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EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF PREGNANT AND  
PARENTING ADOLESCENTS IN PREGNANT  
MINOR EDUCATION PROGRAM

---

A Dissertation  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education  
in  
Educational Leadership

---

by  
Tabitha Ndinda Muteti

June 2013

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June 2013

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## ABSTRACT

Pregnant and parenting adolescents are in a unique situation of being pregnant or parenting and attending high school. They are expected by society to behave like adults and take up adult responsibilities while, on the other hand, they are expected by their learning institutions to behave like students and take up responsibilities like all other students. In order to develop programs and design curricula, there is a need to understand the pregnant and parenting situations by exploring students' educational experiences. This is a qualitative study that utilized phenomenological perspective and included a series of three in-depth interviews with six pregnant and parenting students. The findings revealed that the themes that emerged from the first, the second and the third interviews were consistent with the Turner's (1967, 1969) rites of passage. The rite of passage includes pre-liminal (separation), liminal, and post liminal (incorporation) stages of dissociation and reintegration. The importance of these findings is to help educators understand the phenomenon better and help the girls as they progress through the liminal stages. The findings in this study also suggest a need for further research. Further study in this topic could include tracing the participants' several years later and determine whether societal forces surrounding them prevented them from pursuing and meeting their desired educational and career goals. Researchers could broaden the sample and to confirm whether what happened to the sample of the current study will happen with a larger sample.

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To my colleagues at Riverside County High School, thank you for your support and constructive criticisms. The community of Cal-Safe education program, especially the participants who gave me a chance to tell their stories, I want to say thank you.

To Catherine, Debi, and Jennifer, thank you for your encouragement and taking time to edit parts of this dissertation.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ through him I can do all things. To my beloved children Cheryline, Frida and Mark who had to live with books all over our house and their support throughout this journey.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Pregnant and Parenting Adolescents

Pregnant and parenting adolescents are in a unique situation of being pregnant or parenting and attending high school. They are expected by society to behave like adults and take up adult responsibilities while, on the other hand, they are expected by their learning institutions to behave like students and take up responsibilities like all other students. In order to develop programs and design curricula, there is need to understand these pregnant and parenting situations by exploring their educational experiences.

The aim of this dissertation is to explore, understand, and learn from the lived educational experiences of pregnant and parenting students enrolled in a pregnant minor program. The study examines the participants' educational experiences and their understanding of being pregnant or parenting and attending a new educational setting. This chapter will explain why this topic is important in two ways. It will address the significance of listening to the voices of pregnant and parenting teenagers for the purposes of planning their educational experiences. It will also account for my interest in the topic with reference to my personal history.

## Selection of Research Area and My Positionality

I journeyed to this research project as a former teen parent myself, as a teacher of pregnant and parenting teens, and as a concerned and interested researcher. Experience has taught me that teen mothers have fewer chances of succeeding in education because society has contempt for them and they often have little support from their families. Most of the students come from homes where education is never spoken about; self-discipline is not emphasized and the majority comes from homes where there is no visible structure, at least to the outsider. In this regard, there were some connections between my own journey in education and that of my students.

It is not unusual for researchers to have a personal stake in what they study. By using my story in the introduction of this study I hope to help the reader understand my position and how I relate to the study. My positionality does not only help me to develop rapport with the subjects but also highlights my capability to empathize with them. As Burgess (1984) notes:

While some [researchers] become interested in an area of study through reading other people's work, this is only one part of the story; the biography of individual researcher has a part to play (p. 210).

There were many rich experiences, which motivated me to pursue research on the lived educational experiences of pregnant and parenting adolescents. I was motivated to study this population of students partly because I went through similar struggles in life and partly because I have been teaching in

pregnant and parenting minor programs since 2004. My concerns are about the phenomenon of being pregnant or parenting and attending alternative education program such as spring from my personal experience. This perspective might raise questions about my ability to be objective in the study. Might personal bias interfere with the research purpose? On the contrary it might be argued that personal bias makes this research more honest:

A person's knowledge can only exist by virtue of a vast range of past experiences which have been lived through, often with the most intense feelings. These experiences, including textual experiences (book, lectures, lessons, conversations, etc.), we have been taught to disguise so that our utterances are made to seem as though they emerge from no particular place or time or person but from the fount of knowledge itself (Rosen, 1998, p.30).

I see my personal history, including my experiences and struggles, as a tool to use in seeking to understand more fully the educational experiences of the participants. The account of my own journey is also meant to bring to the forefront insights into the phenomenon of teen parenting.

I was born and raised in a small village in the south of Kenya. Kenya has many tribes and my tribe (Kamba) occupies most of Southeast Kenya. The majority of the people inside the village are old people, women, and children. Young and middle- aged men work outside the village. Women culturally are not expected to work outside the village and they are responsible for taking care of



old people and the children. Moreover, they are also expected to take care of the farms and the animals. A kindergarten through eighth grade education system is available for all children but the parents have to buy school uniforms and school supplies. The villagers emphasize educating boys more than girls.

The girls are expected to grow up and get married, so educating them is considered a waste of resources since they do not normally seek employment outside the village. Other tribal and customary practices in my village include penalizing girls who procreate before getting married. Pregnant girls also are forced into arranged marriages to the fathers of their babies. All young people are taught about this norm either at school or by their parents.

Most children in my village including girls are expected to learn to ride bicycles. Since bicycles are the only means of transportation, like all other children, I was expected to learn to ride one. Unlike most ten-year-olds in my village, I was short and could not reach the pedals of an adult bicycle. After several attempts to stay on the bicycle, I gave up and told my dad that I would like to buy a car, because, unlike a bicycle, a car has four wheels and it would be easier to learn how to drive and I could work outside the Village. My dad was puzzled by my choice of words and attitude since no women he had ever known had sought work outside the village before. I assured my dad that I was determined to get educated through college and I intended to secure a high paying job, which would enable me to buy a car.

At that young age, I realized my future success depended on the choices I made. My parents were very strict Catholics and decided to send me to a Catholic boarding school where I learned discipline. For example, all students were required to wake up before 6:00 am and have their cubicles mopped and their beds made before 7:00 am. When I graduated from high school, I was eager to enter college in order to fulfill my goal of becoming educated and obtaining a well-paying job.

I went to college in Nairobi and college life was different from the strict Catholic life I had been used to. Students came and went as they pleased and attended classes at their own discretion. This kind of life was very foreign to me and at first I thought it was too relaxed and too easy. I wondered to myself how students got their work done when they went partying over the weekend and went to class whenever they wanted. I tried to stay within my own set schedule and barely made friends the first year. However, I began to feel bored and realized I was the only one getting all the work done while everybody else seemed to be having fun. One of my friends asked me to accompany her to a social event and I began to change my lifestyle.

At the beginning of the second year of college, I started sneaking out of class and falling asleep in class during lecture time because of late night parties. At nineteen, I got pregnant and I was forced into an arranged marriage. I was not ready to be a mother, let alone, a wife. For the next year and a half I worked hard to complete my education while taking care of my newborn baby. I had to

get used to my new roles as a mother and a wife while pursuing my educational dreams. I went from being perceived as a well behaved Catholic girl who was expected to complete college and do volunteer works in the church to being treated as a servant in my husband's household. The transition was not easy but I was determined to continue with my education. I was determined to prove people in my village wrong for thinking that my dreams were unrealistic and unattainable.

After graduating from college, I was posted to teach in a boy's high school. In Kenya, most high schools are boarding schools and are either all boys' or all girls' institutions. The few co-ed high schools are day schools where students go to school in the morning and go back home in the evening. It was in this school setting that I found a way to gain access to higher education opportunities. I was offered a scholarship to study psychology, because the boys' schools did not have a school psychologist. I saw this as an opportunity that opened new doors to advance in my career and allowed me an opportunity to study relationships and to understand my husband's increasingly abusive behavior. My goal was to escape my troubled and abusive marriage and to liberate myself from a society that considered females as second-class citizens.

I was allowed to use the scholarship money to pursue a master's degree and choose to pursue it in the United States, partly to escape from my marriage, because my husband stayed in Kenya. I also saw studying abroad as an opportunity to break free from cultural constraints. After the completion of my

master in education, I chose to look for a teaching job in the United States of America. Some of the jobs that eventually gave me rich experiences about the phenomena in this study included working at a group home, in rehabilitation programs for troubled teenage girls and boys, and as school counselor. Presently, I am working as a teacher in an alternative education program, which includes the pregnant, and parenting minor program.

