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Teenage pregnancy and educational attainment :: six young black mothers.

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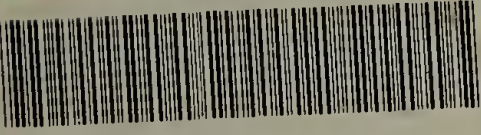
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TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT: SIX
YOUNG BLACK MOTHERS

A Thesis Presented

By

DEBORAH NUNNALLY LEWIS

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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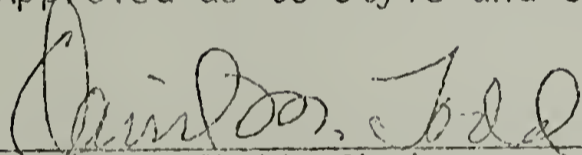
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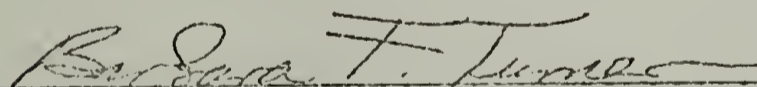
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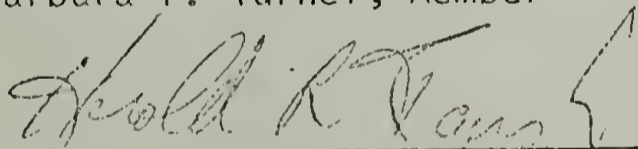
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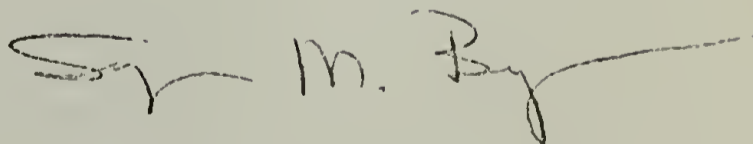
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DEDICATION

To God:

My spiritual advisor, my constant
companion, my hope and my strength.

To my family:

George, my husband,

Rahum, my oldest son,

Zenobia, my daughter,

Neil, my youngest son,

For their constant love, patience and support.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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My many thanks to the six young mothers who were willing to share a part of their lives with me.

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C H A P T E R I

INTRODUCTION

It is evident that each individual's ability to cope and adapt to stress varies. Some individuals are more adept at handling changing and stressful situations. There are three ideas that evolve for this thesis: (1) different developmental stages are associated with different stresses; (2) external (environmental) conditions may enhance or impede coping with developmental stresses; and (3) individuals differ in their ability to cope with stress. The internal stress that is present during the various developmental stages we enter from infancy to adulthood may be intensified by an external stress we may be presently experiencing.

Adolescence, and the advent of puberty, poses a developmental stress. Becoming pregnant during the adolescent period and the advent of motherhood adds a major external stress on coping with adolescent development.

According to research by the Alan Guttmacher Institute, there are one million teen pregnancies as of 1978 (Guttmacher, 1981). Nationally, more than one in ten teenagers were getting pregnant as of the publication of their research in 1981. The Guttmacher research predicted, "If patterns do not change, four in ten teenagers will get pregnant at least once while they are in their teens" (p. 4). The statistics seem alarming and appear even more alarming when we consider the consequences of teenage motherhood, which include the following: (1) the higher infant mortality for teen mothers as compared to

mothers in their twenties; (2) teen mothers fifteen years of age and younger are twice as likely to have babies with low birth weight as compared to the older teenagers and mothers in their twenties; (3) teen mothers who marry are three times more likely to separate and divorce; (4) teen mothers are apt to be more reliant on welfare (in 1975 approximately half of the billions of dollars invested in Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) programs went to families in which the mother gave birth as a teenager); (5) the income of teen mothers is half that of mothers in their late twenties; and (6) the majority of teenage mothers never complete junior or senior high school education.

This sixth consequence, related to educational attainment, is the central issue for this thesis. In fact, fifty to sixty percent of female dropouts are pregnant and most never return to school (Phipps-Yonas, 1980). Early childbearing has been directly related to the truncation of the teen mother's education. Waite and Moore (1977) find that teenage motherhood is "strongly associated" with a decrease in educational attainment. In their study, this lowered level of educational attainment was evident, even though these young mothers' educational aspirations did not differ much from other teenagers. The Guttmacher and Phipps-Yonas studies demonstrate that early truncation of the teen mother's education was also related to consequences for their offspring, such as lowered I.Q.'s as well as educational cognitive deficits. Card and Wise (1978) find that when teenage parents are matched with classmates who did not become parents as teenagers,

for academic ability and achievement, socioeconomic status, race and educational expectation at age 15, before any of the young women have had a child, the negative influence of childbearing on education remains. "Thus, early childbearing appears to be a direct cause of truncated schooling, independent of other influences" (pg. 199).

Literature Review

Studies on why some teenage mothers complete their education while others do not are limited. Of the few investigations done, Furstenberg's (1976) Philadelphia study of adolescent mothers and their families is the most comprehensive to date. He and others (Waite and Moore, 1977; Ewer and Gibbs, 1976) suggest that educational attainment for teenage mothers is directly associated with the amount of support the teenager receives from her family. Furstenberg (1978) observed that the adolescent's family of origin was probably the most important buffer for the teenage mother. He commented, "...it appears that mothers were much more likely to receive substantial amounts of financial assistance and familial childcare when they remained with relatives..." (p. 69). He found that financial support and childcare support were crucial elements for the teenage mother to complete her education and that these supports were more likely to be provided by the family. Furstenberg also observed that there was often a mutual understanding between the family of origin and the teenage mother about the provision of financial support and child support so long as the teenage mother attended school:

Young mothers who continued their education after becoming pregnant were significantly more likely to rely on their parents than those who dropped out of school. Further, parents often had an explicit understanding that they would supply childcare so long as the young mother was attending school (p. 70).

Furstenberg suggested that the family was a vehicle for tiding the young mother over during the difficult period of transition to parenthood. He suggests that had this support not been given, the teenage mother would have found it difficult to juggle the roles of motherhood and student. Furstenberg also concluded that the adolescent mother who did not leave home before or immediately after having her child was more likely than her peers who did leave home to advance educationally and economically.

In Furstenberg's earlier study (1971) done between 1966 and 1968, 400 teenage mothers were interviewed at the time of delivery and three more times up until the offspring was five years old. He found in that study that between one-half and two-thirds of the female dropouts indicated pregnancy and/or marriage as the main reason for leaving school. Although, at the time of this study there were fewer alternative school systems and less emphasis on encouraging the teenage mother to continue her education. The number of dropouts due to pregnancy in the formal school system is still high, as noted by Waite and Moore in their 1977 review.

Furstenberg noted that although most of the teenage mothers wanted to complete high school, a large percentage did not meet their aspirations:

Yet, against the young mothers' own educational goals, their achievements did not measure up quite so well. All but ten adolescents reported that they hoped to complete their high school education, and nearly half looked forward to some type of higher education. While many considered that in all likelihood these aspirations would not be realized, 84 percent still expected to complete high school, and over one-quarter anticipated finishing some higher education. A large number of the young mothers failed to reach their goals (p. 160).

This coincides with Waite and Moore's assessment that the young mothers' educational aspirations did not differ much from that of other teenagers; yet, the pregnant teenager would be more likely to drop out of school than her peers.

According to Waite and Moore (1977) in their study of a nationwide sample of 5,159 "noninstitutionalized" civilian women between the ages of 14 and 24, the earlier the age at first birth, the fewer years of schooling completed. These investigators also attempted to explain why Black teenage mothers were more likely to complete their education than White teenage mothers and they concluded that:

...since teenage parenthood is more common among Blacks than among Whites, social mechanisms for dealing with this occurrence may be better established among Black families and in school systems with a high proportion of Black students (p. 224).

This assumption would, in part, tend to coincide with Furstenberg's observation of the family of origin being a crucial support system in the success rate of educational attainment.

Contrary to the notion that teenage pregnancy and premarital sex are more acceptable in the Black culture, Furstenberg (1976) noted in his research that Black families were unaccepting of premarital sex and pregnancy, but that once pregnancy occurred, the Black family was able to mobilize sufficiently to support the teenage mother. Furstenberg also found that the majority of Black adolescents in his study disapproved of premarital sexual relations: "...A substantial proportion of the pregnant adolescents and their parents disapproved of premarital sex. Nearly half of the mothers of the pregnant teenagers stated that they thought it was 'very wrong' for a girl to have sexual relations before she married and another quarter said they felt it was 'somewhat wrong' (p. 150)." The adolescents' views on premarital sex closely resembled those of their parents. Nearly half of the teenagers stated that it was very important for a woman to wait until after marriage to have sex. Phipps-Yonas (1980) concluded in their review of the literature on adolescent motherhood, "...it is inappropriate to conclude that teenage pregnancy is generally well accepted among the poor. Evidence has been provided that within lower-class Black communities, many families view teenage pregnancy as a social disgrace and financial burden and communicate to their adolescents that they should not become parents at a young age" (p. 408).

Ambition, academic performance and family expectations were also found to be highly predictive of whether the young mother remained in school until she graduated (Foltz et al., 1972; McCarthy and Radish, 1982). Educational completion was found also to be influenced

by mother's and father's education, father's occupation, family income, size of the family of origin, and whether or not the parental family was intact (Ewer and Gibbs, 1976).

Other studies find that school policies and practices may contribute to the teenage mother's failure to complete her education. Students who were given support, encouragement, and an alternative school setting which took into consideration the demands of pregnancy were more likely to complete their education (Foltz et al., 1972; Ewer and Gibbs, 1976). Moreover, those students who stayed in school during pregnancy had a higher probability of returning to school and completing their education after the birth of their child (Foltz et al., 1972).

Implications for the Present Study

The literature suggests that some specific variables, such as age, academic standing, parental socioeconomic status (SES) and educational level, family expectations and family intactness, should be considered when attempting to understand the educational attainment of teenage mothers. It also suggests two broader interrelated concepts in determining which mothers stay in school: social support systems and personal qualities, such as determination. These two concepts provide the framework for this study.

The literature already cited includes evidence that the family is potentially a major source of support for teenage mothers to continue their education. It is not clear from that literature what

other sources of support may be important, particularly when a family support system is not strong. It is also less clear from this literature how the teenage mother's personal strength or determination was crucial to educational attainment.

The literature, though scarce, suggests that ambition is one factor that is highly predictive of whether or not a teenage mother remains in school until graduating. The general literature on coping patterns seems to suggest that an individual's coping responses and social resources attenuate stressful life events. It is one thing to have a network of support and another thing to utilize that network in an effective way (Billings and Moos, 1981; Wheaton, 1982). Billings and Moos (1981) concluded in their study of adult coping styles that, "coping may impact on social networks; various patterns of coping may also lead to enhance or diminish social resources" (p. 154). Wheaton (1980), in his study of personal coping resources, distinguishes between environmental resources (social support) and personal resources (also referred to as "low fatalism"; i.e., personality traits which have a bearing on an individual's ability to cope effectively during stress). It may be that those teenage mothers who do successfully complete their education are able to utilize environmental resources because of positive personal resources, i.e., strong determination.

This study is an exploratory study of six teenage mothers who either completed their education, were in the process of completing their education, or were no longer involved in formal education. A

number of factors were identified which may influence a mother's decision to stay in or leave school. Of special interest is the interrelatedness of personal characteristics, social support systems, and events in individual lives. Possibly by studying these factors, questions can be generated for further research.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

This study was originally designed to recruit 20 to 25 teenage mothers. An intensive interview format was decided on and a questionnaire consisting of approximately 20 open and closed questions was to be used as a guide.

As the study evolved, it became apparent that it would be impossible to recruit the original number of participants and, therefore, it was decided to recruit as many participants as possible using the above-mentioned format, keeping in mind that the obtained information would not be generalizable to the larger population of teenage mothers.

What evolved were case studies of six teenage mothers who were all Black and never married (with the exception of one mother who stated she was "common law" married, but who was not living with the putative father). Their ages ranged from sixteen to nineteen.

Each mother was interviewed for approximately 45 to 60 minutes using the questionnaire. The areas covered in the questionnaire included educational status, reasons for leaving and/or staying in school, demographics, and socioeconomic status (SES) of participants and parents. (See appendices 1A, 1B, II, IV and V.)¹ During most of

¹Because the sample was so small, no significant information was pooled and, therefore, not discussed in detail. All of these six young mothers came from families in which there was at least one parent who was a paraprofessional or professional and had attended college.

the interviews, the questionnaire was followed verbatim and there were times when additional questions were asked for clarification. In addition (because this study evolved into case studies), it was important not to make the sessions overly structured. In addition to the questionnaire outline for intensive interviewing, each participant was given the abbreviated version of the Rotter's (1966) IE Locus of Control Scale (see appendix III). This scale consisted of four statements, with each statement having two choices from which the mother had to select one. As the study developed, the IE Scale per se was not useful in the analysis of these six cases.

All interviews were audiotaped and occasionally notes were taken. Prior to the interview, the mothers were informed of the confidentiality and purpose of the research. Each mother was asked to sign a consent form and those mothers who were under eighteen were required to have parental consent in order to participate in the research. Each mother who participated in the study was eligible for a fifty dollar lottery. Each mother was given a numbered lottery slip, with the winning number to be redeemable for the fifty dollars

It is questionable whether or not educational or occupational status of the parents is relevant, because as noted by Hill (1971) in his study of Black families, the majority of Black college students do not come from middle-class homes with college-educated parents. Hill also found that lower status students were more influenced by their parents than white students were.

after all the interviews were completed. At the end of the study a random drawing was held to determine the winner of the lottery. The winner was notified by the social worker at the Community Center and a fifty dollar money order was given.

The teenage mothers were recruited from a community center in San Antonio, TX.¹ The interviews were arranged through a social worker at the community center who met regularly with the teenage mothers for the purpose of providing assistance for child care, employment, and continuing education. All but one of the teenage mothers used the Day Care at the community center for their children.

Each taped interview was reviewed and later transcribed verbatim. After transcription of the tapes, the transcripts were checked against the tapes for accuracy. An initial written summary was done of each interview and these summaries were revised after again checking them against the tapes and transcripts for accuracy. Each transcript and each written summary was reviewed by the thesis chairperson.

At the time of the study, five of the mothers had only one child and one mother had two. Their children's ages ranged from three weeks to nineteen months. Three of the mothers lived with their parents, two of the mothers lived with close relatives, and one mother lived with a woman who was also a single parent. Five of the mothers had

¹In order to insure confidentiality, the names, places and land geographic locations have been disguised.

their children with them, while one mother's child was living with the putative father's parents. None of the mothers were living with the putative father and only two of the mothers were receiving financial and child support from the putative father. Four of the mothers had a practically nonexistent relationship with the putative fathers, one mother (the one with two children) had a minimal relationship with the baby's father, and one mother's relationship was viable, though the putative father was away serving in the armed forces. This last mother's child was with the putative father's parents.

