the way through your undergrad?

Jamie: I actually got married and moved out in about 2004 right around the time I was going to take a year off. That only lasted about a year and a half. I moved back with my parents again.

J. Salazar: OK. How did you choose the colleges you attended?

Jamie: Location. I needed to be able to stay close to home because I needed my parents help with PII.
J.Salazar: OK. Please describe any events, agencies, or people in your life that provided initial support.

Jamie: Actually, I went and talked to someone. My dad didn’t get mad at first but he did think that the best thing for me to do was to go with adoption. He was pretty much telling me that was what I was going to do and I really didn’t want to do that. I went and talked with someone at PII and she was really helpful and kind and told me the programs and unwed mothers homes and what my options were. It sounded good, but she gave me enough confidence that I went and told my dad that’s what I was going do. I was going to leave and have my kid. Actually he said that he wanted to see that kind of commitment to it. He was supportive from that moment forward. That lady at PII definitely made a huge difference.

I had Medicaid when I was pregnant. I didn’t have health insurance prior to that. My parents didn’t have any kind of health insurance on me. That was a huge help. The guidance counselor at school was immensely helpful not having to miss half of my junior year. She actually helped me a lot my senior year. She got the principal to let me leave at lunchtime. I had my daughter in a nearby daycare so I could go breastfeed. She was just really supportive. She was in the top two. She let me use my breast pump in her office. I actually reconnected with her fairly recently. She was the one that made a big difference in my life. My parents were very supportive. That’s probably the main people. I ended up when PII was about two, three, I moved her to a home daycare. The lady that kept her ended up being a really good friend. She actually helped me out a lot.

J.Salazar: Did you have confidence initially in your abilities to go to school or did that increase over time?

Jamie: I think I felt fairly confident with school as far as the work and being able to do that but it was the time and I really wondered if I’d ever finish. When you’re on a ten year or longer plan for a bachelors degree, it gets a little discouraging.

J.Salazar: What were your primary motivations for continuing on with your education?

Jamie: Definitely my daughter. I felt like I needed to set that example for her and be able to provide for her without depending on anybody else. I’d say that was the most and I wanted to make my parents proud as well.

J.Salazar: Please describe the challenges you faced while working towards your college degree.

Jamie: Probably mostly time and money. I always made just enough that I really didn’t get much financial aid usually not even enough to cover all the tuition. Money was always an issue. There were a couple of semesters I probably could of squeezed in another class if I would have had the money to do it. I tried not to go
into debt for a while. I eventually gave up on that, that wasn’t working. Time and money were the biggest things.

J.Salazar: What social or cognitive or institutional factors can you identify as making a difference in your life that made continuing on with your education possible? What I mean by that is were there any tutoring programs, or social clubs, or social networking that you a part of? Anything that made it possible or contributed to your success.

Jamie: I got involved with the student body for human resources but I would say that was really more instrumental in finding employment and advancing in that field than it was my education. I really can’t think of anything. I really didn’t have time to be involved in anything.

J.Salazar: Did you, which answers my next question, did you involve yourself in anything other than attending class while in school?

Jamie: Once I lost my job and was able to go back to school full-time, I started getting involved in a couple of student organizations, some volunteer work. I was just going to school full-time that one year I had, things like that. I stuck with the guide for human resources, their graduate school. I held office and was really involved in that. That was the only thing I really stayed consistent with.

J.Salazar: Do you consider losing your job and being able to go back to school full-time sort of as a turning point?

Jamie: Yeah I think so. I honestly don’t know. Two classes a semester stretches it out a really long time and I still at that point had quite a few classes to go. I ended up finishing in ten years. I was probably there fifteen years and I don’t know if I would’ve stuck with it that long.

J.Salazar: Did you attend physically or did you go online?

Jamie: I did a few online classes. [inaudible 18:23].

J.Salazar: The main reason for my study is because as I was doing research, I was looking at teen pregnancy and teen rates and those kinds of things and I came across a statistic that said that only two percent of girls who get pregnant before the age of seventeen or before the age of eighteen, excuse me, only two percent go on to graduate with a four year degree by age of thirty, that’s it. So although it took you ten years, you are still a part of that two percent. My question is, why do you think you were compelled or motivated to achieve such a high level of academic success?

Jamie: I think I knew . . . I had a pretty good idea of what my life would be like if I didn’t finish school. The kind of jobs I would have. I saw my parents always
struggle. I knew other people who had kids and lived in government housing. They kind of get stuck there. I don’t even think it’s necessarily their fault. That’s just not where I wanted to end up.

J. Salazar: Did you see the correlation then between going to school, getting a degree, sort of the payoff at the end?

Jamie: Yeah. I think my grandfather instilled that in me. He was the only college grad in my family until one of my older cousins graduated. He always . . . he was the one as I growing up that would talk to me about college. I really didn’t pay him that much attention really. I think it kind of . . . when I got pregnant, it woke me up to what he’d been trying to tell me.

J. Salazar: Did you feel directly responsible for the outcome of your life?

Jamie: In my life?

J. Salazar: Yes.

Jamie: Yes.

J. Salazar: Tell me more about that.

Jamie: There is a lot of factors. You can’t simplify why people make the decisions they make. I think we’re all still ultimately responsible for those decisions. That’s a core belief I was raised with.

J. Salazar: Why do you think that others who find themselves in the same situation that you were in, why do you think so many of them are not able to continue on? Why is it 98 percent aren’t able to graduate by thirty?

Jamie: I think a lot of it is the social support you have. My family’s support was amazing. At the same time, I’ve known other people that their parents help them a lot with their kids, just let them still continue down a bad path. They keep their kids while they went out and party and stuff. My parents were . . . they were strict before, they were even more strict after. They helped me get a car. That car was to get my kid to daycare, get to school, get to work, all that kind of stuff. I didn’t do anything else. They never, until years later, would babysit for me to do anything other than work and school. They always did that. I could always count on them for that. They’d always figure it out.

J. Salazar: What expectation did you have for your future once you graduated from college?

Jamie: At the point where I had my bachelor’s?

J. Salazar: Yes.
Jamie: At that point I was already on track to go to grad school so I was hoping that went well and I would have a good job when I graduated from there. I was already working at a consulting firm under a biopsychologist by the end of my last year of undergrad. I really liked that so I was hoping that I would have a career similar to that when I finished.