Looking back on my upbringing, I was brought up by strict parents and attended Catholic schools from kindergarten through 12th grade. My culture valued a high level of discipline and respect for adults, especially teachers. I expected my students to show the same kind of respect and self-motivation to achieve an education, because that is a logical way to become a successful adult. I was shocked when I realized my students at the Cal-Safe program not only appeared to dislike education, but resented anyone who tried to encourage them to improve their academic performance. It was very common to hear from students how their parents left them to do whatever they wanted and how they often argued with their parents. The teen mothers talked about how they intentionally would push their parents' buttons so that they would be kicked out of the house. They glorified their behavior and their resentment of authority.

During my tenure as a teacher in the pregnant and minor program, I never understood why the girls behaved differently in my classroom compared to when they were with their children at the daycare or why they seemed to doing the opposite of what was expected of them in school. My assumption at the time

was that they chose to be deviant and disobey authority. During the research I learned that, the girls behaved differently because they did not want to be bad examples to their children. Further, I had not taken enough into account that these teenagers were just children themselves, whose teenage years had been cut short by getting pregnant and, therefore, they had to live in two worlds, the teenage world that they were not ready to leave and the adult world that they were not yet prepared for.

I have always thought of myself as a good, fair, and caring teacher, but I was unable to motivate these pregnant and parenting minors to learn. During data collection through the interviews, I learned that the girls were eager and determined to learn, which was contrary to my experience as a teacher. I did not realize how my students felt about their circumstances and I felt helpless assisting them to succeed in school.

Now, as a researcher, I feel compelled to take time to listen to these students, record their feelings and opinions and give them a voice. I want to hear from their own perspective, how their experiences may have led to who they are today. I want to understand their priorities, value systems, and dreams for their education and future. Even though I no longer teach the pregnant and parenting minor programs, I hope the findings from this study will help other educators to motivate and encourage them.

Most of the participants in this study are of low socio-economic status and qualify for reduced or free school lunch. The participants are Hispanic, Asian,

White, or African American. All my participants are females and their ages range between fourteen and seventeen years. The majority of the participants come from single-parent households where one or both parents have been involved with drugs, and they know relatives or neighbors who have been in jail. It is also common to find students in this program who live with friends, significant others, in-laws, or in group homes. Schools and school districts tend to place pregnant and parenting adolescents in alternative education programs away from regular comprehensive high schools. Pillow (2004) contends that separate institutions for pregnant and parenting students are due to what she calls a “discourse of contamination” (p.57). In this view, if pregnant adolescents are left in regular comprehensive high schools, they will contaminate other non-pregnant female students and lead them to believe it is acceptable to get pregnant during their teenage years.

### Rationale for the Study

The dearth of literature on the education of pregnant adolescents leaves many unanswered questions. The questions that arise are due to the lack of information regarding the educational attainment of girls who get pregnant and are placed in alternative programs (Pillow, 2004). The literature also has failed to address satisfactorily the situations, circumstances, and conditions that contribute to low educational attainment for pregnant and parenting adolescents (Maslak, 2008). In the last few decades, a plethora of studies have been

conducted on teenage pregnancy. However, none of these studies to my knowledge were dedicated to educational experiences of pregnant adolescents and none of them used a qualitative phenomenological perspective to adequately represent the voices of the girls. It is important to get the perception and perspective of pregnant and parenting adolescents on their educational experiences, because current studies are based on second-hand sources or on the perspectives of the researchers and educators that do not include the perspective of the pregnant and parenting girls. Through this exploratory and descriptive study, some of the girls' struggles, feelings, and successes can be heard.

The literature, which explores the phenomena under study, is limited. The insufficiency of information and literature in itself necessitates and justifies this study. Usage of a qualitative phenomenological perspective is intended for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in order to develop curricula and educational programs that respond to the girls' own concerns rather than simply be imposed on them.

### Significance of the Study

One of the underlying assumptions in this study is that giving pregnant and parenting adolescents a voice is a worthwhile research purpose. The second assumption is that if these adolescents have a voice in their own schooling, they are more likely to pursue goals that will benefit them and their

children. The third assumption is that developers of programs and curricula are more likely to consider the needs of the girls when making decisions about educational programs if the voices of the pregnant and parenting students have been documented. Finally, the perspective of the adolescents can be used when it comes to decisions on developing programs and designing curricula for pregnant and parenting minor programs.

### The Problem Statement

In order to illuminate the experience of being pregnant or parenting at a new school setting, there needs to be further examination of the topic under study. Consequently, the description of the experience should represent the voices of pregnant and parenting students' own needs. It should treat their educational experiences in their new school setting as a phenomenon that explores and examines their emergent perceptions of their educational and career goals. Previous studies on pregnant and parenting adolescents focused on their social welfare and on the health of their babies, but virtually none have been devoted to their educational and educational goals. Focusing on such educational experiences and representing the voices of pregnant and parenting students, therefore, amounts to an addition to the body of literature in educational research.



## Purpose of the Study

The objective of this study was to inquire into the educational experiences of pregnant and parenting adolescents enrolled in a pregnant minor program and to represent their voices by documenting this inquiry. The researcher was interested in listening intently to the stories of the pregnant girls about their educational experiences.

## Research Questions

Consistent with a qualitative phenomenological perspective study, the researcher sought to explore the phenomenon of pregnant and parenting students' educational experiences in their new school setting. The research questions that guided this inquiry were: What are the lived educational experiences of pregnant and parenting adolescents in a pregnant minor program (Cal- Safe)? How do these experiences impact their educational goals? And what role does agency of the students play in pursuing these goals throughout the course of and after their pregnancy?

## Theoretical Perspective

The orientation for the present study is phenomenological in that it seeks to explore and exemplify the meaning of the lived experiences of the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological approach utilizes inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews to collect data. The

purpose is to ask questions that elicit deep experiences of a phenomenon. This study focuses on exploring and understanding the meaning of the phenomenon of pregnant adolescents in their new school setting and the meaning that these personal experiences have for them in their education. "People's behavior becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them" (Seidman, 2008, p.11). This means that the circumstances of an individual's life, the setting of their environment and the statements they make help us to appreciate their perspective.

It is difficult to explore the meaning of an experience without putting it into context (Patton, 1989). In this case the context is the unique story each participant has to tell about her own educational journey. Through the interview process the researcher therefore sought to gather detailed situational information rather than just simple answers to direct questions in order to understand the phenomenon.

## Methods

The subjects were purposely selected because they possessed characteristics that met the requirements and scope of the study. Using purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990), the participants selected for inclusion in this study were pregnant adolescents who were enrolled in a pregnant minor educational program. I drew upon the phenomenological perspective as suggested by Moustakas (1994), at least with reference to his concept of

“Epoche” (p. 33). In “Epoche” the researcher first has to examine her/his own biases, beliefs, and assumptions about the phenomenon under investigation. He/she sets aside the “everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings about the phenomena and revisits, freshly, naively, in a wide open sense” (p.33). Three face-to face interviews with each participant were conducted and audio-taped to document the personal stories of their educational experiences at their new school setting. The length of the interviews varied, with some taking approximately 45 minutes and others between 25-30 minutes. The audiotapes were transcribed and these transcripts formed the primary data for the study. The researcher read and analyzed the transcripts thematically in order to arrive at a description of the pregnant girls’ educational experiences.

### Definition of Terms

The following terms are used in this study and are presented in alphabetical order.

#### Agency (Maslak 2008; Bandura, 1987)

The capacity an individual possess to act and achieve a goal or outcome. Post structuralists such as Foucault view agency in terms of “power” and state that the individual possesses limited independent power to act. On the other hand humanists such as Bandura, contend that all humans have the capacity to exercise and control their thought process, motivation and actions (agency).

## Cal - SAFE (California School Age Families Education)

The California School Age Families Education () program was established in 2000, following the California Senate passing Bill 1064 in 1998. The program serves pregnant and parenting adolescents under the age of 18.

## Cultural Capital

Cultural capital refers to a form of knowledge, skills, education and advantage that a person possesses. Parents transmit cultural capital (for example, knowledge, skills) to their children. Bourdieu (1977) contends that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to have much cultural capital because they lack resources/ knowledge accepted by the dominant culture.

## Discourse

Discourse refers to “practices which form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972, p. 49); He further states that discourse is not just a group of signs referring to content or representation but rather a set of meanings, rules, norms, traditions, images, and stories in a given community or institutions.

## Epoche

This is a step used in phenomenological study to explain preparation researchers take to set aside their external and internal biases to derive new meaning/ knowledge from an experience. The Epoche process means that a researcher is aware of his or her biases and opts to set them aside (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34).

## Interviews

Interviews are the most common data collection instruments used in phenomenological study. Through interviews, the participants can tell their stories; "Telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process" (Seidman, 1998, p. 1).

## Liminality

It is a state of life where individuals are caught between two conflicting sides or situations; thus, they are "neither here nor there (Turner, 1967, p. 95).