As of the time of the interview, two mothers were working and the remaining four were unemployed.

One of the mothers had actually graduated from high school one month before the interview. Two mothers obtained high school equivalency diplomas; of these two, one completed the tenth grade of formal schooling and the other completed the eighth grade of formal schooling. Of the remaining three, one mother dropped out of formal school in her eighth grade and at the time of the interview had been out of school approximately $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 years. She was 13 years old when she left. Also for this mother, an attempt was made on her part to acquire her high school equivalency diploma. Another mother in this group left school during the final quarter of the 11th grade and had been out of school for over one year. At the time of the interview, this mother was uncertain whether to obtain a GED or complete formal schooling. The final mother of this group completed

the 11th grade and was intending to return to school in the fall to complete her senior year. This mother was attending an alternative school program for pregnant teenagers.

The following chapter presents case studies of each of the participants, followed by a final summary chapter.

C H A P T E R I I I

CASE STUDIES

This chapter presents six case studies. Each case study is organized around the following issues: those mothers who were most successful in completing their educational program are presented first, followed by those mothers who were currently continuing their educational program and finally, those mothers who had not completed their educational program, with the most sincerest about completing her educational program presented first.

Cathy

Status at the time of the interview

Cathy was an eighteen-year-old Black woman who had an 11-month-old daughter. She was a petite and well-dressed young woman. She was soft spoken, very articulate, and responded to questions in a slow, thoughtful manner. Cathy had never been married and was living with her mother, younger brother, and her daughter. Cathy worked full time in a radiology clinic while her mother cared for her daughter.

Cathy graduated from high school in May, 1983. She was in the eleventh grade when she became pregnant.

The putative father was 19 and Cathy, by choice, did not interact with him. Also, by Cathy's choice, the putative father had not ever seen the baby as of the time of the interview. Cathy was receiving child support from the putative father after filing for it. The

educational or employment status of the putative father was not ascertained during the interview.

Cathy's intentions for the future were to go to college after working for a while and her career goal was to be a medical laboratory technician.

History

Cathy was seventeen and in the eleventh grade when she became pregnant. She was a B-C student and the thought of dropping out of school never occurred to her.

Cathy's pregnancy was an accident. She was on birth control pills, though shortly before becoming pregnant she had stopped taking them. Cathy stated that the pills were making her sick:

...I was taking birth control pills and the pills that I had gave me a reaction to them. I was sick, vomiting -- a bad reaction. So I just stopped taking them and not a month after I stopped taking them there it was -- pregnant.

Although the pregnancy was accidental, she valued her education and did not see the logic in dropping out of school when she was so close to graduating:

...I made this mistake, I did this, so I just felt like I should finish school. It was my 11th grade. Gee, I had one more year so why drop out? I've been going to school for 11 years, so why drop out? So I decided that would be best.

Finishing school was the most important thing for Cathy to do. She commented, "...I always said I wanted a family but I wasn't ready then because I had so many plans after high school. I wanted to finish high school."

Cathy persevered and remained in school throughout her pregnancy. Her daughter was born during the summer months and Cathy returned to school the following fall to complete her senior year and graduate.

Relationships/support systems

Parents. Although Cathy's parents were divorced, they both remained supportive of Cathy and were instrumental in her decision to stay in school:

...They helped me a lot and they were very supportive. Because some parents turn away.

Cathy stated that her parents thought it was "real important" for her to stay in school.

Cathy commented that she probably would've considered leaving school if it had been a financial burden to her mother to care for the baby. This is reflected in the following statement Cathy made in response to reasons she would have left school:

If there wasn't enough money, if my mother wasn't making enough. Like I said, she's taking care of my little brother and I and then there's the baby...So if there wasn't enough money for her to take care of all three of us and her, then, I'd feel like I should get out and get a job and help.

This was not necessary because it seems that Cathy's father, who was divorced from her mother for 3-4 years, provided financial assistance. As Cathy states, "he spoils us rotten." So it seems that Cathy was able to rely on her parents for financial support as well as child care support.

It also seemed that Cathy's parents were strong positive role models. Her mother attended college and had worked for a number of years with computers. Her father graduated from high school and retired from the military. Cathy stated she thought her mother earned slightly more in salary than her father.

Counselors and teachers. Cathy received support and encouragement from counselors and teachers at her school. Cathy was made to feel that although becoming pregnant was a mistake, she should not let it hold her back from completing her education. Cathy also acknowledges that although she became pregnant, it was up to her to rectify it. Cathy's perception of her counselor's and teachers' feelings toward her are reflected in the following statement:

I had a real supportive counselor and teachers. I got along with a lot of people. I'm the type of person, I can get along with anyone. Most of my teachers, they were real supportive. Like my parents, you know, said, "you made this mistake" and they saw that I realized my mistake and they kind of influenced me. "Don't quit now, everybody makes mistakes, just keep going, it's going to be hard, but you have to keep going." And it was hard.

It appears that Cathy's counselor and teachers reinforced a positive sense of her capabilities. They were also able to put Cathy's situation in the context of "everybody makes mistakes" rather than singling her out as an aberration. Also, the reality of the situation was acknowledged; it was going to be hard, but she had to keep on going.

Relationship with the putative father. At the time of this interview, the putative father was not involved with the care or financial

support of the baby. This, in part, was because of Cathy's anger towards the baby's father initially denying paternity. Cathy described the process of the baby's father's denial and her subsequent reaction in the following way:

...he denied it and came up with stories like how could he be sure that it was his, how could he be sure that I hadn't been with someone else. Well, that really hurt me because I knew and I told him that if there was any chance that the baby could be yours, and somebody else's, I wouldn't have come to you. I feel that would be my responsibility. But it had been a long while before I had been with someone else before him. So it went on and on and he denied it and he denied it and he denied it. So I Told my mother about it and I talked to his mother and his mother said, "Well, he's grown and I can't do anything about it and so that was really..." So I said well, I've made the mistake and I would like some help from him because I didn't do it alone, but there was nothing that I could do, so I suggested different things like blood tests, which he refused. That was a sign of guilt. I said, "I'll have to take care of it from here." So I went ahead and had the baby and I said, "I've made this mistake and I love her and I'm going to take care of her." Which is what I am doing now. I felt like a lot of young girls that if the father denies it they just leave it and say that if he doesn't want to take care of the baby, I'll just do it myself. I don't feel like I should have all the stress and all the strain because I didn't do it myself. So I went down and I filed for child support and got it.

Cathy became angered and she let the baby's father know how much he hurt her. This is reflected in the following statement:

...there was nothing else he could do. I'm a stubborn person...After he denied it for so long, I told him that he would never see this baby. She will be a year old and he hasn't seen her yet and he stays right in the same apartments. He's tried to sneak. Sometimes I'll have her outside in the evening when it's cool, let her play and get tired so she'll go to sleep and he'll walk around the corner and I'm so stubborn I'll pick her up and bring her in the house.

Cathy knew of the putative father for approximately 1½ to 2 years before becoming pregnant. Her description of their initial meeting went as follows:

Well, he was an accident. I knew him, he stayed in the apartment where I stayed and for a long time he would speak and sometimes he would come on a little strong and I would just brush it off and that went on for almost a year, because I really wasn't interested in him. He was a nice person, but I wasn't interested.

Cathy stated after a while she started getting interested in him and not long afterwards she became pregnant. A period of confusion and shock ensued after she became pregnant. Cathy commented, "...before you knew it, there was the accident. I was confused...I didn't know what to do."

Cathy seemed even more confused and hurt after she informed the baby's father of her pregnancy. She commented, "...I talked to him about it and like most Black men, they deny it..."

The baby's father was 19 at the time of the interview. It was uncertain to this researcher whether or not Cathy would ever involve the putative father in the rearing of their child. Cathy seemed intent on handling the situation the way she was handling it until her feelings changed and not before. She commented:

I'm not as angry now as I was and I'm realizing -- like I said, everybody makes mistakes. I'm not as angry as I was and I don't know how long I'll hold onto this anger. But as long as it holds out I'm not going to. When she grows up older and if she ever asked about her father, which I'm sure she will, he's asked me that -- what will I tell her? Will I say he's dead? Will I lie to her? I told him no, I won't lie. I'm going to tell her exactly the truth.

Presently, Cathy is very clear about what she wants and only time, further maturation, and experience will dictate what the final outcome will be. It was also clear that the putative father had not influenced Cathy's decision to complete her education.

Personal qualities

Cathy's education was of paramount importance to her. She demonstrated tremendous tenacity in staying on course to achieve her goals. As mentioned earlier, although the pregnancy was an accident, she was determined to complete high school. In response to good reasons for her to stay in school, Cathy selected the following reasons: It was important for her to get a good job; she wanted to set a good example for her child; and, because of her parents who wanted her to complete her high school education. As mentioned, Cathy commented that her parents helped her "a lot and were very supportive." She knew she had a special relationship with her parents; as she stated, "some parents turn away." Cathy's willingness to assume responsibility for her mistakes and her determination to beat the odds are reflected as follows:

...I had a younger sister that got pregnant and she was sixteen and she didn't finish school and she didn't go to college. So me being the baby girl kind of reflected on me. But I'd already planned... I made this mistake, I did this, so I just felt like I should finish school. It was in my 11th year. Gee, I had one more year, so why drop out? I've been going to school for 11 years, so why drop out now? So I just decided that would be best.

Even when Cathy became pregnant, finishing school was the most important thing for her to do:

...I always said that I wanted a family but I wasn't ready then because I had so many plans after high school. I wanted to finish high school.

Cathy's determination to learn from her mistakes was also reflected in her comments about birth control pills. As mentioned, prior to becoming pregnant Cathy was taking birth control pills. She stopped taking them shortly before becoming pregnant because they didn't agree with her system. "Now I am taking birth control pills and I have something that agrees with my system. And I do not miss them!"

Cathy's strength and determination were also reflected in her pursuit of child support from the putative father. As she mentioned, most young mothers would not have done the same thing. Cathy felt she did not get pregnant by herself and, therefore, should not have to bear the total burden of providing for her child alone.

As previously stated, Cathy planned to go to college, but she felt it was more important to get on her feet and become more financially stable: "In the future, not now...right now I'm just working to kind of get on my feet and then after I get on my feet I plan to go to college, before this year's out though." This seemed to be of added significance after having a child. Cathy had a strong sense of motherhood and felt it was important to adequately provide for her child. This was reflected in comments about foregoing immediate entry into college so she could work and also reflected in her comments in the love she expressed for her child. Cathy commented at one point, "I've made this mistake and I love her and I'm going to take care of her, which is what I'm doing now..."

Other comments about future plans and motherhood:

To work now and get myself at least half-way financially situated so that I can take care of my little girl the way I want to or close to the way I want to and after that, I'd like to go on and go to college, and if not college, a trade school.

Cathy sums up her goals and determination to achieve those goals in the following way:

...I know I can do it, all I have to do is put my mind to it. From there, just try to make it -- make the best for my little girl.

Summary

Cathy graduated from high school even though she became pregnant while in the eleventh grade. She did not take any time off from school after becoming pregnant and she said the thought of dropping out never occurred to her. Her child was born in July and Cathy returned to school the following school year.

After graduating from high school, Cathy secured a full-time position in a medical lab clinic; she reported she was interested in pursuing this area on a more professional level. Her plans definitely involved college or further technical training. Her mother was providing child care support.

Cathy valued her education a lot and seemed to effectively utilize a support network of people who also valued education and who also supported Cathy in the attainment of her education. Both of Cathy's parents were high school graduates and her mother had some college background. Both of her parents were successful at their careers and

this seemed to symbolize vicariously the importance of education and the achievement of career goals. I speculate that Cathy learned the importance of educational attainment from her parents, as well as receiving overt encouragement.

Cathy also valued motherhood and, in fact, thought it more important to continue her education and secure a good job in order to provide adequately for her child, as well as to set a good example for her child.

Cathy summed up her commitment to education as a means of: (1) pleasing her parents, (2) finding a good job, and (3) after having a child, to provide a better living and set a good example for the child.

Thus, it seems that Cathy was able to remain in school and subsequently graduate from high school, in part because of the strong support and encouragement she received from the significant network of people in her life. In addition, Cathy demonstrated a great deal of personal strength and determination. This was revealed throughout the interview in her reaction to the pregnancy, her filing for child support, her tenacity to stay in school, and in securing a good job. She showed maturity and clarity in her thinking and actions despite the initial confusion she experienced as the result of the pregnancy.

Indeed, Cathy's achievements seemed strongly associated with the buffering effects of her support network, her maturity, and her own personal strength.

Tina

Status at the time of the interview

Tina was a nineteen-year-old Black woman with a two-month-old son. Her son was in the day-care program at the community center. Tina was thinly built and above average height. She had a pleasant smile and a gentle sense of humor throughout the interview. Tina had never been married, was unemployed (though looking for work) and was living with her aunt and uncle in Florida. Her father, stepmother and siblings lived in Missouri. When Tina was fifteen, her biological mother died of cancer.

Four months prior to the interview. Tina had received her high school equivalency diploma (GED) from a junior college in Florida and was planning to enter college the following fall.

Tina was not involved with the putative father by choice and received no support from him. The putative father was eighteen, had also dropped out of school, and was living in Missouri.

History

Tina stated that she completed tenth grade before finally dropping out of school. Although she left school while in the tenth grade, Tina had enough credits accumulated to fulfill requirements for completion of the tenth grade:

I was in a 10th grade homeroom, but I was a senior. I could've graduated because all my class periods were taken in order for me to graduate and I was supposed to graduate in June, but I dropped out

of school in the Spring of '82, so I was out all that summer.

...I didn't have enough credits to graduate as a senior because you have to have so many credits. So I had enough for 10th grade, but they made my schedule out to make enough credits to graduate.

Tina finally left school approximately four months prior to becoming pregnant. She was a C student and found it difficult to do the work because she had missed many days of school. Again, I was puzzled and got the impression that Tina had left school more than once because of the following comments in which she was emphatic about not dropping out because of getting pregnant:

...When I first dropped out of school, I didn't quit because I was expecting, because I wasn't -- I just didn't want to go. I had missed a lot of days and I was way behind and it was hard for me to catch up with my classes.

Tina felt that the courseload was "too much" and did not even provide her a lunch break, thus she left.

Because of Tina's first comments about when she first dropped out of school and her later comment about missing a lot of days, I concluded that there was a possibility she had left earlier and then returned. In addition, there was the discrepancy in her verbal statement about when she completed the tenth grade. Tina's description of when she started missing a lot of days from school and of when she finally left school, seemed to coincide with the time of her mother's death. I can only speculate that Tina's missing a lot of school was related to her mother's death.

Tina got pregnant the summer after she finally left school. She stated, "It was an accident, it was not planned at all" (laughs). Tina knew about birth control but stated, "...I wasn't thinking -- it was too late when I thought about it." Tina didn't think getting pregnant would happen to her. When she found out she was pregnant, her immediate concerns were about how her father and brother would react (elaborated on later in the next section). Tina was also upset because pregnancy interrupted employment plans:

...I was going to get a job and it was all planned out so nice, I was going to be making money that I wanted at the time and the very next day I found out I was pregnant. I was really upset.

Tina seemed less concerned with the consequences of having a baby and more concerned with other people's reactions, employment opportunities, and how she would appear. This last concern is reflected in this statement:

Well, I wasn't really upset because I was going to have a baby, but I was upset because I didn't want to be big, didn't want to buy maternity clothes...

Tina was living in Missouri with her parents and siblings when she became pregnant. After becoming pregnant, Tina decided she would live with her aunt and uncle for two main reasons: one was because she was being negatively influenced by peers and the other reason was because the putative father was getting in a lot of trouble and Tina feared she'd get into trouble with him. The other possible reason that may have also influenced Tina's decision to live with her aunt and uncle was, as Tina reported, that she did not get along with

her stepmother (see below).

It was while she was pregnant and living in Florida with her aunt and uncle that she decided to pursue her GED. Getting a good job was important to Tina and she was finding it difficult to obtain a decent job without a high school diploma.

I went back and got my GED because every time I went to apply for a job they always asked me if I graduated and I said no and I'd never hear from the people again because everybody has to have some kind of diploma and I was talking to a counselor at St. Fredericks and he said that I needed to go ahead and get it. So I just went back.

Tina received her GED in February at age 19 and as previously stated, four months before this interview.

Relationships/support networks

Parents. As mentioned, when Tina was fifteen her mother died of cancer and her father remarried two years later. Tina commented that she and her stepmother did not get along: "We were friends and everything, but we just didn't get along." Tina denied that her relationship with her stepmother was a factor in her decision to live with her aunt and uncle.

It seemed that Tina's father believed in the value of Tina completing her education; he was a college graduate himself. In response to how her parents felt about her being in school, Tina commented, "...they were really happy and wanted me to go on." Although not much was verbally expressed about Tina continuing her education, it seemed her father and mother may have provided a role model for the

value of an education. Tina did allude to the fact that pressure was put on her regarding school. This was reflected in the following statement about her plans to attend an alternative school in Texas:

...It just sounded like I had to go and I wanted to go, but I hated people to tell me that I had to, especially when it comes to school, because I heard it so long...

No more was said about her father's feelings about her education, although a little more was expressed about her father's reaction to her pregnancy. In response to whether her parents were happy about her pregnancy, Tina commented, "Not at first, but then after a while the shock wore off. Yeah, they took it pretty well." Tina was initially quite concerned about her father's reaction to her pregnancy and in particular she was concerned about her older brother's reaction. Tina spoke of her brother and father with fondness and respect. Her concern was reflected in her response to what her first thoughts were when she became pregnant:

My father is going to kill me! That's all I could think about. I was also wondering how I could tell my brother and all of the people I knew. He was the very last person that I would tell and I really did not tell him, someone else did. I hated to tell him because we're so close, he would be upset. He couldn't stand things to happen to me...

Tina's relationship with her father seemed open and positive, but tired (to be elaborated on later). She knew her father would not reject her or make her feel guilty about her general welfare and would continue to be supportive of her in spite of the pregnancy. He appeared to be quite aware of the problems that could develop from dropping out of school and it also seemed he was aware in advance that Tina would

have some difficulties. This is all reflected in the following comments Tina made about how she informed her father of her pregnancy:

I was talking with a friend of mine, my father's friend, and I was telling her about it and she said you better tell your Daddy because it would be better for him to hear it from you than someone else. I went to tell him on his job. I called first and he reacted like he already knew. He wanted to know what I had to tell him. I said I just want to talk to you. I went in and sat down and he said, "what's wrong, are you expecting?" I said yes. "What are you going to do?" I want to keep it and he said, "well, I hope you can handle it." It was that kind of conversation. He had a lot to say, but uh, not mad or happy, he was just neutral. He said, "You know I'm here, whatever you need, just let me know." It wasn't an attitude like I don't care; he's not like that at all. I knew he'd be more hurt than mad. He said he kind of expected it because he feels once you dropped out, one thing leads to another, unless you're really determined to get it together and at that time I really wasn't. So I think he kind of expected it to happen (whispers).

Relatives' support. As mentioned, Tina lived with her aunt and uncle in Florida during and after her pregnancy. Tina attributed a great deal of her completing her GED to her aunt and uncle. She spoke of them with a great deal of admiration and respect and credited them with a lot of support. Tina had not thought she would ever go back to school, but it was with her aunt and uncle's encouragement (rather than pushing) that she decided to go ahead. Tina commented:

No, I really didn't think I would ever go back because I didn't want to go back. When my aunt wrote to Missouri before I came, she wrote down what she required and the one thing she said was that it was up to me, but she thought it was wise to finish school and she heard of a school here called St. Margaret's and it's run by nuns and I just said I wasn't going...My plan was to come

here, I was gonna act up, and go back home, but after I came I liked it and we started out looking for something for me to get GED. A lot of places required to go for year and I didn't want that and then I went to St. Fredericks and I liked the atmosphere and I decided to go and it was only 5 weeks.

Her aunt's and uncle's views on education were an important factor.

Tina commented:

...My uncle thinks that everybody should be the best at whatever they can. He thinks you ought to continue your education and he didn't push me into it, he just kept encouraging me.

Tina stated that her aunt and uncle were very influential. She commented specifically about her uncle: "He has a lot of influence. Not because he's strict. He's really down to earth." Tina felt that her uncle was someone she could look to for support and someone she could talk to. Tina felt that her relatives were more supportive than her father for the following reason: "I think my father was just tired of it and with my uncle, we were just starting out new and everything, so I think I got more influence and boosting."

Relationship with putative father. The baby's father had no influence on Tina's decision to get her GED. She spoke of him with detachment and felt he had or would have had a negative influence on her had she stayed in Missouri. In fact, Tina attributed the baby's father's negative influence as the main reason she left Missouri. Tina commented:

...I really didn't leave because of my family. I'm living where I am because of the baby's father. He's a lot of trouble -- he's a street person -- it was too much and I was really afraid that he would get involved with something and somehow I would get into it and I didn't want

that to happen. Even if I hadn't gotten in trouble, I was planning on moving here when my mom died, but I didn't want to leave my father and brother. I knew eventually I would come out here; but after I got pregnant, I decided that I might as well.

Tina stated that the baby's father was initially angry when he found out she was pregnant and for a short while severed communication with her:

Well, at first he was -- he hit the ceiling. I didn't hear from him for a long time. Until I decided to move here and then he didn't want me to move. By then, it was through.

Tina denied being upset over becoming pregnant. She seemed more disappointed about being pregnant with the baby's father: "Well, I wasn't really upset because I was going to have a baby...I didn't want to have his baby." Tina's feelings about the paternity of the baby was also reflected in response to whether she liked the baby's father:

I liked him, but if I were going to have a baby by anybody, I didn't want it to be by him because -- he's responsible, but he's in his own world.

In any event, at the time of this interview, Tina had no contact with the putative father and he was not contributing financially.

Religion and other support systems. Tina commented that religion had always been a major part of her life. Up until the time her mother died she attended church regularly. Tina could not say whether or not her religious views had any impact on her decisions about school.

Another support system was the child care assistance Tina received from the community center. Although having this assistance did not impact on her completing her GED, it would be of future benefit when Tina found a job and started college.

Personal qualities

Having a child did little to influence Tina in terms of completing her education or terminating school. Although she seemed quite dissatisfied with school at the time she dropped out, she seemed to never give up her long term goals of college and other interests. This is reflected in her response to why she wanted to go on to college in light of having a child:

Well you see, I've always, all during high school and junior high, wanted to go to college. I've always wanted to study education and either education or some kind of field having to do with little kids and when I had the baby, while I was expecting, I was going to a lot of nutrition classes and being involved with a lot of things having to do with children. I just figured while I'm in it now, while I'm experiencing this with the baby, I might as well go ahead, because I like them so much.

Tina seemed determined to achieve her goals in spite of the added responsibility of having a child. She felt that having a baby did not change her mind at all. Her determination was also reflected by the fact that even while she was pregnant she completed her GED program, and in her desire to pursue a voice training class. She commented in response to whether she took time off from her school program during pregnancy, "No, I think I only missed about a day out of 5 weeks." Her eagerness in pursuing voice training was reflected in her comments about whether or not she was in a school program at the time of the interview. Tina commented:

Right now, I'm not in any. I always wanted to go into voice training but that was when I was expecting. I was in my 7th or 8th month and they told me it wouldn't be wise to go to that class now because I was ready to have the baby and wouldn't have a chance to finish. So I'm not studying anything right now.

Tina was eager, but was discouraged from taking on any additional coursework because she was in the last trimester of her pregnancy. It may be that Tina was, in part, unable to complete formal school because she was suffering an emotional loss from her mother's death. This is only speculation, but in some ways Tina seemed to perceive her ability to move forward in Missouri because of some "mental thing." She admitted she missed a lot of days from school which made it difficult for her to "catch up" with her classes. Tina's insight into her decision to go on in her education and what may have been blocking her is reflected in this following statement:

It all happened here. I mean in Florida. I was just thinking about it after I got pregnant. I tried to go back to night school back in Missouri, but it was too much. I was sick a lot my first 3 months. I just couldn't do it. I couldn't get myself to go. I think it was really a mental thing because when I came here I was still sick but I wanted to go.

It seems likely that Tina may have experienced emotional trauma, because as mentioned earlier, dropping out of school correlated with her mother's death. Tina's determination to make it and prove to others that she could do it also came out in her response to what she did to make the decision to complete her education:

...I wanted to be able to write back home and say I'm doing such and such. As a matter of fact, when I got my GED, I had some teachers who told me

I would never finish high school. I got a hundred copies and sent them to all my teachers and wrote little notes. I wrote one teacher, my drama teacher. He's another reason I dropped out of school, because they wouldn't take me out of his class. I don't think he liked me -- he didn't like Blacks. He told me several times that he didn't like me and I made sure he got a copy...

Tina seemed determined to continue her education. She commented in response to her plans for college, "I'll go on this fall." Going to college was a strong motivating factor for Tina completing her high school education. She commented (and mentioned earlier in her reason for completing her high school equivalency diploma): "Well, I went back and got my GED because every time I went to apply for a job they asked me if I graduated. I knew everybody had to have some kind of diploma and I knew that I wanted to go to college..."

I did not pick up any strong sense of how motherhood affected Tina's determination for completing her education. For Tina, pregnancy was an unfortunate accident. She commented, "It was too late when I thought about it." Discussion of abortion as a consideration for Tina was not pursued or volunteered by Tina.

Summary

Tina was nineteen when she received her high school equivalency diploma. This was approximately one month after giving birth to her now two-month-old son. Although she dropped out of formal school four months before getting pregnant, she realized that in order to secure a good job and go on to college she would need a high school diploma. Tina planned to enter college the following fall semester.

Tina came a long way in a short period of time from when she dropped out of school. She seemed to experience many difficulties in school after the death of her biological mother. Additional factors, other than the pregnancy, may have also negatively influenced Tina (e.g., peers, lack of support from teachers).

Though Tina seemed to rebel against being told what to do, she also seemed to pick up through learning from her parents the value of an education. More importantly though, it seems that the positive influence and support Tina received from her aunt and uncle was a major motivating factor for her educational attainment. In addition, Tina was determined to prove her teachers wrong and took great pleasure in sending them the results of her GED exam.

Tina's sense of motherhood did not seem to play any part in her continuing her education and, in fact, Tina acknowledged that it had no influence in her decision surrounding her educational attainment.

Tina's strong determination to go to college, the need to get a good job, and the support network of people significant to her were elements that seemed to come together in order for Tina to achieve her educational goals.

GerriStatus at the time of the interview

Gerri was a short, somewhat unkempt and overweight seventeen-year-old Black woman who giggled throughout the interview. She was single and had two children, a girl aged 19 months and a boy, aged 3 weeks.

Gerri completed the eighth grade and dropped out of school twice while in the ninth grade. Both of the times she dropped out were related to her pregnancies, though there were also other factors.

Gerri completed her high school equivalency diploma (GED) in May, 1983, approximately two years after leaving formal school, and was waiting for her certificate to be sent to her. She was living with her parents, two sisters and one brother. Gerri maintained contact with the twenty-year-old father of her two children. The putative father also completed his GED, was unemployed, and was living with his mother.

Gerri was currently looking for fulltime work.

History

Gerri was fifteen years old, in the ninth grade, and having trouble with school when she first got pregnant. Her grades were C's and D's. Gerri left school soon after her first pregnancy. She commented, "I was having problems in school, so after I had my little girl I went back and I was still having problems, so I just didn't go back after this one." She indicated that she associated with a peer who was a

"troublemaker" and Gerri was getting into a lot of trouble with her. When Gerri did get pregnant the second time and attempted to go back to school, the school officials were reluctant to accept her back.

Well, the girl I hung with, she was a troublemaker and so I was hanging with her and I was getting myself into a lot of trouble. I went back and the people gave me a hard time. At first they told me they didn't want me there, but I kept going back until they let me in. I kept going to school and I was doing what I was supposed to do, but they would always find something that I was doing wrong.

This was the reason Gerri gave for dropping out of school the second time. It's not clear from her comments whether the school was nonsupportive because of Gerri's behavior or her pregnancies.

In any event, her difficulties with school and her pregnancies influenced Gerri's decision to pursue her high school equivalency diploma.

After being out of school for about a year and a half, it seemed Gerri was still ambivalent about whether she should complete formal school or a GED. She commented:

Well, I had started to get my GED and then I got uninterested and then this time, I said I'm going to go get it. The reason I quit the first time is because I had decided that I was going to go back to school, which I did. Then I stopped again and decided the best way to do it was just go and get my GED, so that's what I did.

Gerri did not suggest she wanted to become pregnant and, in fact, reported she was taking birth control pills and didn't believe, at least for the first time, that she could get pregnant.

(The doctor) said that I must have missed one.
Another reason I could have got pregnant is that

no one told me that I had to take them the same time every day. I didn't know that. They say they only last for 24 hours and I didn't know this.