## Lived Experience

Husserl (1970) used the term lifeworld to describe the world of lived experience. He also stated that lifeworld is the starting point and beginning of phenomenologically oriented studies. Studies that use lived experience to reference an experience that the researched participants have lived through (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). In this study, pregnant adolescents were asked to tell stories of their lifeworld, which included their educational experiences in their new school setting.

## Phenomenological Perspective (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990)

A qualitative research design which focuses on an individual's perception and experiences in their lifeworld (Husserl, 1970; Van Manen, 1984; 1990; Moustakas, 1994). Patton (1990) asserted that,

A phenomenological study is one that focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they

experience. One can employ a general phenomenological perspective to elucidate the importance of using methods that capture people's experience of the world without conducting a phenomenological study that focuses on the essence of shared experience (p.71).

### Political Discourse (Van Dijk, 2002)

Political discourse can be defined as debates or conversations concerning a political issue by politicians, the public, news organizations or media.

### Pregnant Adolescents

The term adolescent is used synonymously with teenager referring to girls between the ages 10- 19. A pregnant adolescent refer to a pregnant girl aged 10-19 years of age. This study focused on adolescents who were pregnant between the ages of 14-17.

### Social Capital

Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988) both pointed out that social capital refers to benefits individuals derive from networking or a great deal of relationships they hold with others in their society. Coleman further suggests that social capital can facilitate actions such as interactions between individuals and sharing of resources to achieve a desired outcome. Interactions and good relationships between parents and their children can increase social capital.

## Social Structure

Social structure refers to “a set of interrelated and coexisting frameworks that provide the social conditions for and requirements for action” (Maslak, 2008. p.xv). Structure greatly influences an individual’s life and way he or / she acts.

## Themes

Themes are starting points in reporting the findings in a study. They describe elements of the lived experience as narrated by the participants.

## Overview

Chapter 1 of this qualitative research from a phenomenological perspective has introduced the topic of the lived educational experiences of pregnant and parenting adolescents in their new school setting and has set the topic in the context of its relationship with the researcher’s own educational journey and other related studies.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature regarding the topic under investigation and maps out the theoretical framework. It also explores the main theoretical concepts that will be used in later chapters to help make sense of what the girls have to say.

Chapter 3 presents a qualitative phenomenologically perspective as the research design and explains how the process was used in the study. The chapter also outlines the theoretical framework for choosing a phenomenological

approach for this study. Delimitations and limitations of the study are also discussed.

Chapter 4 presents the results and the analysis of the data from the first round of interviews. The emergent themes and patterns are stated and described. Chapter 5 is based on the second and third interviews. It presents the emergent themes from the data analysis.

Chapter 6 is the concluding chapter and includes the discussion where the emergent themes will be closely examined and connected to the existing literature. The implications of the study for education are suggested and ideas for future research on the topic are also presented, as well as researcher's conclusions about the topic.



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This literature review was conducted to establish a theoretical base for the study. It shows how previous literature speaks to my research questions, establishes a context in which pregnant and parenting adolescents are discussed in the society as a whole and identifies gaps in the previous research literature. I shall review literature related to the following research questions: what are the lived educational experiences of pregnant and parenting adolescents in a pregnant minor program? To what extent do these experiences impact their sense of agency and their conventionalization of their educational goals? Key areas I shall examine include the relationship between structure and agency in general terms and specifically as these terms apply to educational experiences of pregnant and parenting adolescents.

The first part of the review, will address the concept of “structure”; it will include definitions of structure in general terms and map out the forces at work in structuring the education of pregnant and parenting adolescents. This includes the educational and political discourses surrounding pregnant and parenting adolescents, societal views on teen pregnancy (including images attached to teen pregnancy), policies, educational institutions (traditional and non-traditional), Title IX legislation, and documents that demonstrate how schools

and school districts react to teen pregnancy. These structural forces form the foundation that underpins the schooling of pregnant and parenting adolescents. The rhetoric and arguments that exist today have been about how teen pregnancies impact and drain the social welfare system.

In the second part of my literature review, key areas I will investigate include agency in general terms and agency specifically as it relates to pregnant and parenting adolescents experiences of school, social capital, self- efficacy, and educational goals. Each of these identified areas influence and impacts the experiences of pregnant and parenting students and how they view themselves and their educational goals.

#### An Overview of the Issue

Policymakers, researchers, health specialists, social workers and educators have a lot to say about the social welfare of pregnant and parenting students and their children, but the voices of the teenagers are seldom heard. Although extensive research has been carried out on teen pregnancy to date, there are limited numbers of studies that adequately address the educational experiences and also represent the voices of pregnant and parenting students. There are fragments of information representing the voices of pregnant and parenting students' social welfare but none of these studies to my knowledge are directly devoted to their educational goals or take into account their own sense of agency as actors in their own lives. This study is going to address some of these gaps in the previous studies. The study also will try to connect what other

studies have found with regard to teen pregnancy and what my research purports to represent (the voices of the pregnant and parenting adolescents).

Recent studies conducted on teen pregnancy have found that American schools make sex education a big part of their health curriculum (Little, Henderson, Pedersen, & Stonecipher, 2010). Despite numerous efforts to eradicate unplanned teenage pregnancies, the issue continues to be problematic and remains a major concern of the public. Teenage pregnancy raises many complex issues and generates debates between politicians, educators, and researchers (Luker, 1996). Educational and political discourses focus on issues surrounding the pregnant and parenting adolescents' social welfare, their health, the health of their babies, and the upbringing of the babies. It is rarely ever about the educational needs of the pregnant and parenting adolescents (Pillow, 2004).

The educational and political debates raise discourses which make the issues of pregnant and parenting adolescents more complicated, for example, discourses of "wrong girls" and "welfare mothers" (Kelly, 2000) which will be illustrated in detail in later chapters. According to Luker (1996), the debates often lead to disagreements on the magnitude and impact of teen pregnancy, making it hard to come up with possible solutions.

There has been no consensus on how well these students are being served either socially or educationally. It is important to look at the overall structure of the educational system and its policies as they pertain to the education of pregnant and parenting adolescents. I am particularly interested in

examining literature on educational structure because of its insight into the profound potential of structuring, influencing, and impacting the educational experiences of these pregnant and parenting students.

### Education and Social Structures

Structure is a term often used in the social sciences and has been defined in several ways depending on the context. The Oxford College Dictionary (2007.) defines social structure as “organization of a society, institutions or other groups and the relationship of the system and its members, which enables the organization to function” (p. 1363). For the purposes of this study, the researcher is going to concentrate on the definition of structure (social structure) which relates to educational institutions and their policies impacting the schooling experiences of pregnant and parenting adolescents.

Giddens (1984) views structure as a relationship that exists between the individual and social forces. He further contends that individuals have limited choices to act due to the constraints of social forces but they may also use structures as resources to bring about personal and social change. According to Maslak (2008), social structure refers to “a set of interrelated and coexisting frameworks that provide the social conditions for and requirement of action” (p. xv). In other words, social structures are resources that are created by members of the society, from which they then draw to make sense of the places of their habitat. The social structure generally includes but is not limited to, groups,

institutions, laws, populations' characteristics, and sets of social relations accepted in the society.

This literature critically reviewed forms of discursive power that conceal the agency of teen parents as far as their education and educational goals are concerned. Further the literature reviewed the current and emerging discourses, policies, and implementations of policies and evaluation of the policies. Knowledge of policies and how they are practiced helped to identify the gaps in the literature on the educational experiences of pregnant and parenting adolescents especially what had been silenced or left unsaid.

In a sense, discourse “structures” our lives. Belsey (2002) suggests that poststructuralism “names a theory or a group of theories concerning the relationship between human beings, the world, and the practice of making and reproducing meaning” (p.5). Belsey further suggested that, “society recruits us as subjects, subjects us to their values, and incites us to be accountable, responsible citizens, eager, indeed, to give an account of ourselves in terms we have learned from the signifying practices of those societies themselves” (p, 53). Through discourse society influences people’s decision-making, their actions, and how they feel about and see themselves.

Some studies suggest that discourse refers to language, spoken or written, norms, traditions, or practices (Burr, 2003; Belsey, 2002). Discourse itself changes meaning depending on the context in which it is being used. These discourses influence how educational institutions and the society in

general, view and react to the task of educating pregnant and parenting adolescents and construct their identities.

### Educational Discourse

Cannella (2000) suggests that the emergence of educational discourses legitimized the belief held by some scientists that older people are wiser than younger people (adolescents included), and that, therefore, decisions have to be made for them by adults. Further, Cannella suggests that educational discourse specifies what young people are like, how society expects them to behave at different ages, how society differentiates each group of young people, and how they should be treated in educational settings.

Parents and educators have accepted and contributed to the discourse of 'scientific childhood' without question or critique, without recognition that younger human beings may not always benefit from the pre-determinism imposed by others (Cannella, 2000, p.36).