The second time Gerri became pregnant she was less certain that the pregnancy was an accident and even justified it because of her feelings toward the putative father. She commented, "I don't know, I was in love." Marriage was considered but the putative father's father told them they "were rushing things."

Relationships/support networks

Parents. Gerri's parents were very supportive of her education and encouraged her to complete it. They were also supportive after her pregnancies and although they were initially disappointed with the pregnancies, they stuck by Gerri. Gerri commented that her mother was more encouraging of her completing school:

I think my mother says more about my education because she would have liked to see me go across the stage. I would have liked to see it myself, but it just didn't work out that way. But now she's accepted it and she's glad that I did go on and got my GED...as long as I have some kind of education.

While Gerri attended the GED program at night, her mother and sister took care of the baby.

Gerri's mother worked as a practical nurse full time and earned the most income for the household. Gerri mentioned that her mother graduated from high school and completed two years of college. Gerri was uncertain about her father's educational level. Interesting to note, when Gerri's mother was eighteen she gave birth to Gerri out of

wedlock. One reason Gerri's mother may have been more supportive is because she could perhaps identify with Gerri having a child out of wedlock and pursuing a career.

Gerri described her parents' reaction to her pregnancy in the following way:

They weren't too happy, but then they stuck in there with me.

A little later Gerri commented:

Yeah, they accepted it and they're crazy about both of them now.

Although Gerri felt it was her own responsibility to take care of her children without being a burden to her parents, her parents felt differently. Gerri commented:

...but still, I'd rather be on my own and I tell them that I know I should get out on my own, but they just say don't rush yourself. I hate depending on my mother because I know that she's having a hard enough time by herself and I've got these two babies.

Community center. The Community Center made it possible for Gerri to work on her GED because the high school equivalency diploma program was held in the Center. In addition, the Center provided daytime child care, which made it possible for Gerri to work. In response to whether Gerri thought it helped to have the Community Center, she commented, "Yes, it helped because I was working and at first I was paying \$35 for my little girl to go to day care; then she came over here and I only had to pay \$6, so that helped a lot. I was paying \$35 plus diapers and milk and stuff and that's a lot of money."

School system. It does not seem that the school system was very supportive of Gerri and as mentioned, peer pressure influenced her behavior in school. The nonsupport of the school system is reflected in her response to why she stopped going to school after her second child. Gerri commented:

At first they told me they didn't want me there, but I kept going back until they let me in. I kept going to school and I was doing what I was supposed to do but they would always find something that I was doing wrong, so that's what did it!

It's not clear from her comment whether the school was nonsupportive because of her behavior or her pregnancies; it could have been both.

Gerri indicated that in addition to having trouble in school, financial pressures played a part in her decision to leave formal school. In response to whether it was a concern for her, Gerri responded, "It still is" and that it played "a very big" part in influencing her actions.

Putative father. Gerri didn't talk about the putative father in detail. He was minimally involved with the babies, providing financial support when he could. Gerri seemed perplexed by the putative father's lack of involvement. She commented, "He used to help me, but now he's not doing anything. He bought the baby one box of diapers, if you call that doing something (laughs)." Gerri commented that the putative father helped much more with the first child than with the second. Gerri's frustration or puzzlement about the babies father's involvement was revealed in her response to how she felt about him not doing anything. Gerri commented, "Well, he does say if you need anything, let

me know; but then he knows there's two babies there and they're gonna need something -- I don't know what it is (in exasperated tone)."

The putative father was 20 years old, unemployed, and also received a GED. Gerri expressed annoyance at him not working. She commented, "He's not doing anything. He's sitting around and letting his momma take care of him and they do it though."

Personal qualities

Gerri seemed determined to "get some kind of education." She expressed concern for providing an adequate life for her children without depending on her mother. In addition to her parents wanting her to stay in school, Gerri thought it was important for a mother to have a good education in order to set a good example for a child and having a good education made it easier to provide a better life for her children. In response to what she thought played the most important part in making a decision about continuing her education, Gerri commented:

Well, I was thinking about my babies and I wanted to do something so I could help them myself and I couldn't do nothing without an education or at least a GED. So I decided to go get it. For my children, for myself, too.

Later on, in response to whether the major reason for completing her GED was basically her kids, Gerri commented:

Yeah, because they're going to need me and if I don't have it, there's no way I'm going to be able to help them. Plus, I hate to depend on my mother for everything.

Gerri's sense of motherhood was strong and provided the impetus for her to get her GED.

Gerri demonstrated her determination in other ways also, though it seems the responsibility of having two children and peer pressure precluded her chances of attending a formal class setting. Gerri was very persistent in her efforts to return to formal school:

I was out of school about a year and a half. Well, I had started to get my GED and then I got uninterested and then this time, I said I'm going to go get it. The reason I quit the first time (working towards her GED) is because I had decided that I was going to go back to school, which I did. Then I stopped again and decided the best way to do it was just to go and get my GED. So that's what I did.

Soon after Gerri commented:

After I had my little girl, I decided that I wanted to go back to school. I got a job and everything and I was going to school. Then I got pregnant and kept going for a little while. Then I quit again and decided to just go ahead with my GED, because it seemed like every time I was getting ready to get back in school, something would go wrong, so I decided to go ahead and get that done with.

Gerri may have been determined to complete her education, but she also may have realized that the demands of motherhood were too pressing to attend regular school. This, coupled with her desire not to burden her mother, quite possibly may have pushed her towards completing a GED vs. graduating from high school.

Summary

Although Gerri only completed the eighth grade of formal school and after two unsuccessful attempts to complete ninth grade, she was able to get a high school education through the GED program.

Gerri showed a great deal of determination in obtaining "some kind of education." Gerri's dropping out of formal school seemed to be related to her pregnancies, but not the direct result of the pregnancies. She was having academic problems and getting into trouble. One can only say that the pregnancies were the final precipitants. While she would have preferred graduating from formal school, her efforts to achieve this were thwarted by lack of support from the formal school system and the demands of rearing two children.

In any event, Gerri achieved a lot. The determination and the support she received from her parents gave her the necessary impetus for the accomplishments she made in her education. Another important driving force for Gerri in completing her education was her children. Several times Gerri emphasized how important it was for her to provide a life for her children. She felt that this could only be done if she had some kind of education. She was fortunate to have the support of her parents because they made it possible for her to pursue her GED by providing child care during the evenings and encouragement that she could do it. The likelihood of Gerri obtaining her diploma with two children without this support seemed very slim. It seems that perhaps Gerri's strong opinion that education was deeply connected with being a good mother was because of the strong identification she may have had with her mother. In all probability, Gerri learned from her mother that education and motherhood were compatible; that becoming a mother did not preclude attaining an education.

Another aspect of Gerri's support network was the Community Center. Not only did it provide day care, thereby making it possible for Gerri to work, but it also offered the GED program at its facility, making it possible for her to receive her high school equivalency diploma.

Thus, it seems that Gerri's positive support network, her need to provide a decent life for her children, and her personal determination were the key factors in Gerri's educational attainment.

MayaStatus at the time of the interview

Maya was a seventeen-year-old Black female with a six-month-old daughter. She was a solidly built woman of average height. What was striking about Maya was the physical strength that was emanated and the strength in her eyes. She had a strong voice with a warm smile; she reminded me of the writer and poet, Maya Anjelou, in many ways. When this Maya spoke, she did so with confidence and clarity.

At the time of the interview, Maya had completed eleventh grade and would be attending school the following academic semester. Maya attended an alternative school program for pregnant adolescents during the eleventh grade. She did not intend to take any time off from school and definitely wanted to graduate from high school and attend college. Maya's career goal was to become a registered nurse.

Maya had never been married and had minimal personal contact, by choice, with the putative father. The putative father was 21 and was not providing child support; his educational and employment status were unknown. Maya was living with her mother, stepfather, three brothers and two sisters in a small housing project. She was to begin a full time position as a nurse's aide the week of the interview. She was currently doing volunteer work in the day care program at the Community Center, a program that her daughter attends as well.

History

Maya was sixteen years old and in the second semester of tenth grade when she first became pregnant. She remained in school throughout the school year completing the tenth grade while she also worked:

I didn't stop going to school at all because I was pregnant in May, in my third month, and I wasn't really showing because I'm a short person and I was working during that time while I was pregnant and I didn't even know it. I was working from 3 to 9 p.m. and didn't get home until 10:30 and I'd have to eat and then have to sit up until 12 or 1 a.m. doing my homework. Then I'd have to get up at 6 a.m. to go to school. So it was pretty hard for me because I was going through those sleeping spells and dragging along and I started seeing my classwork going down and so I said if I get too low in my grades I'm quitting this job and continuing my education because I didn't want anything to imbalance it.

Maya's education was very important to her. She returned to school the following fall, entering the eleventh grade at the school for pregnant adolescents. She was approximately eight months pregnant. Her daughter was born in November, ten days after Maya turned seventeen and she returned to school to complete her eleventh academic year. Maya was an A-B student at the time. She never really seriously considered disrupting her education by dropping out of her own choice; although after the birth of Maya's daughter, she was being pressured by her mother to pursue her high school equivalency diploma (GED) instead:

Well, I've thought at times I was going to have to (drop out of school). Like when my mother wanted me to get a GED and I said I can't go to college on a GED...

Maya's wishes prevailed!

Maya's pregnancy was accidental to a large extent. I say to a large extent because to a small extent she seemed to want to get pregnant; she knew of birth control, but chose not to use any:

Well, I knew about birth control pills, but, see, I did not want to use any of those chemicals in my body because if I do decide to have a child, I don't want to ruin me from having kids period!

Also, she commented when she was with the putative father a part of her did want a child. This feeling was reflected in response to her sexual involvement with the putative father at the time she was not using birth control:

...if you're asking me in terms of if I knew I could get pregnant, the answer is partly yes and partly no. Because I told you that I wasn't really scheduled. (Maya stated earlier that her menstrual cycle was irregular.) ...Like I got away with it for so long and never got pregnant and then I got pregnant.

Immediately afterwards Maya commented:

During the time we were together I did want a child and I wanted a child that much and I did get pregnant. I kept telling myself I want this child. I wanted it so bad.

Maya was going with the baby's father approximately four to five months before becoming pregnant. Abortion was not considered as an alternative and, in fact, she had very strong feelings against abortion or giving her child up for adoption. The following were her thoughts during her pregnancy:

I'm not going to give her up or give her away.
I'm not going to have an abortion. I don't

think that's right. If I had another kid today I wouldn't have an abortion. I'd have to struggle to take care of it, but I wouldn't have an abortion...

Maya had her daughter and kept her.

Maya had a difficult time during her pregnancy and attempted suicide a few times during this period. She managed to stay in school with the support she received from significant people such as the school nurse and a friend. Her faith in God and sheer determination were also key elements in her continuing her education. These supports are explored in the next section.

Relationships/support networks

Parents. Maya was given little support and encouragement from her parents to stay in formal school during and after her pregnancy. As mentioned, Maya's mother thought that Maya should pursue her GED and her mother didn't believe Maya should consider college. Maya commented:

She (her mother) thinks in terms of "you're not going to go to college, you're not going to be able to go to college." Just because I have a baby doesn't mean that I can't go to college.

Maya's mother was 40, had nine children, and was able to graduate from high school and complete one year of college. Maya did not think it was fair that she not be given a chance to go to college as well.

She had nine kids and she struggled with nine kids and she went to college. She went to St. Fredericks for about a year and she graduated and in terms of her having a chance to try and go to college, I'd like the same opportunity for myself...

Maya's parents were not supportive of the pregnancy either. When asked what her parents feelings were about the pregnancy, Maya commented:

When I was pregnant, I didn't get too much reaction from them. They were both withdrawn. My whole family was withdrawn and I didn't have anybody to go through the pregnancy with and I had been through a lot of problems then...

Maya did not comment much on her stepfather, and her biological father did not have any contact with the family. Maya was uncertain about her father's educational level.

It seemed that Maya's family became more supportive after she gave birth to her daughter. According to Maya, her mother, sisters and brothers would sometimes help out with child care:

Everybody helps some, she usually (her daughter) sleeps in the bed with me. My mother helps out a little bit. My little sister baby sat for me while I went to the store yesterday. My brother likes to spend time with her and play with her...

School nurse. As mentioned earlier, Maya had a difficult time during her pregnancy and attempted suicide three times. The school nurse gave Maya a great deal of help during this period. The nurse was an extremely important support for Maya emotionally:

When I got pregnant, I left (home) for a month and tried to take an overdose of pills three times and my mind wasn't really stable then and because when I moved away I tried to take an overdose then and the third time I took four or six sleeping pills and one valium and it was a trying time for me. The nurse at school, she helped me through it. She told me always to remember that she loved me. I will never forget her for what she'd done for me.

Maya spoke about the school nurse with much respect and fondness. She kept in contact with the nurse even after the birth of her daughter:

I called her (the nurse) when I had my daughter the next day and told her what I'd had. I usually, when I can, go visit her. And she's usually happy to see me. I've seen pictures of her husband and kids. I think I used to tease her and tell her 'you don't have the same person in the office as you use to.' I used to be in the office all the time. I think I was the only student in her office that many times.

It seemed that Maya needed to feel loved (this is verified later) and the school nurse was able to reciprocate. The emotional support may have partly provided a buffer against Maya dropping out of school.

The friend next door. Another key support person for Maya during her pregnancy was a friend who lived next door. Maya commented:

I didn't have too many people there for me, but I had a friend of mine who stayed next door. She still stays next door; she's about to get married in the fall. We consider ourselves sisters. I couldn't have made it through my pregnancy without her. I was so depressed and so hyperactive then. I just couldn't get control over myself and she's always so helpful.

It seems this person was a source of emotional support for Maya as well.

Religion. Maya reported that her faith in God provided her with strength in the most difficult times during her pregnancy:

...He helped me when I didn't have nobody there. The only person I could go to was the Lord and he helped me through so many problems. That if something happened and you know there's no way in the world it could've happened, but somehow it happened. You know who had something to do

with it and it gives you a calm feeling inside and your emotions calm down a little bit, when you know; I know I'm being taken care of. I know I can look forward to this happening to me. I want that so much. I worked so hard for it.

In the last few sentences of the above quote, I can only speculate that Maya was talking about looking forward to positive things happening to her and having worked hard achieving her goals in life. Maya's faith provided spiritual support which probably fostered emotional strength. This, too, may have acted as another buffer against a very stressful time.

The community center. Maya felt the A.E. Community Center was a much needed support system for child care. Maya would have been reluctant to return to school without adequate child care for her daughter:

I needed a place for my baby and I wouldn't start school until (Tia) could get enrolled in some kind of day care and they had one over at the school, but I heard there was a long waiting list which I wasn't too sure about and I wanted to bring her here anyway. I wanted to drop her off on my way to school.

Maya was familiar with the community center; it was only a few blocks away from where she lived. It seems Maya needed to feel comfortable with the place she left her child and she was also concerned about easy access to a day care program, for transportation would have been a problem for her. The community center was an important support for Maya, for without it Maya reported she would not have started back to school after giving birth to her daughter.

Putative father. The baby's father was 21 years old and was not a part of Maya's support network. He had no influence on Maya's educational goals. He did not play any role in the support or care of their baby; this mostly by Maya's choice. Maya expressed anger and feelings of hurt over the putative father initially denying the child's paternity:

He came and called me when I was in the hospital. He had all kinds of doubts whether or not she was his child. He said he was coming. I said you can come but I'll be gone...He came by one day and I had so much anger that I didn't know whether to strike out at him or what.

Maya's anger over the putative father questioning the child's paternity and her sense that he did not love her motivated her to end the relationship with him:

I told him I didn't want him to have anything to do with the child. I said hey, I don't want you back if you don't love me. And sure enough, I don't even know if I gave him a chance to answer. We just argued and then calmed down and I just told him goodbye.

Personal qualities

Maya strongly valued her education and her role as a mother. It seemed the two were inextricably linked, one not being any less important than the other. When Maya was given the list of good reasons to stay in school, she selected: (1) in order to set a good example for her child and (2) to get a good job. She knew that in order to secure a good job she needed to complete her education and she also knew that it was important to be a positive role model to her daughter; for Maya, a positive role model meant getting a good education. Both of the reasons

for staying in school were equally important to Maya:

...both of them are important to me because getting a good job, that's a way to survive and in this world that's what you need, is to have a job. And, setting a good example. I think it's right for a mother to set a good example for her kids and to also let them know what's right from wrong. And education, you really need that and it's going to be harder for her. As you get older, it's still going to be harder for a parent to try to push kids through school and it's going to be harder in the future than it is right now.

Thus, one could see the interconnectedness between education and motherhood for Maya. It seemed that she vicariously learned from her mother that having children did not preclude finishing school or going to college. Maya followed her mother's covert message to complete her education, rather than her verbal discouragement of going on to college or completing formal high school work. Maya reported that it was her decision alone to continue with her education. She described herself as determined and this was certainly supported by her ability to utilize persons for emotional support and in her final decision to pursue graduating from formal high school versus obtaining a GED. Maya summed up her determination in the following manner: "...as much determination as I have and all the past experiences that I've had, I could make it!"

Maya seemed to be very sensitive and it seemed it was her extreme sensitivity that made her vulnerable to being hurt by others: "I was always very depressed and I'm just a person that always feels a lot of everybody else's pain along with my own."

Although Maya's sensitivity seemed to make her vulnerable, it also could be looked upon as a strength because it seemed to make her aware

of the future needs of her daughter.

Maya's strong sense of motherhood seemed to evolve from her own feelings about not feeling loved. Maya reported that when she had her own daughter, she now had someone to love. It also seemed that being able to love her daughter placed a higher value on her wanting to continue with her education.

Right now I value my life more than I valued it before because I have someone. See, I always, as a child, I use to think my mother didn't love me at all because I was the one that always got mistreated. That's why I was always in trouble. I felt that I had to go and find love myself, but it's not like that and I don't have to go looking anymore, because I have a daughter to share that with.

Maya's sense of motherhood was also reflected in her comments about why she wouldn't have an abortion or give up her child:

...If I had another kid today, I wouldn't have an abortion. I wouldn't. I don't think that's right. I'd have to struggle to take care of it but I wouldn't have an abortion. I would not give it up unless I was absolutely sure that the child would be taken care of because I can't stand to see a little child being brought into the world and treated like a piece of trash.

Maya demonstrated a great deal of determination. It is not clear what the suicide attempts were an expression of; there were some obvious underlyings in Maya's personality. Nevertheless, Maya overcame the depressive reaction by her determination to provide love to her unborn child and to be somebody.

Summary

Maya became pregnant when she was sixteen and in the tenth grade. Nine months later, in November, while in the eleventh grade she gave

birth to her daughter. Maya stayed in the regular school system until she completed the tenth grade and later transferred to an alternative formal school system for pregnant adolescents. Maya completed eleventh grade and intended to return to school to complete her senior year the following school semester, either during or after her pregnancy.

The elements that seemed to work together that allowed Maya to stay in school were her support networks such as the school nurse, the friend next door, the community center, and her strong faith in God. In addition, Maya showed a lot of personal strength. This was revealed in her determination to get a diploma from the formal high school system versus getting a GED, in her ability to work while pregnant and stay in school, in her ability to overcome emotional disturbances, and in her ability to seek out and effectively utilize the available support systems.

As mentioned, there seemed to be an interdependence between continuing her education and being a good mother. Both were of equal importance to Maya.

Maya's intentions were to graduate from high school and go on to college to be a registered nurse. Her plans for going straight through school were less certain though, because she did not know how supportive her parents would be:

It depends really on how things turn out, because I was planning on going on straight through college and get it over with, because I was going to be a RN...but you know with my parents thinking, 'Hey, you can't do that because you've got a child...'

Maya seemed well aware that whatever decision she made, if she allowed too much time to elapse with interruptions in her education, she might find it harder to achieve her goals. She continued from the previous quote:

...I want to hurry up and do it -- because I know if I put it off and wait a couple of years I won't do it. I want to do it while I've got it fresh in my mind...

I had no doubts that Maya would complete school. My impression was that if Maya set her mind to it and utilized the personal strength she has already demonstrated, her educational attainment would not be compromised.

LeiaStatus at the time of the interview

Leia was a nineteen-year-old Black woman with a one-year-old daughter. She was a petite, somewhat timid young mother. Her voice was soft and childlike and she appeared much younger than her stated age. She had never been married, though she maintained a close relationship with the putative father. The putative father was eighteen, had graduated from high school and was in the military on active duty status. Leia was living with a single mother, who was not a relative, and her children in Florida. Leia's daughter was living with the putative father's parents in Nebraska. Leia voluntarily made the decision to let her daughter live with the paternal grandparents until she "could get on her feet." She was beginning a fulltime job as a sewing machine operator the week of this interview. Leia's parents were divorced and both were remarried. Her mother and most of her siblings lived in Nebraska. Her father and grandmother lived in Florida.

Leia was seventeen and in the eleventh grade when she dropped out of school. She left formal school during her pregnancy, and at the time of the interview had not returned. Although she initiated work on her GED, she has not completed all the requirements. Leia was uncertain about whether or not she would complete formal schoolwork or her GED, though it seemed she was leaning towards graduating from high school. She stated she definitely wanted to go to college to be either a designer or social worker.

History

Leia dropped out of formal school when she was either seventeen or eighteen, even though she was doing well academically; she stated she averaged an AB in her coursework. She became pregnant when she was seventeen and it's uncertain at what point in her pregnancy she left school, though from her description it sounded as if she left school in the last quarter of the eleventh grade. She commented, "I stopped school in the 11th grade...I was 17 going on 18 when I was pregnant."

Leia commented about her feelings about returning to school:

I was afraid that if I went back to high school I would be put back in 11th, but I spoke to a counselor/teacher from St. Fredericks College and he said I could go back as a senior because I had enough credits to graduate.

From her comments I speculated that she must have been close to completing the eleventh grade. At the time of the interview she had been out of school for a little over one year.

Leia dropped out of school because she felt uncomfortable around her peers; she may have felt embarrassment because she was pregnant. She also felt it was important to find a job so that she could provide a stable life for her daughter:

I was disturbed by a lot of people. I kept on getting sick for one thing, but I still didn't want that to keep me from going to school. I stopped because I wanted to get me a job so I could take care of her even though me and him got along. He wanted to marry me and things, still I wanted to get a job while I was pregnant.

Leia's pregnancy was unplanned. She knew of birth control, but stated she was "hard headed." In some sense it seemed that a part of

wanted to become pregnant: "I never had sex with a young man before. Not until I was 17 going on 18...and that was the first time. He didn't force me, he was real nice to me...I'm the one that finally gave in. We was not using nothing..." In response to whether she knew about birth control, Leia commented:

I knew it, but I was hard headed to tell the truth. But we really cared about each other... Love...I'm the one that gave in. I told him I was ready. I felt I wasn't going to get pregnant any way. Me pregnant?" We started liking each other so much. We started playing games and talking about how we'd like to have a baby with each other...I guess we talked too much...

As it obviously appears, Leia became pregnant soon after initiating sex for the first time. This was confirmed by Leia: "I met him in January and we started going with each other in February and in March, almost April, I was pregnant."

Abortion was considered as an alternative to having the child, but it wasn't what Leia or the putative father wanted, it was what her mother wanted: "He wanted to keep the baby and so did I, but my mom wanted me to have an abortion."

During part of her pregnancy Leia lived alternately with her divorced parents who resided in different states. By the end of her pregnancy she was living with the putative father's parents in Nebraska.

My father is in the military and he lived here and they're divorced. He's in the Navy. My mom got married again to a man in the Army. I was like, I've sort of been tossed around. I went to Virginia for the summer. My father didn't like it there because it was bad, so he sent for me and my brother from Virginia to Florida and I didn't want to have the baby in Florida so I left Florida and went to

Nebraska because the father wanted me to have the baby there; he wanted to get together. After that I ended up staying with them and then we broke up and everything was falling apart, so I came back here on my own. My mom and my stepfather, who I originally stayed with, headed out for Germany.

Leia gave birth to her daughter while living with the baby's paternal grandparents in Nebraska. Shortly afterwards she moved to Florida with her daughter, experienced difficulties, and moved back to Nebraska. It must have been in Florida that she began her GED work, but this is unclear. The reason for this assumption is because of Leia's comments about St. Fredericks College, which is in Florida, and her feelings about returning to school:

I'm planning to go back to school next winter session; going to senior school only because I want to walk across the stage in my gown. But to tell the truth, I took my GED, but I have one more test and that's math, in GED to get my diploma or go back to high school.

At the time of this interview, Leia had made no definite steps toward completing a high school diploma, although she was close to finishing. She was more concerned about securing a good job.

Relationships/support systems

Parents. Leia's biological parents were both college graduates and held well-paying jobs; as mentioned earlier, her parents were divorced and both remarried.

Leia's relationship with her mother seemed more supportive than her relationship with her father. Leia's mother was aware of her talents and seemed supportive of her capabilities:

My mother told me, gee I don't know what you're going to be, but you're going to be something 'cause you've got a lot of talent.

It's hard to speculate whether or not Leia's mother supported her during the pregnancy because, as mentioned, Leia's mother encouraged her to have an abortion. Leia commented, "My mom wanted me to have an abortion."

Leia definitely did not want an abortion and expressed concern over future ramifications if she chose to have an abortion. Evidently abortion was discussed in detail with a social worker and her mother:

I was talking to a social worker, me and my mom. And we were talking about this abortion and stuff. Then the social worker wanted to talk to me alone and told my mom to go out of the room and she asked me if I really wanted the child. I said I want my baby, I want my baby, I'm not going to kill my baby..."It's not a baby." Still I don't care, I want the baby. I'm not going to do that. It might affect you if someone tries to force you to get an abortion, even if it is your mother, it might affect you later on in the future. Might be almost like a mental problem.

Based on Leia's comments, her father seemed less supportive and their relationship seemed more strained. Leia commented: "My father and my grandma think I'm always doing something bad because I've been gone all day to look for a job; I'm always getting criticized." Later she commented:

...I been through a lot really. My father acted like he don't care sometimes. He makes enough money that if he wanted to he could get me a nice apartment, but the way his attitude is -- I'd just rather do it all by myself.

...My dad, he makes enough money to get me a car if I ask him. He was going to get me one but he changed his mind. Sometimes he acts like he don't care. Sometimes I feel like he hates me. Me and him didn't get along.

Leia seems to measure her father's feelings towards her by the number of material things he could provide her. There is a possibility that Leia's relationship with her father was altered after Leia became pregnant. She may have felt he was less supportive and again, this seemed to be judged by the material things her father would not give her.

Leia lived next door to her grandmother for a while and had to rely on her at times for food and child care. This also seemed to be a minimally supportive relationship. Leia expressed both negative and positive feelings about her grandmother. Initially Leia commented that her grandmother was very critical (also mentioned earlier):
"...my grandmom, we don't get along. One time she hurt me. She took a heel of a boot and hit me on the head and I started bleeding. The baby was there at the time. She broke my finger. She's real tough. But I left there."

On the positive side, Leia was able to seek out her grandmother in times of real need: "...Grandmom, she's been a pretty good lift up. We didn't get along, but she lifted me up. She stayed next door and when I was hungry, she gave it to me."

Leia did not comment on her parents' and grandmother's feelings about her continuing education. This seemed odd in light of the fact that both parents seemed to value education enough to have become college graduates.

I can only speculate that Leia's parents may have felt it would be difficult for Leia to continue her education with a child and, as mentioned, Leia seemed embarrassed about returning to school pregnant. This may be one of the reasons Leia's mother wanted her to have an abortion. This speculation could be supported by Leia's concern for securing a job to provide for her child, rather than looking at education as a means of getting better employment. At some point it may have been communicated to Leia that now that she had a child she must provide for it. It is also possible that Leia's relatives pulled away from her after having the child and subsequently Leia no longer perceived them as supportive. When given the list of reasons for staying in school, Leia did not indicate that her parents wanted her to stay in school.

Putative father and baby's paternal grandparents. The putative father and his family seemed to be a major support network for Leia. She received emotional support during her pregnancy and child care support after her pregnancy. As mentioned earlier, it was the baby's paternal grandparents that supported Leia in her decision to carry the baby to term:

...His parents didn't want me to get an abortion,
but they had enough money to get me an abortion.
So what happened, they told my mom the bank was
closed the day I was supposed to get the abortion.
Now they tell me they lied, they had the money.
"We didn't want you to get an abortion."

Leia seemed to seek out people (baby's father's parents) who supported her own wishes. It also seems that when Leia was experiencing hard times with the baby, they gave her the support she needed. Leia commented:

I took her (the baby) to visit her father for Christmas and we stayed there for a while til the vacation was over and I came back without her because he wanted to keep her until he went into the Air Force and they saw me struggling. They are really nice and they said we'll keep her until you get on your feet. She'd talk to me and write to me every once in a while. She (the baby's paternal grandmother) said, "I bet that people is trying to tell you that I'm trying to take the baby away, but I'm not. I'm just trying to help you out... While she's away you do what you have to do and you come back to get her anytime you want."