For example, teenagers might not benefit from the imposed discourse of abstinence until marriage because that is not a decision they have made; rather, it is a societal expectation imposed on them. Scientific discourses such as "childhood" or "abstinence" have proven hard for young people to conform to. Discourse in general terms refers to the practices of writing and talking (Woodilla, 1998). Oxford American Writer's thesaurus (2008), defines discourse as "discussions, conversations, talk, dialogue, conferences debates or consultations" (p. 238). While this definition of discourse has been acceptable in

different circles, the prominent definition used in circles of education and research is that which implies traditions, norms, rules, text, or symbols. Burr (2003) suggests that, “discourse is certainly a lot more than just ‘talk’ or even language” (p.64).

Michael Foucault has profoundly influenced understandings about discourse and how discourse has influenced and impacted individuals. According to Foucault (1972), discourses are “practices which form the objects of which they speak” (p.49). He further contends discourse is not just a group of signs referring to content or representation. A discourse therefore refers to a set of meanings, practices or rules, norms, traditions, images, and stories in a given community or institution. These discourses over time, influence how the individuals see themselves, feel about themselves and act. Burr (2003) defined “discourse to refer to a particular picture that is painted of an event, person, or class of persons, a particular way of representing it in a certain light” (p. 64). Thus, discourse can therefore be used to shape the identities of individuals.

Other studies have found that discourses reflect and generate power, and serve as a mirror of particular ideologies and socially constructed norms which the members have to bind with in order to function and be accepted by the society (Foucault, 1980; Lather, 1999). For example, the socially accepted view of school-age girls is to attend school and not get pregnant while they are still going to school is an example of an educational-childhood discourse at work.

Cannella (2000) suggests that dominant discourse can be dangerous if they are not subject to continued examination to ensure it is not misleading or having negative impact on individuals. In her view, the continued discussion or investigation might reveal crucial details or information that the discourse leaves out. The educational discourses like other social science discourses are regulatory by nature, which means they propose many rules and regulations with regard to education and students.

Cannella (2000) interpreted Foucault's view of discourse and applied it in educational discourse as follows. In her view, educational communities function inside these assumptions.

- (1) A belief in the existence of change, thinking, learning and mind.
- (2) Focus on the necessity of education.
- (3) A movement towards logic and advancement.
- (4) Particular knowledge as more important, more sophisticated, more legitimate and
- (5) the inferiority of certain groups of people within education (Cannella, 2000, p. 38).

These notions not only highlight the framework used to create alternative education programs for pregnant and parenting students but also the rules that exclude the participation of these students in comprehensive high school activities and advanced core subjects. Studies conducted on pregnant and parenting adolescents shared the notion proposed by Foucault (1972) on discourses of exclusion, which prohibit the teenagers from fully benefiting from free access to education (Pillow, 2004, 2006; Cannella, 2000; Kelly, 2000). For



example, Luttrell (2003) found pregnant and parenting girls who were enrolled in “The Piedmont program for pregnant teens” were “offered a small set of “regular” school course offerings- offerings that met basic graduation requirements but limited the girls future curricular choices” (p.11). “For example, more advanced math courses were not offered and, thus, students wishing to take college preparatory math courses would not have the prerequisites” (p.11).

Bernet (2007) applied Foucault’s views of discourse and contended that there was enough evidence to suggest that educational discourse promotes construction and implementation of educational policies in our society today that do not give opportunities for individual suggestions and opinions. Researchers such as Cannella (2000) found such rituals and practices are to be uncaring, non-democratic or unsupportive of children’s learning and progress. These rituals most importantly, undermine the progress of students who fall outside the normal population. Although such suggestions might seem too extreme, studies support these findings (Bernet, 2007; Cannella, 2000). In most cases students do not get a chance to express their opinion regarding programs or policies that define the process and scope of their education.

Pregnant and parenting adolescents rarely get the chance to choose between comprehensive high schools or separate institutions or / programs to continue and complete their high school education when they become pregnant. Cannella (2000) suggested that educational discourse serves a pragmatic function supporting the status quo necessary for the continuity of society. This

statement suggests that society has to find a way to improve and sustain itself through utilizing available resources.

Cannella (2000) proposed that most discourses are “governed by rules and principles of exclusion that include prohibition, rituals, privileged right to speak, the appeal to reason, and will of truth” (p. 38). What this means is that discourses separate those who have the power and the right to speak and be heard from those who do not. For example, in educational settings not all people are free to say what they believe or if they voice their opinions, it will have little impact on what is being practiced. Further, Cannella contended that participants in educational communities are not privileged, or free to say what they believe, because certain practices and ideas have been eliminated in educational circles.

Foucault’s views are shared by other researchers and educators. In many aspects, educational discourse is intertwined with political agendas that inhibit individuals or groups from voicing any concerns (Cannella, 2000; Pillow, 2004; Kelly, 2000). Cannella (2000) who cited Foucault’s notions on discourse, suggested that

The basic underlying assumptions of educational discourse (i.e. educational necessity, the existence of learning, thinking and human mind, educational advancement, sophisticated knowledge, and inferiority of childhood), have imposed themselves on us for so long that we do not recognize them as masking forms of power and desire (Cannella, 2000, pp. 39-40).

Cannella further suggests these assumptions will continue to dominate human life unless they are recognized.

Pillow (2004), suggests that, it is problematic when the focus is on short-term solutions as such the immediate care of conditions associated with pregnant and parenting student health and social welfare, instead of long-term solutions such as ensuring they get quality education. One significant discourse that has featured prominently in schools and in the life of pregnant and parenting adolescents is that of the danger of pregnant students contaminating others morally (especially non-pregnant teen girls).

#### Discourse of Contamination

According to Pillow (2004), the debates surrounding the education of pregnant and parenting adolescents have brought up a common unifying idea of contamination. Pillow contends that these “themes circulated the idea that the presence of a sexually active female students (as pregnant students or as a mother), will contaminate the student body, leading to an epidemic of immoral and promiscuous behavior” (p. 63). This contamination discourse makes pregnancy look like a disease and positions the pregnant girls as “contaminators”. The term “teen pregnancy”, “by itself indicates a pregnancy that is marked as wrong and carries a heightened sense of surveillance with it” (Pillow, 2004, p. 64).

Even though the discourse of contamination is never acknowledged in public circles, leaders in school system understand that they have to protect

other female students in the schools. This idea of contamination has led to the development of separate facilities in the pretense of protecting the interests of and providing better services for pregnant and parenting students. Other discourses position pregnant and parenting students as wrong girls, welfare mothers and bad girls (Kelly, 2000). As stated earlier, the political and educational discourses are intertwined and have a unique kind of push-pull relationship. Political and educational discourse benefit from each other, influence each other and any kind of deliberation made by either side is likely to influence the outcomes of the other.

### Political Discourse

Hunter (2007) suggests that, "The political discourses surrounding teen pregnancy and early motherhood reinforce stigmatized images of teen motherhood that drew upon moral elements of acceptable female sexuality in traditional structures" (p. 76). What does political discourse entail? Moreover, how does it relate to pregnant and parenting adolescents? Political discourse includes discussions or debates by professional politicians, on public events or within political institutions concerning a political issue. Political discourses can therefore be defined by the use of politicians as the main actors or participants in the debates or conversation (Van Dijk, 2002). Other examples of political discourse are produced by news organizations and found in the media, for example, the Chicago tribune which carried the story of welfare mothers or Chicago welfare queen (Hunter, 2007). The dominant political rhetoric and

discourse regarding pregnant and parenting students focuses on the prevention of teenage pregnancy. For example, when former president Bill Clinton took office in 1996, he emphasized the reduction of teen pregnancies (Pillow, 2004).

In his weekly radio address Clinton said in reference to pregnant and parenting adolescents, that, "We have to make it clear that a baby doesn't give you a right and won't give you money to leave home and drop out of school" (Pillow 2004, p. 46).

Pillow (2004) contends that most former presidents of the United States of America have associated teen pregnancy with poverty and an economic drain on the country. For example, Bill Clinton's presidency (1992-2000) addressed the issue of teen pregnancy as a social welfare problem. One of his major campaign promises was to reduce teen pregnancy. There was a call to all politicians to talk to their constituents about teen pregnancy, because, in his view, teenage pregnancy was a moral and personal problem (Pillow, 2004). Hunter (2007) found "a growing political discourse defining teen mothers as "welfare mothers" which reinforced the image that Ronald Reagan articulated in his description of the "Chicago welfare queen" (p. 77). "Welfare Queens" is a term used in United States to describe people who manipulate the welfare system and collect excessive welfare benefits. Kelly (2000) pinpointed that even though teen pregnancy is no longer seen as an epidemic, it still remains a highly politicized issue because it is viewed as a moral and a social issue.