The baby's father was 18 and in the Air Force. He graduated from high school and seemed very interested in having a relationship with the baby. Leia spoke of the baby's father with a lot of respect and affection:

I was engaged to the baby's father. I don't know what we are now. Seems he wants to keep on writing me. He's almost like me -- he keeps on struggling. He takes care of that girl. I can see young men my age just wanting to get weed or dope. They don't take care of the baby. Him, he was only 17, he took care of the baby, he had a car. When I took her down there for Christmas and left her all I could hear is that he took care of her every day. He worked, came in after school and took care of her. He gave her baths. He took her off the bottle. He potty trained her. Everybody wants us to get back together and he wants to.

Again, nothing was mentioned about whether or not Leia was given encouragement from the baby's father or his parents to continue her education.

Religion. Leia's belief in God was a buffer for the difficult times she experienced after having her child. She stated, "...Mostly I've been depending on God..." And in response to whether religion played a strong part in her life, she commented, "Yes, it is. I think I

wouldn't have made it without God... Later in the interview when Leia was talking about her plans for college, she responded, "I think all it takes is faith -- if you take one step, God takes two -- that happened a lot."

Community center. This agency was a support for Leia when she was having a difficult time making it on her own with her daughter:

I've been in a lot bad shape and I just didn't have any money period. One time the community center, that's why I like the community center, and I ran out of diapers and I didn't have anything to eat and I said I got to do something. If I was weak minded, I probably would have gone out there in the streets...I cried and prayed... I said, got to be something there. I thought of the community center and they had a program called social services and they gave me food and then they took me up to this place called Family Aid and they gave me some diapers and I was satisfied until I could get my money and get another job...

Personal qualities

Leia felt her education was important to her in that it would provide a means for her to create a better life for her child; but it seemed her sense of motherhood outweighed immediate educational goals. As mentioned earlier, Leia stopped school because she wanted to get a job in order to take care of her daughter. Even though Leia stated she definitely wanted to complete her high school education, she expressed concern over how she could manage school, work and a baby: "...but if I get settled and get (Cindy), it might be a problem going to high school and working. But I heard there is a school where you can go to night school called St. Fredericks I was thinking I'm going back to school no matter what..."

Caring for her child now was the most important reason that influenced Leia's decision to leave school. When asked for good reasons for her to leave school, Leia chose the response, "There was no other way to care for my baby." She continued:

At the time I was staying with my mom and then I started staying with his family. I think its important for a child to have their mother around. School was in my mind, but I felt that she had to have me around all the time -- it was almost holiday time too when I got out and I just felt that she had to have me around and I was getting ready to take my GED. I wanted to take care of her...

It seems that Leia may have picked up her values about motherhood through direct experience: "I had a lot of experience because my mom had two little girls...She had a little girl already. I took care of her a lot when my mom was gone. I had a lot of experience and felt that I needed to take care of her, that was more important than school at the time. I felt that it was more important to take care of Cindy."

Leia seemed very concerned with being a good and responsible mother. Her sense of motherhood and responsibility to her child was also revealed in the following statement:

...I want to raise my daughter in a good environment. I want her to have a nice place to stay even if she's my only daughter forever. I want her to have nice things and I want her to grow up nice, good mind, not get in trouble.

At another time Leia expressed pride in mothering her child: "Me and Cindy, I raised her up good. She was healthy every time I took her to the doctor..."

When Leia began experiencing difficulties in raising her child alone, she expressed pride in always providing for her daughter: "...I always kept food for Cindy's mouth...I didn't go out in the streets and hustle no money like that..."

Leia demonstrated good judgment and strength when things did become difficult. She seemed able to effectively utilize support networks when they were needed. She showed courage and determination in trying to make it under very difficult circumstances. She sought out and obtained jobs necessary to feed her child, but it seemed it just wasn't enough to live off of. It was very difficult for Leia to give up her child, but it seemed as if it was the only alternative she had; she was determined not to depend on anyone for support, at least for herself. She made many attempts:

Soon as I got out of school, it seemed like the whole part of my business was trying to get on my feet, get on different programs, get a job. Soon as I had her, too, I kept on going. I was too young to get on food stamps...they said I had to wait until I'm eighteen...I kept trying to get on different programs. I've been through a lot of when I was in Nebraska.

As mentioned earlier, Leia wanted to finish high school and pursue college. She believed education was important in order to set a good example for a child and understood, in retrospect, some of the advice she received from her mother and grandmother, that she didn't believe when given.

Leia's attitude about completing her education and setting a good example are reflected in the following comments: "If you don't set a good example, then the child will grow up like you are -- say if there's

a teenage mother out there -- I want to make a career as a social worker. I want to raise my daughter in a good environment..."

Leia's plans for college are described in the following comment:

Yeah, I want to go (to college) for sure. I wanted to go to college to be a designer either in interior decorating of homes or clothes. When I do that, I wanted to go into business management. That can be done...

Leia apparently learned a lot from being thrust prematurely into motherhood:

I'm still a teenager, but now that I have a child of my own I notice a lot of things that my mom noticed that I didn't notice. If you don't raise the child up the right way, they're going to grow up like they don't care neither if you don't pay no attention to them...Yes, I noticed a lot of things that my grandmother or mom would say then, I noticed that now. I realize that what they told me is true. I'm really trying to struggle.

Leia had to do it her way. It seemed she was constantly struggling for her independence and trying to prove to others that she was capable of handling her life. Her determination and need for independence are reflected in the following comments:

...I told my mom that I wanted to start out on my own and I didn't want to be depending on nobody, except for me 'cause my daughter has to look up at me and I can't be looking up at everybody else, depending on them. So far I'm doing pretty good.

A little while later Leia commented: "...I don't need to prove nothing to nobody, but I'm going to show them that I can do it myself."

Summary

Leia dropped out of school over one year ago while she was in the

eleventh grade. She was pregnant at the time and although she was in good standing academically, she reported she felt a strong desire to get a job to provide for her unborn child. This was a major compelling reason for Leia to leave school. Leia also reported feeling disturbed by her peers, though this seemed to have less of an impact on Leia's decision to leave school.

It is uncertain whether Leia would complete her high school education, though she reported she wanted to "walk across the stage" and she wanted to go to college. It was my impression that Leia could complete her education because she had all the necessary ingredients to do so. She had a strong support network for child care provided by the baby's paternal grandparents and she had a close relationship with the putative father. Her parents were both college graduates. She had a clear sense of what she needed to complete before going to college and she was close to finishing. In addition, she was a strong student academically when she was attending formal school. Religion was also a strong buffer for Leia.

What did seem to be missing was any clear verbal encouragement to continue her education from either her parents, grandmother, the baby's paternal grandparents, the putative father, or other significant people. Also, it seemed that Leia's family pulled away from her because they became embarrassed after she became pregnant. In any event, Leia did not perceive her family as supportive. As an example, when the issue of abortion came up, Leia did not get much support from her family, but sought out those people who did support her own wishes.

Leia's overwhelming concern to provide a stable life for her daughter and being independent seemed to outweigh any value Leia may have had for her education. Leia could not or would not connect that completing her education currently was extremely important for securing a good job in the future.

Leia has demonstrated that she has a great deal of strength and determination as revealed in her efforts to raise her child alone, in seeking help from the community center, from securing a number of jobs, and in utilizing the support of the baby's paternal grandparents.

It is not clear whether or not verbal encouragement about completing her education has been offered, but it is my opinion that if this encouragement is overtly expressed and if Leia can connect that completing her education now will have a positive influence on her sense of motherhood by providing more and better opportunities for securing a job later, then Leia will be able to achieve the educational goals she sets for herself.

Judy

Status at the time of the interview

Judy was a 16-year-old Black female with a one-year-old daughter. Judy was very thin and of average height. She spoke softly and often in a monotone. At times during the interview she was encouraged to speak louder.

At the time of the interview, Judy had completed eighth grade plus some GED work, but was not currently involved in any educational work. She referred to herself as being "common law" married to the putative father who was 33 years old and had completed a GED. Presently though she was not living with the putative father because of statutory rape legalities. Judy was living with her grandmother in Miami and her parents live in New Jersey.

Judy was unemployed, but was to start a full time position at the Community Center's Day Care Program at which her daughter attended. She was uncertain about her educational plans and she was uncertain whether she would complete formal school or her high school equivalency diploma (GED).

History

Judy had been out of school for approximately three years at the time of the interview. She left school one year before becoming pregnant. Judy reported three main reasons for leaving school: (1) she was experiencing conflict at home, (2) she was influenced by peer pressure, and (3) she was dissatisfied with school. Judy made the

following comment in regard to pressure at home:

...see, I was staying with my grandmother at the time, and times were really hard, and I figured, I guess it is time for me to get out on my own, and I just felt in my mind that I could live by myself and live my own life, because when I wanted to go out, she wouldn't let me and when I wanted to do my own thing, she wouldn't let me, and so it was a restraint around my neck.

Later she commented, "Well, like I say, things at home was not really going that good and everybody was bugging me, do this and do that...so I just figured that instead of going to high school I would just get me a job. I wasn't listening to nobody; I had to run my life by myself. So I left."

In response to peer pressure as a reason for leaving school, Judy commented:

Well, my friends wanted me to leave...Well, in school I had a bad problem about listening to other people giving me advice and I would listen and then I would do it, which I think now was real stupid. But I thought then it wasn't really stupid. And I let people tell me let's go out and do this and do that.

Judy felt that school was useless. Her dissatisfaction with school is reflected in the following comment:

Well, you know, like teachers. They teach you things that are not really going to apply in life. Say for instance you are going to be a carpenter, you don't need to know about Santa Anna to be a carpenter and you don't need to know about English to be a carpenter, and like some of the teachers are prejudiced and they only taught you half of what you need to know.

A little later she commented:

Well, see, I was going to school here for a while (Florida) and then I went there to school (New Jersey) for a while and then I heard

about the GED while I was in school and I thought, what's the use of going to school for twelve years when you can get it on one sheet of paper for six months.

Judy also indicated school was not challenging enough for her:

...I didn't really see any use for the whole twelve years, because if you can get a GED in three to six months and say for instance, if you are thirteen years old and you get a GED, then you know all this at one time instead of -- I can understand them breaking all this down, but if you have a genius mind and you can get all that on one sheet of paper, then you can go to college when you are thirteen and be out when you are nineteen or twenty, maybe earlier...

Judy became pregnant when she was fourteen. She did not consider it an accidental pregnancy. She and the putative father were living together and had discussed having a child. Her comments surrounding her decision to become pregnant reflected poor judgment, immaturity and idealism:

Okay, I figured that him and me were going to get married. He wanted a family and he asked me if I wanted a family and I told him that if we were together I didn't see anything wrong with having a baby because I like children and plus I have two little sisters and I taught them, so why not have one of my own to teach. And I was really curious about if I had a baby what it would look like and have been curious with that ever since I was little. If I had a baby, what would he look like. So I had a baby.

Again, there's no indication that having a child impacted on Judy's education in any way, so there's much doubt that she would have finished school because it was important to her child.

As stated, the pregnancy was not an accident and this was further reflected in her following statement:

No, it wasn't an accident. We had agreed and I just like having little ones running around the house. I think little babies are a joy to me. See, the reason, like some girls, they go out and have one anyway, don't matter who it is, but in my case I figured we were going to get married and if the money was right, we would have, but we didn't and someday if the money is right, we still might get married. There is really no definite yes and no definite no. So I figure that if I am going to get married, then I want to have a baby. I didn't do nothing wrong.

Relationships/support systems

Parents. Judy's parents were divorced when she was two and Judy had not seen her mother since that time.

As mentioned earlier, Judy's father and stepmother lived in New Jersey along with two stepsisters. Judy chose not to live with her parents because she stated: "I didn't really like it." There may have been pressures at home that Judy felt were too restrictive. This was reflected in the following comment:

I respected them you know. We were happy to a certain extent. Like when I wanted to go out with friends or to a party or something, they wouldn't let me go and then I didn't understand why until I got out there and saw why and got to know the parties and the streets and all that, but as I say, then I didn't understand.

Judy's parents did encourage her to complete her education, but Judy was determined to do things her way:

Well, they gave me advice. Like, it's best to stay in school and get your education and I explained to them about the GED, you know, but they was telling me that you should just go ahead and get your schooling so they can teach it all to you, but I was saying if I can get all this in 3 to 6 months, what is the use of going twelve years and

they were just saying it is better for you to go that long and get a good education that way and they kept telling me to go back to school. And I didn't listen to them because I already had it set in my head I wasn't going back...

It's not clear whether Judy's parents were supportive of her during or after her pregnancy. Judy did not comment on this, nor was there any mention of their reaction to her pregnancy.

Grandmother. Judy lived with her grandmother most of her life and her relationship with her grandmother also seemed stormy. It appeared that Judy was constantly struggling for total independence and resisting any restrictions placed on her by her parents or her grandmother. This is reflected in the following comments:

...I just felt in my mind that I could live by myself and live my own life, because when I wanted to go out, she (grandmother) wouldn't let me, and when I wanted to do my own thing, she wouldn't let me...I lived with my grandmother practically all my life, so I figured that I could live on my own, so I left...when it came to me going out and doing things I wanted to do, like when I wanted to go skating, I couldn't go. When I wanted to go swimming, I didn't go. Like this game I couldn't go. She was always telling me there is nothing out there for you, there is nothing out there for you.

And, as mentioned earlier, the home pressures Judy felt were a precipitant for Judy finally leaving school.

Judy's relationship with her grandmother seemed to improve after Judy's baby was born. She began to recognize that her grandmother always cared for her and loved her. When asked with whom she was living, Judy responded, "My grandmother. See, the thing I was grateful about was after all that I went through she accepted me back and I am glad

of that." In response to the interviewer's comment that her grandmother really loved her, Judy commented, "I didn't always know that, but as they say, experience is the best teacher."

Relationship with putative father. As mentioned earlier, the baby's father was 33 years old. This presented some legal problems for Judy because of their age difference. The baby's father was facing a "statutory rape" charge and was hiding out, it seemed, to avoid being arrested. In response to whether there was a problem with the baby's father being so much older, Judy commented:

Well, see it was a statutory rape case. We had the baby and didn't nobody in the hospital complained about, which we did worry a lot. And we figured, well if we get married they wouldn't have anything to say about it because high business executives are marrying these young people anyway. So the only time it became a problem is when someone started getting nosey. See, we had already considered that we were going to deal with the problem whether people like it or not. There ain't nothing wrong with it because nowadays old women are getting young men, so I really don't see anything wrong with it.

Judy later commented that the baby's father could not be seen with her. She commented he wanted to "live like a hermit" because of the difficulties he had in finding a job. This may be so, but it also seemed he was avoiding the legal authorities.