The issue has led to what researchers see as a development of “social anxiety and gradual shift to a conservative, individualistic model of what is owed and expected of North American citizens” (Kelly, 2000, p.3). What Kelly suggests in this statement is societal views towards teenage pregnancy have shifted towards holding the teens responsible for their actions. Studies have also identified other players in political discourse including the public and other groups who have an interest in the education and social welfare of pregnant and parenting adolescents (Van Dijk, 2002; Kelly, 2000). Political discourse in reference to pregnant and parenting adolescents, should, but often does not include the perspectives of the students themselves, teachers and parents of the adolescents.

Educational and political discourses have opened a new window through which t society views the issue. Furthermore, studies such as those reviewed below, have consistently revealed society’s view of teen pregnancy as the cause of moral decay, as a shame to society, and as a drain on social welfare resources (Kelly, 2000; Pillow, 2004). In the following section I am going to look in detail at what recent studies have found regarding societal views of teen pregnancy.

### Societal View on Teenage Pregnancy

According to Erikson (1996), it is hard to think of a topic in recent years that has attracted more misinformation and more twisted reasoning than teenage pregnancy. In some circles, the bearing of children by mothers who are barely

out of childhood themselves serves as a symbol of disgust by many people in United States. This kind of reaction is influenced partly by traditional beliefs that teenage pregnancy is morally wrong and shameful (Kelly, 2000). Erikson further reported that teenage pregnancy is viewed by society as a drain on the public treasury or a cancer that is eating away at the tissue of moral order. Teen pregnancy has even been viewed as root cause of poverty in our societies.

Society views the adolescent stage as a preparation period for adulthood. However, according to Bucholtz (2002), society pays minimal attention to the period and its potential crises, which can bring uncertainties both physically and socially, as the youth transition between adolescent stages. Teenage years bring both bodily and hormonal changes that have the potential to alter the teenager's emotional reactions and logical judgment. Society seems to pay attention to these changes and their impacts, but still people are quick to judge and condemn teen girls when they become pregnant (but not the boys). A plethora of studies indicate that teen pregnancy is not a new phenomenon (Kirby, 1999; Barber, 2000; Card, 1999). However, teen pregnancy continues to carry heavy stigmatization that attaches immoral and shameful behavior to the girls. In effect pregnant and parenting teenagers reside on the boundary between childhood and adulthood situations, which Turner (1967) referenced as a place of liminality.

Liminality, according to Turner (1967, 1969), is a state of life where individuals are caught between two conflicting sides, thus they are "neither here

nor there” (p.95). This concept applies to the position occupied by pregnant and parenting adolescents because they are neither living fully in the adolescent stage of life nor living fully in the adult world. They are expected by society to behave like adults and take up adult responsibilities while, on the other hand, they are expected by their learning institutions to behave like students and take up responsibilities like all other students. According to Turner (1967), liminal individuals basically reside outside the societal structure that has definite passages and margins. Society expects students’ to go through school, graduate, get a job, get married, and have children. It structure people’s lives to follow this sequences. Pregnant and parenting students do not follow this predictable social passage. Instead they live in both worlds of adulthood and childhood.

Turner (1967) groups the rite of passage into three stages: rite of separation (pre-liminal), transition rites (liminal rites), and rites of incorporation (post-liminal). In the first stage (pre-liminal), several things happen that detach individuals from the social structure, alienate them from society, disorient them, and to a small extent dissolve the social order. In the second stage (liminal) individuals are secluded; they live within boundaries; and they start developing a transition plan. The third stage of the rite of passage is incorporation. This stage is also seen as the reintegration or post-liminal stage. During this stage individuals are incorporated back into the society. They have acquired a new image, identity or a new self.



The pregnant and parenting students' life passage does not follow either societal or educational expectations of school-age children. Generally, the expectation held by the society about school-age children is that they should to attend school, follow school rules and graduate in time. Getting pregnant or dropping out of school in most cases is considered as deviant behavior. Therefore there is a strong temporal dimension to the educational discourse.

The public has been focused on the problems associated with adolescent pregnancy and the costs of social welfare (Maynard, 1996). Unfortunately there is little mention of how the adolescents' education might be affected and consideration of how to help them succeed in education. A resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly reveals the lack of concern or caring about the educational needs of pregnant and parenting teens. The 1996 General Assembly adopted a resolution referred to as "World Programme of Action for Youth to the year 2000 and Beyond." In this resolution, the United Nations identified unwanted teen pregnancy as one of the main problems facing the world. The Assembly came up with strategies to reduce teen pregnancy but there was no mention of how to help adolescents who were already pregnant or parenting to succeed in education. One can only conclude that when adolescent girls become pregnant, they are dropped from the United Nations General Assembly agenda (Waller, Brown, & Whittle, 1999). A colleague in an alternative education program mentioned that society is more likely to harshly judge those girls who opt to have their babies when they get pregnant than those who opt to

have abortions. Society applies double standards when it comes to pregnant and parenting adolescents versus adolescents who opt for abortion (Sacks, 2011).

Researchers have found that society sees teen pregnancy as a central and significant source of societal and welfare problems (Fields, 2005; Adler, Bates, & Merdinger, 1985). Often criticisms are directed at adolescents for what are considered bad or poor choices. Most people believe pregnant girls knowingly play a major role in their own dilemma, yet the girls would claim that they are innocent and simply victims of circumstances (Fields, 2005). Fields points out that cultural and religious belief have over the years led to an ignorance of “girl’s sexuality” and a failure to educate girls on other aspects of sex. Adler, Bates, and Merdinger (1985) found that being a teen mother, whether married or not, has economic consequences for young women. For example, early or unplanned motherhood can lead to poor academic performance, low educational aspirations, and reduced employment and earning potential (Card & Wise, 1978; Adler, Bates, & Merdinger, 1985).

#### Implications of Teen Pregnancy for Educational Practice

Teen pregnancy has often been labeled as a situation only for the “wrong girls” and society views the girls as culprits instead of victims. According to Kelly (2000), the “wrong girl” label by the public has inhibited a useful understanding of the phenomenon. Many who are involved with pregnant and parenting adolescents turn their back on the girls and instead of helping and supporting

them, view them as a disgrace and a shame to their families. According to Pillow (2006), pregnant and parenting adolescents are seen as irresponsible and also as a drain on societal resources. Further, Pillow (2006) maintains that this negative view of pregnant and parenting students produces negative outcomes. Pillow insists the focus should be less on the current situation of the teens but instead on education that will enhance the chances of successful futures for the teenagers.

Schools tend to mirror the condemnatory societal view of pregnant and parenting students by establishing separate institutions and programs for these girls with the idea that their pregnancy might “contaminate” other girls who are not pregnant (Pillow, 2004). Further, Pillow contends that, “Historically, and up to the present day, debates on the education of the school-age mothers contain a common theme described as ‘discourses of contamination’. These discourses justify removal of the school-age mother from the school setting based upon the fear that her sexuality and immorality will spread to other students” (2004, p.57).

The educational discourse discussed earlier has promoted such negative views and consequently the public has joined in condemning adolescent girls for getting pregnant and jeopardizing their educational accomplishments. Learning institutions have segregated pregnant and parenting adolescents into separate facilities and some research concludes that these actions are taken to protect other teens rather than to benefit the pregnant girls (Pillow, 2004).

Not all studies have shared this view, for example, Luttrell (2003) suggested that society accuses pregnant and parenting adolescents of seeking love in all the wrong places and represents them as “imaginary love-like objects” (p.27). This is psychological interpretation and does not represent what the girls think. Later in this study I will present what the girls actually said. Bhabha (1983) expressed the view that the stereotypical discourses were both anxious and assertive in representing pregnant teens. This expression coincides with all other studies cited previously that the stereotyping of pregnant and parenting adolescents does not represent the true picture of who they are or take enough account of their own views regarding their circumstances.

Societal views have led to social tension between structure and agency. Society has rules and laws (structure) that govern the lives of individuals. However, these rules and laws also limit the individual’s right to choose (agency) and set up ongoing conflict between the structures that govern and the individual’s attempts to assert agency. Persians (2003) pointed out that the tensions between structure and agency have extended to the external institutions, which shape the social space. These institutions fail to give pregnant and parenting teens an opportunity to choose and to be self-determined. It is important to note that institutions are shaped by policies, the process of developing these policies takes many turns and sometimes some information is lost in the process.

## Policies

The discourses surrounding the issue of teen pregnancy have produced two- pronged policies in the United States that started in the late 1970s and still continue to present-day. “The two- tiered approach is about controlling and regulating who has children and under what circumstances” (Pillow, 2004, p.39). Most policies regarding pregnant and parenting adolescents in the States, including California, stream from Title IX regulations. Title IX is a federal law dating from 1972, which guarantees equal educational access and opportunities to all persons in the United States. It prohibits any kind of discrimination against anyone, including pregnant and parenting adolescents. The educational structure for pregnant and parenting adolescent programs has been based on the Title IX legislation. Title IX legislation established rules and regulations to govern the education of teen mothers. It states:

[ A] recipient [of federal funding] shall not discriminate against any students , or exclude any student from its education programs or activity ...on the basis of such student’s pregnancy , childbirth, false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy or recovery therefrom, unless the student requests voluntarily to participate in a separate portion of the program (Pillow, 2004, p.34).

Title IX further required educational institutions to make sure that, if teen mothers are placed in separate facilities, those facilities are comparable and offer the same opportunities as facilities for non-pregnant students. According to Pillow

(2004), the legislation was a major breakthrough that impacted and protected pregnant and parenting students. School districts were mandated to implement Title IX policy, which guaranteed the rights of pregnant / or mothering students to an education equal to that of their peers. In 1985 a California “roundtable series of reports” outlined steps the state took to prevent teenage pregnancies and to ensure that those adolescents who were pregnant or parenting received proper education (Moses, 1985).

While Title IX policies appear very clear, there is evidence indicating that school districts fall short when it comes to the implementation of these policies. Dunke (1990) found that some school districts in California did not make accommodations for pregnant and parenting students, violating mandates of Title IX. Where separate facilities for pregnant and parenting students exist, these students have few platforms where they can express their satisfactions or dissatisfactions regarding their learning institutions.

Montessoro and Blixen (1996) stated that the issues of teen pregnancy lay in the middle of a variety of legislative and judicial events and social trends. Most policies of the 1980s focused more on the prevention of teen pregnancy and social welfare of the children born to teen mothers than on other areas of the teen mother’s lives such as their education and career goals (Montessoro & Blixen, 1996; Frost & Forrest, 1995; Kirby, 1994; Maynard, 1995; Miller, Card, Paikoff & Peterson, 1992; Miller & Paikoff, 1992).

During Ronald Reagan's presidency, the issue of birth control and sex education shifted and became linked to the issue of abortion. This shift was primarily due to a focus on social issues, instead of the more traditional viewpoint, which linked teen pregnancy to societal concern about a decay of morals. Montessoro and Blixen further pointed out that the shift moved the issue of teen pregnancy from a public health concern to a political arena. Clearly the issues of teen pregnancy have been in the limelight for the last three decades and cannot avoid being subject to political intervention. Some political interventions have addressed how educational policies should be applied in schools. In the following section I would like to discuss the application of these policies in learning institutions, especially in Cal SAFE programs.

#### Application of Educational Policies

Application of educational policies differs from institution to institution. The California School Age Families Education ( ) programs fall under the California Educational Codes (EC: 200-201). California EC 200, also referred to as the equal access policy mandates public school districts to provide equal educational opportunities to all individuals regardless of disability, religion, gender, nationality, race or ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation. It also protects individuals from being discriminated against or harassed due to any peculiar characteristic they may possess. Pregnant and parenting adolescents are protected under this California Education Code (EC). While educational institutions reserve the final say on how educational policies are implemented

and applied, the equal access policy in theory protects minorities and other marginalized group of students.

### Institutions

“Institution” is a term stemming from disciplines such as sociology, health science, psychology, and educational research. Institution is a term that can be used to refer to rules and regulations which are humanly devised and shape human interactions (North, 1990). There is no single acceptable definition of an institution. What is commonly understood is that institutions are social structures that have attained a high degree of resilience (Scott, 2004; North, 1990).

Institutions also are understood as reducing uncertainty in societies by providing structure to everyday life. However, some social institutions have been characterized as exploitative and ensuring unequal access to resources by some individuals or groups of people in the society (Dukes, 1999).

The U.S. Department of Education stipulates that, primary and secondary schools in the United States are to be governed by local educational agencies (LEAs). Institutional policies and regulations tend to be uniform across all schools within the same district, with the exception of charter schools and special education programs. Individual schools are confined within those policies and regulation and autonomy is very limited. Institutionalization enables schools to manage and operate in line with mandated goals and objectives (Ozgan, 2011). Educational institutions teach students societal values such as being disciplined, obedient, punctual, and valuing hard work. In summary, educational institutions



encourage students to be good students and good citizens. However, structuring forces that are in play in these institutions often create systems of winners or losers (Dukes, 1999). Students who often do not follow school regulations or break school rules are viewed as destined to fail or as losers.

Institutionalization from an educational perspective has been viewed as a process by which students are reprogrammed to confirm and comply with the rules and regulations of the institution (Ozgan, 2011). Pregnant and parenting students are thus expected to adapt to their new schools without complaining or receiving special treatment. Most pregnant and parenting students experience the impact of these structuring forces. They do not choose to attend alternative education schools voluntarily but that is usually the only option presented to them by their school counselor when they discover they are pregnant.

### Non-traditional and Alternative Education Schools

According to Coppus (2008), the history of alternative schooling dates back to the early 1840's. The U.S. Department of Education defines alternative education as;

Public - elementary/ secondary schools that address the needs of students which typically cannot be met in a regular school and provide nontraditional education which is not categorized solely as regular education, special education, vocational education, gifted and talented or magnet school programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p.55).

Alternative schools and programs are designed specifically to meet and accommodate the needs of students that cannot be met in the regular schools (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). Many students who attend alternative schools and programs can be identified as being at risk of failing or dropping out of schools. Some of the indicators identifying students include but are not limited to, poor grades, truancy, disruptive behavior, and pregnancy. In most cases alternative schools are located in separate facilities from the regular schools, although occasionally they can be housed within the regular school (Carver & Tice, 2010).

California State Law (California Education Code [EC] sections 58500 through 58512) gives school districts an allowance to establish alternative schools and programs. Some of the alternative schools and programs include: Community Schools, Court Schools, California School Age Families Education Program (Cal SAFE), and Independent study programs. EC states that all teachers and students in these programs and schools must be voluntarily selected. The alternative schools and programs must be maintained and funded the same way as other educational programs and must be evaluated annually. Lange and Sletten (2002) found that alternative schools are primarily for those students who have behavior problems at school (community schools), students who are deficient in credits, students with special needs or students in other special circumstances such as being pregnant. The California School Age

Families Education programs (Cal SAFE) belongs to the category of alternative schools and programs (CDE, 2000).

### California School Age Families Education Program

The Cal- SAFE program was established in 2000, following the California Senate passing Bill 1064 in 1998. It was designed to serve pregnant and parenting students and their children. The program was previously known as “Esperanza” and the name was changed during the adoption of the new bill. is a comprehensive and integrated program that works in collaboration with other community agencies. The program was designed to improve educational experiences and increase support services for students, and to provide child care and developmental services for the parenting teenagers’ children (CDE). According to EC section 54742 (b), the goals of the program are to reduce the dropout rate, to increase the graduation rate, and to assist pregnant and parenting adolescents in transitioning into work or post-secondary education.

Most pregnant and parenting students are placed in alternative schools. The underlying assumption is that alternative schools are better equipped than comprehensive high schools to meet the students’ educational, social, economic, psychological, and health needs. Also, the argument goes, alternative schools positively shape the lives of the teenagers and promote healthy development, stability, productivity, and long term self-sufficiency and well -being (Shapiro & Marcy, 2002). Brindis and Jeremy (1988, in Amin, Browne, Ahmed and Sato

2006) found “evidence that intervention programs for pregnant adolescents can alleviate many of the problems associated with teenage pregnancy” (p.174). Graduating from high school minimizes dependency on social welfare and improves parenting skills. Also, attending alternative programs reduces the chances of the girls having repeated births while still in high school (Shapiro & Marcy, 2002).

The effectiveness of alternative schools are yet to be determined, since there is limited research in this area (Seiz & Afel, 2006; Lange & Sletten, 2002). Other studies done by Pillow (2004); Littrell (2003) and Kelly (2000) focused on educational policies, school climate, and inner-city schools respectively. For example, Pillow’s research focused critical analysis of educational policies (Title XI). She found that the funding of pregnant and parenting adolescent programs was cut in half by both state and federal government during Ronald Reagan’s administration. Pillow further pointed out that there was a major shift in policy from focusing on the educational needs of pregnant and parenting teenagers to providing information about contraceptives and promoting sexual abstinence.

The literature reviewed in this study had scant information on agency for pregnant and parenting adolescents. Both structure and agency contribute to shaping human behavior. In general terms agency is the capacity for an individual to make choices or act, while structuring forces control or limit the choices and opportunities an individual can have.