The putative father chose to get his GED rather than complete formal coursework. Judy commented that the baby's father felt the way she did about school. It did not follow logically that the putative father felt the same way she did because he was older and dropped out of school first. It seemed more plausible that Judy felt the same way the putative did; that indeed, she was influenced by him.

Judy commented that the baby's father helped with the baby when he could and that he has seen the baby, although was unable to keep in constant contact:

He plans to stay in touch, but not so close, because, okay, like if he goes on unemployment, he can't put our address, because he can't live there. So if people just don't see me and him together, say like for instance somebody come around looking for him, they can't say that I have been in contact with him.

Personal qualities

Judy seemed naive about the immediate or long range consequences of not completing her education. Even though she selected "a mother should set a good example for her child" as a good reason for completing her education, I was not convinced that she really felt that way. I was left with the impression that if it had not been given as a choice, it would not have come up for her. Only twice during our interview did Judy give me any sense of what motherhood meant to her or if it impacted her plans for school. The first time was in response to whether she planned to graduate from high school:

Well, I was thinking about going back cause I talked to my auntie about going back and she told me there was a lot of paperwork to go through. Like I would have to go back through middle school to get my records and then have to go two or three years of summer school. So I just decided that instead of going through all of that -- my baby needs something else and all, I would just get the GED and go to college during the day or high school during the weekends or something and study for law so I can be a lawyer.

Spending a lot of time in school was not what Judy wanted. In fact, as mentioned earlier, her dissatisfaction with school was one of the

reasons she left. It seems having a baby was incidental and in all probability, may have increased the unlikelihood that she would complete her education. Judy clearly seemed unable to understand what her responsibilities would be in the future.

As briefly mentioned, Judy thought she might finish high school or her GED, but this was not said with any definitiveness. A major concern was the amount of work she would have to put into going back to school and, therefore, she thought it would be more probable that she would complete the requirements for a GED:

Well, the reason I am thinking about it is that I would have to go to so many years of summer school.

Her plans for obtaining a GED was as follows:

It really depends. Like some things you have to have a diploma, some things don't accept a GED. People tell me that a GED is not as effective as a diploma. So really at this point I am not really sure. I have to wait until next year comes and I can go register and see all the things I have to go through.

Judy's plans for college were more definite than her immediate plans for completing high school. Judy seemed unable to realistically project into the future. For example, Judy wanted to be a lawyer. She was, however, unable to see what needed to be done currently before she could begin to think about a career as a lawyer. It's as if the present had no meaning, it was only the future she could hope for. Again, this seemed to make it very unlikely that she would be able to plan realistically to complete high school. Her idealism and lack of foresight into what it would take to achieve her goals are reflected

in the following comments:

The main reason I am interested in the law is because like attorneys, one of them was real helpful to me, like in a world like that, you get to know a lot of things. You get to know all the positives and all the negatives and it just seems like there is a lot of experience in that rather than being an electrician or homemaker or something, it's a lot of experience because you get all kinds of people and maybe it's because of the money, you know, because they make a lot of money.

Summary

It is not clear that Judy will continue her education beyond the eighth grade level at which she left school three years ago. She reports having left school prior to her pregnancy primarily because of a strong dissatisfaction with school and the need to get out on her own. While she would not completely rule out the possibility of returning to school, she spoke in some detail of the tremendous amount of time and work it would take to go back. She seemed somewhat more interested in working on a GED, but had no plans to do so beyond waiting until next year and checking into it.

The status of Judy's education seems to have little to do with her having a child. Her leaving school was unrelated to her pregnancy and she does not cite having a child as a barrier to continuing her education. Nor does she seem to see a child as a compelling reason to stay with her schooling. For Judy, motherhood and education seem to be relatively separate issues.

A major driving force in Judy's life seems to be a wish to be an adult and independent, and those wishes seemed important both in her quitting school and in having a child. There is little sense that she sees education as a major factor in becoming independent and an adult, so that these goals might motivate her to continue her schooling. She expresses some awareness that employment can depend on education, but that also does not seem to be a strong motivator. In fact, Judy seems, in general, to live pretty much in the future with a very vague and somewhat unrealistic sense of the present rather than any kind of specific plan. She might like to be a lawyer, but expresses little real sense of what that would take.

Judy's social network is also not a strong force toward the continuation of her education. Her parents apparently wanted her to complete her school, but she seems intent on being quite separate from them and does not feel they are generally supportive. Going to school becomes a point of conflict, rather than an issue of support. No one else in her significant social network is described as supporting further education, and in fact, Judy suggests that her common law husband sees school the same way she does. At the time she left school, her friends encouraged her to do so. Judy is still only 16 and some turn of events might make a difference, but the weakness of her own motivation to attend school and the absence of positive support for doing so in her significant relationships give little reason for optimism. Her status as a mother seems to have little to do with this, except that it is an "embodiment" of her wish to be an independent adult, a wish which had more to do with her leaving school than with any sense that it is important to continue.

C H A P T E R I V

DISCUSSION

This study explored the educational attainment, the support networks, and the personal characteristics of six teenage mothers ranging in age from 16 to 19. Cathy was seventeen and had an 11-month-old girl; Tina was nineteen with a two-month-old daughter; Gerri was seventeen and had two children, a nineteen-month old daughter and a three-week-old son; Maya was seventeen with a six-month-old daughter; Leia was nineteen with a one-year-old daughter; and the last mother, Judy, was sixteen with a one-year-old daughter.

At the time of the interview, Cathy had graduated from high school; Gerri and Tina had completed their high school equivalency diploma (GED); Maya was currently continuing her educational program; and Leia and Judy had discontinued their educational programs, though they had done some work towards a GED.

As mentioned, the socioeconomic findings were not significant because of the small sampling (see Methodology section). In addition, the literature suggests that the socioeconomic status (SES) of the parents may have an influence that is contrary to popular beliefs (that higher SES is indicative of higher educational attainment). The Rotter Scale (also mentioned) was insignificant as a result of the small sampling and variations of individual responses.

Mothers Who Had Completed or Were Currently
Completing High School Requirements

Education

The mothers in this group were Tina, Gerri, Maya and Cathy.

When given the list of "good reasons" to stay in school, all of these mothers selected "to get a good job." For all but one mother (Tina), this was intricately linked to being a good mother and was a major motivating factor.

Gerri, Maya and Cathy indicated that it was important for them to set a good example for their child/children and again, this was connected to having a good education. Gerri and Cathy reported that their parents wanted them to stay in school. Cathy also reported that her counselor and teachers wanted her to stay. Cathy reported that getting a good job and parental desires were the most important reasons for her to stay in school. Maya indicated that it was her decision alone to stay in school and this was the most important reason for her to stay. Maya had completed eleventh grade and chose to graduate from high school rather than receive a GED.

Again, of this group of mothers, when given the list of "good reasons" to leave school if they had to leave, all but Tina indicated that an influencing factor would have been "there was no other way to take care of the baby." Gerri and Tina, the mothers who received their GED, both indicated they were not doing well in the formal school setting. Tina indicated she didn't want to be there, while Gerri added there was "not enough money" to stay in the formal school system. All of the

mothers, except for Gerri, indicated they definitely wanted to attend college and/or professional technical training.

The literature indicates that ambition and/or high educational motivation was one factor that was highly predictive of whether a teenage mother continued with her education and the above responses of "good reasons" to stay in school and college aspirations are generally consistent with this assumption.

Pregnancy

All of the mothers in this group reported that their pregnancies were accidental. For Tina and Cathy this was especially true; while for Gerri and Maya there were indications that they partly wanted a child. Maya reported she wanted someone to love, while for Gerri, with her second pregnancy, reported she thought she was "in love." All of these mothers knew of birth control. The reasons varied for why birth control did not work for them. For Tina, she didn't think pregnancy would happen to her; for Gerri, the first time she became pregnant she reported she was misinformed as to how to use the birth control pills and the second time she became pregnant she missed taking one (it's uncertain whether or not this was intentional, since she reported she was "in love"); Maya reported that she felt the birth control pills would "poison her body" and ruin her chances for having children in the future and also, a part of Maya strongly wanted a child -- "someone to love"; and finally, Cathy reported she was using birth control pills that made her sick and, therefore, stopped taking them and subsequently became pregnant.

Of this group of mothers, all but Tina became pregnant while they were in school. Though Tina completed her GED while she was pregnant, she left school several months prior to becoming pregnant. Gerri (the mother with two children and who also completed a GED) left school each time she became pregnant. Maya left school only to give birth to her daughter and returned soon afterwards. Cathy gave birth to her daughter in July and took no breaks from school while she was pregnant.

The literature suggests that for mothers who stayed in school during their pregnancy, the chances of them continuing their education after their pregnancy was higher than for mothers who discontinued school during their pregnancy (Foltz, Klerman and Jekel, 1972).

Support networks

What is interesting to note about the mothers in this group is that all of them had some significant person(s), inspiration, or agency that provided emotional, spiritual, and childcare support and received direct or indirect encouragement and support to continue with their education.

Tina, who chose to complete her GED, was the only one of this group who was not living with her parents at the time of this interview. In fact, after Tina lost her biological mother through death, she chose to live with her aunt and uncle. It was from her aunt and uncle that she received direct encouragement and continuous support to continue her education. It also seemed that Tina learned from her father the value of education. Gerri, who also completed her GED, received support and

encouragement from her parents to continue her education. She also seemed to receive emotional support during her pregnancy. For Gerri there may have been a strong identification with her mother who was able to attain her educational goals when she was an unwed mother. Maya received support from several significant avenues. The school nurse and the friend next door seemed to provide emotional support during Maya's pregnancy. Her faith in God provided spiritual support and the community center provided childcare support. Maya also seemed to vicariously learn from her mother that having children did not preclude achieving educational or career goals. Maya's relationship with her parents apparently improved and they seemed more supportive after the birth of her child. Furstenberg (1980) noted that in most of the families he observed the teenage mothers' status was altered after having a child:

...By her own account and reports of other family members, she was accorded more respect and "treated less like a girl and more like a woman." The pregnancy brought more responsibilities to the adolescent, but she, at the same time, was accorded greater recognition by parents and siblings...

Meeks (1980) asserts that family relationships may actually improve when the teenage mother has been previously seen as a "bad" child. The pregnancy serves as a means to "get the parents off the hook." Meek states the family relationship improves because "...the fulfillment of the prophecy that she 'would come to no good end' retroactively justifies the mothers' long standing neglect and hostility toward her"(p.305-306).

Last, but certainly not least, was Cathy. Cathy graduated from high school and the significant support persons for her were her parents,

school counselor and teachers. All of these people made her aware of her capabilities.

Clearly this information is consistent with the literature that suggests that family expectations and supports are also highly predictive of whether teenage mothers will continue their education (Furstenberg, 1974; McCarthy and Radish, 1966). This was further supported by Caplan's (1974) findings that "the quality of the emotional support and task-oriented assistance provided by the social network" was more important than the type and intensity of the stress or the person's "current ego strength" in determining an individual's response outcome.

Personal strength

The determination demonstrated by each of these mothers was uniquely different. What seemed to develop as a pattern, though, was the ability of each mother to effectively utilize her support system. As mentioned in the beginning of this thesis, it is one thing to have a support network and another to use the environmental resources for personal positive gain.

For instance, Tina sought out her aunt and uncle and knew she wanted to live with them even before becoming pregnant. She accepted their support and challenge to continue her education. She could have rebuked their desires about her education, for she reported she was tired of doing what others wanted her to do, but Tina did not. Her determination was also reflected in her comments about proving to the teachers she had before becoming pregnant that indeed she was capable of succeeding academically. Gerri's determination was revealed in her

persistence in returning to school after having her first child, in spite of the lack of support she received from school officials. Later this determination was reflected in her ability to pursue her GED and work while pregnant with her second child. It seemed the odds were doubled against Gerri, given her age at the first birth and the number of children she had at such an early age. Gerri seemed to possess a great deal of personal strength to have gotten as far as she did. Gerri, too, accepted the advice and encouragement she received from her parents when she could have rejected it. Maya revealed a personal strength that, given the circumstances during her pregnancy, would have proven devastating for many mothers in general, let alone a teenage mother. Although Maya did not receive direct encouragement from her parents to complete formal education, she was able to utilize the support given by other significant people such as the school nurse. Maya chose to accept rather than reject the support. Maya's suicide attempts could be viewed as a severe despairing response to becoming pregnant. Furstenberg (1980) noted in the mothers he observed that their initial reaction was despair accompanied with astonishment. Meek (1980) suggests that suicide attempt is a reaction to the pregnant teenager's loss of "infantile omnipotence":

The resurgence of omnipotence in the adolescent years may lead to adolescent scorning reproductive reality by taking unwarranted chances, and its collapse is a major factor in the depression which are seen in pregnant adolescents...This collapse adds to the adolescents' despair and heightens her sense of total helplessness. This is an obvious setting for a suicidal "ordeal" (p. 306).

The suicide attempts would have been defeating for many people, but Maya seemed to call in all the remaining personal and environmental resources (her faith in God, the friend next door, the school nurse) she had available and used them. Maya demonstrated a tremendous determination to be somebody!

Cathy was the last mother of this group who revealed a great deal of personal strength. This was revealed in her determination to pursue child support from the putative father, in her ability to stay in school throughout her pregnancy, and her ability to accept rather than reject the support offered from parents and school personnel.

A common element that distinguishes these mothers was their ability to use the support offered them for positive gains. With some mothers, and in certain situations, support was actively pursued and certainly they actively received it. For instance, there was some indication that Maya actively sought out the support from the school nurse when she reported that she frequently visited her. Also, it seemed that Maya actively sought out the support of God.

In any event, for all of these mothers there may have been a combination of seeking and receiving support and effectively utilizing that support.

Mothers Who Discontinued Their Education

Education

Judy and Leia were the two mothers who were officially out of

school at the time of the interview. Both of them had done some GED work, but were ambivalent about whether to complete formal school work or the requirements for a GED.

When Judy and Leia were asked about "good reasons" to stay in school, both reported, "to get a good job." Judy reported it was important so that she could support her child, while Leia reported it was important to set a good example for her child. Judy also reported that her parents wanted her to get a good education, but this advice was not heeded. Leia, more than Judy, felt a strong responsibility to her daughter and to provide a stable life for her. This outweighed Leia's value for an education, although this value was strong. This was also reflected in Leia's response to good reasons to leave school. Leia indicated that there was no other way to care for her daughter and that there was not enough money. Being a good mother and getting a good job were intricately linked for Leia. On the one hand, when Judy was asked what were "good reasons" for her to leave school, she indicated she did not feel school was useful, she was having problems at home, and her peers influenced her decision to leave. Judy's answers suggest that her reasons for leaving school were not related to pregnancy. Judy's sense of motherhood had no apparent influence on whether she would continue or discontinue her education.