## Agency

### Pregnant and Parent Adolescents Agency

As mentioned at the beginning, this literature review has two sections. The first section addressed the concept of structure; the forces at work in structuring the education of pregnant and parenting adolescents, educational and political discourses, societal views on teen pregnancy, educational policies and their application, and Institutions. The second section will address the concepts of agency, social capital, cultural capital, habitus, and hidden curriculum. The division is to some degree arbitrary because, as Maslak (2008) contends, “Human beings act within the social parameters that circumscribe their lives, thus, individuals, regardless of the role they play, experience agency and structure simultaneously” (p. xxiii).

Many studies show that the tension between structure and agency is complicated by the influence they have on each other. This review focuses on structure and agency in relations to educational policies, practices, and programs and investigates how they influence the personal agency, self- efficacy and educational experiences of pregnant and parenting adolescents. Agency has often been referenced or defined in terms of decision-making and power (Manion, 2003; Maslak, 2008; Henze, 2005). In the following sections I will discuss both agency and self- efficacy in detail. I want to examine agency from both poststructuralist and humanistic points of view. Agency is ordinarily

believed to refer to someone's capacity to originate and direct actions for a given purpose (Davies, 1990).

Traditionally, the term agency was used to imply an individual's choice to act or "the intentional capacity to identify and implement alternatives" (Miron & Lauria, 1998, 189). Bakewell (2010) defines agency as, "the capacity for social actors to reflect on their position, devise strategies and take action to achieve their desires" (p.1694). Maslak (2008) defines "agency as the action that propels deliberate movement through a structure(s) by an individual and / or collective(s), with the express purpose of achieving a goal or desired outcome" (p. xv). The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Sociology (1994) defines the term "agency" as a synonym of action" (p. 7). For any individual to have agency he or /she has to have the power and ability to act.

According to Campbell (2005), there are two approaches to agency. The first one 'which illustrates its necessarily close connection with theories of action emphasizes that agency stands for the capacity for willed (voluntary) to action" (p. 408). The second one suggests that agency is independent from the structural process, thus individuals have the ability to act and their actions are not influenced by the societal norms, rules, or practices. Further, agency has been defined as "the volitional, purposive, and intentional aspects of human activity" (Ritzier, 2005, p.8). From these definitions, one can conclude that agency refers to an individual's power that enables him or / her to realize goals or choose a course of action. Other researchers define agency in the following ways,

Campbell (2005) asserts that the general idea that unites definitions of personal agency is power, “the power an individual possesses to act and to make choices or the ability to achieve an effect or outcome” (p.409). According to Steinberg (2002), agency arises from the individual’s ability to control resources. Agency also refers to the ability of an individual to identify resources and to have the power to utilize such resources. This implies that agency goes hand in hand with power. Individuals might not realize their agency unless they have power to act.

Bandura (1989), in his social cognitive theory asserted, that “the capacity to exercise control over one’s own thought process, motivation, and action is a distinctively human agency characteristic” (p. 1175). It is clear from Bandura’s views that agency can be defined as acts that can result in certain outcomes. The concept of agency is critical to this study’s understanding of how the pregnant and parenting adolescents view their control of their own educational goals. Ray (2009) used Bandura’s (1977; 1993; 1997) views on agency to suggest “examining factors and acts that suggest manifestation of agency can lead to identifying the beliefs of a particular group about their ability to control their own situations and their sense of efficacy” (p.117). It is important to note that pregnant and parenting adolescents enrolled in pregnant minor programs are in a unique situation and therefore their experiences and their agency may be impacted. Pillow (2004) asserted that pregnant girls are in a situation where they have no control of the outcomes, or are not free to voice their opinions, may be withdrawn and may fail to realize that education is a right, not a privilege.

Pillow's (2004) work laid a solid foundation for examining the issue of teen pregnancy and how educational policies have been applied to ensure that teen mothers have equal access to quality education. Pillow's work did not directly touch on the issue educational experiences of pregnant and parenting adolescents but it named "teen pregnancy as an educational policy issue" (p.4).

Pillow presents a critical analysis of educational policies (Title XI) and defines and addresses how these policies have been applied and implemented. Her study also traced the successes and failures of educational policies concerning teen mothers' education. She also suggests that most pregnant teens were involuntarily placed in alternative programs. For example, one participant in Pillow's study stated that;

He called me into his office and he said, "I hear you're pregnant".  
And I say "yeah, so what?" He says we don't have pregnant girls in this school-how it was bad for the school's reputation and would give other girls ideas. He told me I had to sign the slip and go to this other school- if you wanna stay in school, this [the separate school] is the only choice"  
(Pillow, 2004, p. xiii).

This is one of many examples Pillow identified which show that the pregnant teen's agency was limited, especially when it came to their schooling placement.

Ray (2009) applied Bandura's (1994; 1997) concept of self-efficacy in the following four principles, which he saw as the sources from which individuals can draw their sense of efficacy:



Mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and physiological arousal; mastery experiences are instances when individuals are successful at completing a particular task. A vicarious experience is a situation in which individuals observe the success of other people similar to themselves, and this observation bolsters their own confidence. Social or verbal persuasion- people who receive positive verbal persuasion to attempt a task are more likely to put forth greater efforts and to sustain them. The fourth principle is physiological arousal. People often interpret physical and emotional reactions to stress as indicative of poor performance. People, who experience an aversive reaction such as anxiety or tension, are less likely to expect success (Ray, 2009, p.118).

Ray's viewpoint suggests that external forces boost an individual's sense of agency. Individuals are more likely to exercise agency when they have positive incentives than when they receive negative reactions. The pregnant and parenting adolescents' situations are unique; they are students, teenagers, and parents at the same time. Their situations force them to experience and reside in both adult and teenage worlds. It is noticeable though that few researchers make the effort to unveil how this experience is understood by the teens themselves. One restriction on agency is the lack of social capital attributed to students who are pregnant and who are forced to attend separate institutions. The next section addresses this concept.

## Social Capital

The concept of “social capital” is derived from the extensive writing of two scholars: - Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and James S. Coleman (1988; 1990). Both Bourdieu and Coleman agree that there is no single appropriate definition of social capital. However, they point out that social capital refers to benefits individuals derive from networking or relationships they have with others in their society. Bourdieu (1985; 1980) views social capital as an “aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition”( p. 248). The benefit derived from this networking gives an individual access to resources.

Pregnant and parenting adolescents do not usually have a great deal of social capital. For example, they don't have relationships or networks like most students in regular high schools such as a variety of professionals (psychologists, educational counselors, teachers with different educational expertise). They do not participate in sporting events, football teams, cheerleaders, and students' council. Participating in these events help students to increase their self-esteem and boost their social capital. Further, studies show that students whose parents and community are involved in their schooling perform better academically than those who do not.

In his writings on the construction of social space, Bourdieu (1985) contended “the structure of the social world is defined at every moment by the

structure and distribution of capital and profits characteristic of the different particular fields” (p. 734). Bourdieu (1986) expressed capital as different forms of power that people possess. These forms of capital (power) include, but are not limited to, wealth, social connections or exceptional abilities like artistic talent, academic qualifications or physical attractiveness (Thorpe, 2009). An individual acquires or accumulates different forms of power, depending on their position or status in an organization or society. The capital that is recognizable in school settings is granted and recognized by peers, teachers, school staff or school administration. A lot of football players and cheerleaders in most high schools possess some form of power due their position in the school and this form of power is highly recognized by peers and school staff. Thorpe (2009) interpreted Bourdieu’s view of women’s capital by stating that, “Women are not typically capital accumulating subjects, rather, they are ‘capital-bearing objects’ whose value accrues to the primary groups to which they belong (for example, husband, family)” (p.493). This capital is important because it enables individuals to have a sense of value and it increases the sense of worthiness. Pregnant and parenting students’ social capital is limited, because their networks and relationships with others are prohibited, excluded or discouraged due to what Pillow (2004) calls the discourse of contamination, as discussed earlier.

Another example of social capital that is recognizable in a school setting is the knowledge possessed by individuals to achieve desired outcomes. Some of those outcomes can be achieved through connections. For example, if a student

needs help with homework and reaches out to a teacher or a counselor or even another student who might be able to help, that is a form of social capital.

Another researcher whose findings revealed compelling results on social capital and its impact on humans is Coleman. Coleman (1988, 1990) defined social capital through its function and relation to human capital. Coleman viewed social capital as different entities that facilitate action, such as the interaction between individuals and the sharing of resources to achieve certain outcomes, which cannot be achieved individually (Coleman, 1988). Coleman (1988) identified different forms of social capital such as obligation, expectation, trust, information sharing, norms and relations. Studies have shown that the meaning and usage of social capital is connected to social values that allow individuals to network and bond with others in their social environment with whom they have similar or diverse backgrounds but also to reciprocate similar norms (Gore, 2005; Coleman, 1988; 1990).