My impression was that Leia would be more likely to graduate from formal high school than Judy because she was stronger academically and because when she became pregnant she had completed more years of school than had Judy. This impression is consistent with the literature that

suggests that the younger teenager was less likely to complete her education than the older teenage mother.

Pregnancy

As alluded to, Judy became pregnant approximately 2½ years after leaving school and, therefore, her educational truncation was not strongly influenced by the pregnancy. Judy's pregnancy was not accidental; she wanted to have a child and thought she would be getting legally married. Meeks (1980) notes that the teenager who intentionally becomes pregnant is attempting to manipulate an unacceptable family living situation. The goals are either to escape or drastically alter the situation.

Leia did leave school during her pregnancy. She knew of birth control but wasn't using any. To a certain degree Leia wanted a child. She had very strong positive feelings towards the putative father and reported that she and the putative father had discussed marriage and having a child together. There was a certain naiveness about Leia, in the way she didn't think she would get pregnant. Leia certainly was not unlike many teenagers who become pregnant because they simply do not consider pregnancy as a potential risk when they become sexually involved.

Judy, on the other hand, who lost her mother when she was two, seemed to be trying to fill a void in her life. Certainly her story seems to reflect this assumption.

Support network

What seems to distinguish Leia and Judy from the mothers who completed or were continuing with their high school education was the lack of strong and direct encouragement regarding their education. Neither Judy nor Leia reported to the extent Gerri, Tina, Maya and Cathy did that there was strong emotional support to complete their education. Nor did I get a sense of how Leia and Judy's parents or significant others valued education.

The lack of support to complete their education and its value seemed to stand out more than any other aspects that all the mothers displayed. These aspects, in themselves, may be the significant elements that were needed to compel these mothers to continue their education. When you compare Maya, for instance, who had a strong sense of responsibility to her daughter and decided to continue her education, with Leia, who also reported a strong responsibility to her daughter and discontinued her education, what seems to distinguish them is their value for education in relation to motherhood and their support network of encouragement to complete high school requirements.

Leia reported a strong faith in God and the strength this gave her to overcome difficult times, as Maya did, but, it seemed again Leia's use of this support was different from Maya's. To some extent Judy reported faith in God and Judy's faith was utilized in a different way.

Leia had a support network of people for childcare and used it when she allowed her daughter to live with the putative father's parents. But again, there was no mentioning of her daughter's paternal grand-

parents' views on education. Judy also had childcare support through her grandmother and she also did not report what her grandmother's value for education was. Judy did report that the putative father received a GED and that they both felt this was sufficient, but there was no strong pull to complete a high school education because it might offer more and better opportunities in the job market.

Personal strength

Both Judy and Leia demonstrated some determination in that they both pursued GED work. Leia, though, seemed more personally determined than Judy and this was reflected in her efforts to rear her daughter alone as well as her efforts in securing several jobs prior to allowing her daughter to live elsewhere.

Again, motherhood and education for Leia and Judy did not seem to be interdependent. For Leia, motherhood and getting a good job were interconnected and seemed to outweigh her immediate educational attainment. For Judy, there was no clear sense of the value of or whether or not motherhood, education, or getting a good job were connected whatsoever. I could only speculate that education weighed less than motherhood or getting a good job.

Conclusion

The results of this exploratory study seem consistent with the literature which suggests that support systems and level of ambition are crucial to a teenage mother continuing her education. In addition, the role of personal resources and its effect on utilizing environmental

resources was also found to be important.

It must be remembered that it was not possible to determine whether this study represented the attitudes and behavior of the larger population of teenage mothers. What it did allow this researcher to do was to explore the interrelatedness of personal characteristics, social support systems, and events in individual lives. Each story was richly unique and allowed me to see each mother as a total human being, rather than looking at some aspect of her behavior as only a small part of a much larger picture.

What amazed me most was the strength that all of these mothers demonstrated. All of them valued education, some to a much larger degree than the others. The strength of this value may have been a deciding factor, as well as the quality of their network and their ability to put the support to good use.

What was also interesting was that those mothers who had completed, or were continuing with their education, all had strong positive relationships with significant others (parents, relatives, friends, God).

Most of the mothers were working on independency issues which coincided with the adolescent stage of development of identity formation vs. role diffusion (Erikson, 1968).

All but two of the mothers expressed anger towards the putative father and I wondered what each father felt about his role and responsibility.

In addition, some mothers reported having strong relations with their own fathers of origin, while others were hurt by a lack of positive involvement. I began to wonder how this did or did not influence these mothers intentions for completing their education and their relationships with the putative fathers. These young mothers were complex people, which does not imply there were no weaknesses. For example, for Maya it was hard to reconcile her suicide attempts and for Judy, it was hard to adjust to her poor judgment in making decisions about her education and becoming involved with a man much older than herself. It must be remembered that these were real life human beings with human failings.

The strength of this study, as already stated, was in its ability to look at the quality of the lives of these teenage mothers in relation to being complex human beings. It allowed for me to see the various emotions that coincide with different human conditions and behavior. It allowed me to see how these mothers' lives were delicately, and sometimes brutally, intertwined with pregnancy and motherhood. It must be remembered that this study did not make comparisons with a group of mothers who didn't want to continue their education or not keep their child and, therefore, we do not know how these six mothers might differ from these other groups.

It must also be remembered, though it was not emphasized to any great extent in this study, that these mothers were Black and to a large degree already at a disadvantage. Two of the mothers alluded to the possibility of racist attitudes affecting their pursuit of an education.

To have come as far as they did and to have coped as well as they did is a testament to the strength of all these young mothers.

What does this all mean for future research and programs? It seems that if more research is directed toward looking at the interplay between personal strength and support networks, hopefully more information could be generated that would be used as a basis for designing effective programs for teenage mothers. There is a need to develop programs that would focus on the teenage mothers' strength and foster assertiveness. Furthermore, programs are needed to teach teenage mothers how to seek out and, more importantly, utilize support networks. Finally, peer programs could be designed that would allow teenage mothers to explore their capabilities and the potential power they have in the job market through completion of their education.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX IA

POSTNATAL/CONTINUATION OF EDUCATION

Date: _____

1. What kind of school program are you in now?

School ____ Tutoring ____ GED ____ Other ____

2. What is the highest grade you have finished in school?

6 7 8 9 10 11 12 other ____

3. Do you plan to take any time off from your school program?

Yes ____ No ____

If yes, for how long? _____

4. Do you plan to graduate from high school?

Definitely yes Probably yes Don't know Probably Not
1 2 3 4Definitely not
5

5. Do you plan to go to college?

Definitely yes Probably yes Don't know Probably Not
1 2 3 4Definitely not
5

6. What is the average of your grades in school now?

A B C D F

7. What are good reasons for you to stay in school (or continue with an educational program)?

____ To get a good job

____ To see friends

____ A mother should have a good education to set a good example for her child

____ Parents wanted me to stay

___ Friends wanted me to stay.

___ School counselor, teacher, or principal wanted me to stay (circle who).

___ Other people wanted me to stay. Who _____

8. What are good reasons for you to leave school (or other educational program)?

___ Didn't want to be there anyway.

___ I was not doing well in school anyway.

___ There was no other way to take care of my baby.

___ Not enough money.

___ I didn't see any use for more school.

___ Parent(s) wanted me to leave. (Which parent _____ both ___)

___ Friends wanted me to leave.

___ Other people. (Who? _____)

___ Other reasons. _____

9. Have you ever thought you might drop out of school?

Yes ___ No ___

If yes, when? ___ Before I got pregnant

___ When I found out I was pregnant

___ During my pregnancy

___ After I had my baby

10. Number of children: _____ Age(s) _____

11. Are you working for pay? Yes ___ No ___

Full time ___ Part time ___

If yes, describe briefly the kind of work you do.

12. With whom are you living?

Mother ___ Father ___ Father of child ___ Friend ___ Alone ___

Other ___ (Explain: _____)

APPENDIX IB

POSTNATAL/OUT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Date: _____

1. What is the highest grade you have finished in school?

6 7 8 9 10 11 12 other _____

2. When did you leave school (or educational program)?

_____ Before becoming pregnant

_____ During pregnancy

_____ After pregnancy

3. Do you plan to graduate from high school?

Definitely yes Probably yes Don't know Probably not
1 2 3 4Definitely not
5If yes, when do you plan to go back to school?

4. Do you plan to go to college?

Definitely yes Probably yes Don't know Probably not
1 2 3 4Definitely not
5

5. What was the average of your grades in school before you left?

A B C D F

6. What are good reasons for you to stay in school (or continue with an educational program)?

_____ To get a good job.

_____ To see friends

___ A mother should have a good education to set a good example for her child.

___ Parent(s) wanted me to stay

___ Friends wanted me to stay

___ School counselor, teacher, or principal wanted me to stay. (Circle who)

___ Other people wanted me to stay. Who: _____

7. What are good reasons for you to leave school (or educational program)?

___ Didn't want to be there anyway.

___ I was not doing well in school.

___ There was no other way to care for my baby.

___ Not enough money.

___ Parent(s) wanted me to leave. (Which parent _____ both ___)

___ Friends wanted me to leave.

___ Other people. (Who: _____)

___ Other reasons. _____

8. Are you working for pay? Yes ___ No ___

Part time ___ Full time ___

If yes, briefly describe the kind of work you do.

9. With whom are you living?

Mother ___ Father ___ Father of child ___ Friend ___ Alone ___

Other ___ (Explain: _____)

APPENDIX II
MEASURES IN QUESTIONNAIRE

<u>VARIABLES</u>	<u>POSTNATAL /CONTINUE</u>	<u>POSTNATAL /DISCONTINUE</u>
<u>Dependent variables</u>		
Continuation of education and future plans	Grp. I #1, #4, #5	#4, #5
Truncation of education	#4	Group II #4
Critical time period	Age	Age
<u>Independent variables</u>		
Support systems social financial educational	#7, #8 #6, #9 #1	#7, #8 #6, #9 #1
Personal qualities inner qualities educational aspirations	IE locus of control scale items #4, #5	same same
<u>Control variables</u>		
Demographics	age, marital status, race, race, religion, parents, occupation, etc.	same
Educational status	#1, #2	same

APPENDIX III

ABBREVIATED VERSION OF THE ROTTER SCALE

Select the one statement of each pair that you agree with most. For that statement, decide "Is this statement much closer or slightly closer to your opinion?" Check the appropriate box.

(Type out on individual 5"x7" cards)

1. a) What happens to me is my own doing; (1,2)
 b) Sometimes I feel that I don't have enough control over the direction my life is taking*; (3,4)
2. a) When I make plans, I am almost certain that I can make them work; (1,2)
 b) It is not always wise to plan too far ahead because many things turn out to be a matter of good or bad fortune anyway*; (3,4)
3. a) In my case, getting what I want has nothing to do with luck; (1,2)
 b) Many times we might as well decide what to do by flipping a coin*; (3,4)
4. a) Many times I feel that I have little influence over the things that happen to me*: (4,3)
 b) It is impossible for me to believe that chance or luck plays an important role in my life; (2,1)

Locus of control refers to the element of the self-concept that represents a person's generalized expectations as to whether his or her behavior results from personal efforts to make things happen or, alternatively, whether it is due to the actions of others or to environmental constraints beyond the person's control.

Personal efficacy is the dimension of the locus of control representing the extent to which individuals see themselves as being effective

in manipulating or controlling their environment (internal control), as opposed to being manipulated by the environment with little or no personal control (external control).

APPENDIX IV
SOCIOECONOMIC ITEMS

1. When were you born?
2. Race: Black ____
Hispanic ____ (Specify)
Caucasian ____
Other ____
3. Marital status: Engaged ____ Married ____ Divorced ____
Never married ____
4. Religion: Baptist ____ Catholic ____ Episcopalian ____
Lutheran ____ Protestant ____ None ____ Other ____
5. Child's birth: ____ Age ____
6. Parents age: Mother ____ Father ____
7. In your family, who has earned most of the money to pay most of
of the bills during your lifetime?
____ Your father or stepfather
____ Your mother or stepmother
____ Both mother (stepmother) and father (stepfather) nearly equally
____ Someone else. (Please tell who: _____)
8. What has been the occupation of the person you checked in the
above question during most of your life? (If both was selected
for your father or stepfather.)

9. In a few words, tell me the kind of work this person has done in
his (or her) occupation during most of your life.

10. Has this person worked for himself or has he (or she) been employed by somebody during most of your life?

___ Worked for himself (herself) or owns own business

___ Employed by somebody else

___ Sometimes worked for himself and sometimes employed by somebody else.

11. How far did ther person go in school?

___ Did not attend school at all.

___ Some elementary (grade school) education.

___ Some high school education.

___ Graduated from high school.

___ Technical training without college (business school, trade school).

___ Some college (junior college)

___ Graduation from college.

___ Professional training after college (or graduate work).

___ Other

12. How far did your mother, or the person who took the place of a mother for you, go in school?

___ Did not attend school at all.

___ Some elementary (grade school) education.

___ Some high school education.

___ Graduate from high school.

___ Technical training without college (business or trade school)

___ Some college (junior college)

___ Graduation from college

___ Professional training after college (or graduate work)

___ Other

Appendix V

S.E.S. Data at time of Interview

Subject	Age	# of Children and age(s)	Occupation		Parents' Education		Subject's Mother Age	Subject's Mother Occupation	Subject's Father Age	Subject's Father Occupation
			Mother	Putative Father	Mother	Father				
Tim	19	1 (2 mos.)	unemployed	unknown	Stepmother High School grad	College grad. plus technical training	Step-mother 33		44	Dir. of WIC program
Judy	16	1 (1 yr, 18 days)	unemployed	unknown	High Sch. grad. uncertain about college	High Sch. grad uncertain about college	Step-mother 37	Former Air-line stewardess	40+	Superintendent of Boys Home
Tom	17	2 (19 mos; & 3 wks)	unemployed	unemployed	College grad. (2 years)	Uncertain about High Sch. grad.	36	Licensed Practical Nurse (full time)	36	unknown
Eric	19	1 (1 yr)	employed full time (day of interview)	Military-A.D.	College grad. (4 years)	College grad. (4 years) plus tech. training	33	Worked in state mental hospital	45/ 46	Chief Petty Officer-Retired Military
Anna	17	1 (6 mos.)	volunteer worker	unknown	High School grad plus 1 yr. coll.	(Stepfather) some high school	40	unknown	30+	Truck driver full time
Keith	18	1 (11 mos.)	Blood lab technician full time	unknown	3 years coll.	High school grad.	43	Data processor	53	Retired Military rank unknown