Coleman suggested that the lack of meaningful parental interactions with their children diminishes social capital which compromises the possibility of building human capital (Coleman, 1988, 1990). Coleman purports that mentoring parental interactions with their children is a form of social capital through which a foundation can be laid to develop human capital. For pregnant teenagers such parental support is often complicated by parental disappointment or disapproval of the girl becoming pregnant. In the following section I will cover pregnant and

parenting adolescent girls' habitus. Their habitus is impacted by societal misrepresentations and hence giving the new identities.

### Habitus

Askland (2007) stated that the term habitus "refers to the principles of generating and structuring practices and representations, subsequently producing identity through particular dispositions and structures of perception, which are associated with sensory environment" (p.240). Further, Askland believes habitus is acquired through socialization from childhood to young adulthood. Bourdieu (1977) suggested that habitus can be continually reproduced and transformed throughout one's life and the reproduction is only dependent upon its previous conditions. Therefore, it can be concluded that habitus is embodied in one's history and social location. Bourdieu argues "that through the "systematic 'choices' it makes among the places, events and people that might be frequented, the habitus tends to protect itself from crisis and critical challenges by providing itself with a milieu to which it is as adapted as possible"(1990, p. 61). What happens when the individual's habitus frames the situation as one which gives the student no choice as is often the case of the pregnant and parenting students who are forced to adapt to a new school setting, to complete their high school graduation requirements? These situations limit the individual's habitus and motivation to pursue goals.

The concept of habitus, as used and applied in many studies, (for example, Bourdieu, 1997; 2000; and 2005), suggested that a habitus consists of

socially learned skills which deposit themselves in an individual's daily activities and often are taken for granted so that their impact is ignored. The habitus for pregnant and parenting adolescents is central to their schooling. Their identities empower them to make choices for themselves and their children. When the habitus of the pregnant and parenting students is suppressed or confused, their sense of who they are might be lost as well. The identity of these students and their position in their school setting helps them to focus, not only on their goals of completing high school graduation requirements but also on planning their future. Therefore the habitus of these students plays a major role in their education and impacts on their schooling experiences.

#### Educational Goals of Pregnant and Parenting Adolescents

Schools expose students not only to the formal curriculum but also to the hidden curriculum. Ozolins, Hall, and Peterson (2008) and Prideaux (2003), note that schools are multidimensional environments with an overt curriculum (the formal or the intended curriculum) and an unintended or unscripted curriculum, which in many cases includes the teaching and learning that takes place outside the classroom (hidden curriculum). The hidden curriculum can be described as the unexpected or unintended outcomes of learning in schools. Further, Ozolins et al. contend that it is this hidden curriculum, which creates and maintains social relations and helps students construct meaning about what is expected of them and about how to respond to the formal curriculum. These views are important

because they help understand the impact of the hidden curriculum and how it shapes the learning environment of pregnant and parenting students.

In the common discourse the public school system in the United States is a great equalizer, which means it provides an opportunity for all students to receive a high quality of education (Schmidt & Cogan, 2009). There is also a belief that, regardless of ethnicity, family background or socioeconomic status, hardworking students can take advantage of the free education provided and go as far as their abilities can take them. Pregnant and parenting education programs were established to provide services that were not available in regular comprehensive high schools (Brindis & Jeremy, 1988; Center for Assessment and Policy, 2002a; 2002b). Despite the intent of these programs; studies have revealed inadequacies in practice. Pregnant and parenting students' have more limited access to opportunities than their counterparts in comprehensive high schools (Kelly, 2000; Luttrell, 2003; Pillow, 2004). Other studies have suggested that pregnant and parenting adolescents benefit from studying in an environment where they feel accepted and engaged with other students who are either pregnant or have babies (Shapiro & Marcy, 2002; Luttrell, 2003).

### Summary

Most of the research on teen pregnancy reviewed in this study focused on the social welfare of the teenagers and their babies. There is a large volume of published studies describing the role played by educational institutions, society,

and by pregnant and parenting adolescents themselves. There were a limited number of studies that focused on education and on the experiences of pregnant and parenting adolescents. Some studies described the institutional and social structure of the learning environment for pregnant and parenting students and how these structures were formed. Other studies suggested that structures were formed through educational and political discourses (Pillow, 2004; Luttrell, 2003; Kelly, 2000).

Other literature highlighted discourses that can be used as lenses to understand teen pregnancy. Most of the studies defined discourse as spoken or written language, norms, traditions, or practices (Burr, 2003, Belsey, 2002; Maslak, 2008; Foucault, 1972). Some common findings also suggested that educational discourse shapes how individuals are educated (Cannella, 2000; Bernet, 2007; Kelly, 2000; Pillow, 2004).

The discourses that emerged include the discourse of 'contamination', discourse of the 'wrong girls', and discourse of 'welfare mothers' (Pillow, 2004, Kelly, 2003). Even though each study revealed a different aspect of the educational experiences of pregnant and parenting adolescents, there was something missing to complete the picture. Most of the literature fails to include the voices of the pregnant and parenting teenagers. Hearing the voices of the girls can enable the reader to see the fuller picture of the phenomena. The literature revealed rich information surrounding the phenomenon of pregnant and parenting adolescents but there is a gap between the literature on pregnant girls'



social welfare and this current study which has as its focus on the pregnant girls' educational experiences.

The literature also revealed that political discourse plays a major role in structuring the education of pregnant and parenting adolescents. The political discourses surrounding pregnant and parenting teenagers reinforce the stigmatization of early motherhood and influences how society views teen pregnancy (Hunter, 2007; Pillow, 2004; Kelly, 2000; Van Dijk, 2002; Fields, 2005; Adler, Bates, & Merdinger, 1985; Card & Wise, 1978). Many of the school districts' policies on the education of pregnant and parenting adolescents stem from Title IX. These federal education policies were passed and mandated implementation in 1972 and guaranteed all students access to free education without discrimination (Pillow, 2004; Dunkle, 1990; Moses, 1995; Montessoro & Blixen, 1996).

Even though Title IX guaranteed access to free and quality education for all students, most pregnant and parenting students educated in alternative education programs, like Cal- SAFE, are disadvantaged (Luttrell, 2003; Pillow, 2004). These researchers argue that, even though alternative education programs are a good compromise for educating pregnant and parenting students, most of them do not offer quality educational opportunities for the pregnant teens that are similar to what their counterparts are offered in comprehensive high schools. However, other studies argued that educating pregnant and parenting in alternative education programs offers better services

than comprehensive high schools (Shapiro & Marcy, 2002; Brindis & Jeremy, 1988). The two groups of researchers based their arguments on what has been written about teen pregnancy and on their own perspectives.

The literature review also examined the agency of pregnant and parenting students. In order for pregnant and parenting students to realize their agency, they need to have the right and the ability to make decisions and take actions (Manion, 2003; Maslak, 2008; Henze, 2005, Miron & Lauria, 1998, Bakewell, 2010; Campbell, 2005). Poststructuralists, such as Foucault (1972), have argued that individuals have limited agency as a result of the influence of powerful by discourses. Others argued that individuals should and do have the capacity to control their thought processes in order to act (Bandura, 1989; Steinberg, 2002).

A few studies brought the voices of the pregnant and parenting adolescents into the research of pregnant and parenting adolescents through their narratives on motherhood (Luker, 1996; Pillow, 2004; Luttrell, 2003). However, this study purports to bring out the voices of girls through their stories about their educational experiences.

The literature shows that social capital is important, because it empowers an individual to act and also to be able to interact with others in her environment (Coleman, 1988, 1990). Pregnant and parenting adolescents have reduced social capital due to fact that they are being educated in separate institutions and their communication or interactions with other students in comprehensive high schools and specialist like counselors, psychologists are limited.

In conclusion, this literature review showed that there is a large and growing body of research that investigates the issues of teen pregnancy but there are limited studies, which are focused on the teenagers' educational experiences. Studies reviewed here presented bits and pieces of the puzzle surrounding the phenomenon of educational experiences of pregnant and parenting adolescents. The studies touch all other aspects of the teenagers' lives, including their social welfare and well-being but leave out one very important aspect, teenagers' perspectives on their educational experiences and their future educational goals. The present study will therefore deepen understanding and hence at least partially represent the educational experiences of these students. The study expands and explores educational experiences of pregnant and parenting adolescents and connects it to the literature review.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

Patton (1990) argued that the aim of a researcher in qualitative research is understand and explain. This qualitative study of pregnant and parenting students' educational experiences used phenomenological perspective to gather girls' stories about their educational experiences in their new school setting (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Furthermore, this study examined and described the meaning of the educational experiences of pregnant and parenting adolescents in their new school setting (.).In order to understand and describe a phenomenon , it has been suggested that qualitative researchers might utilize multiple approaches to collect or analyze data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Further, Denzin and Lincoln described this process of utilizing different approaches as "brocolge" and the researchers as "bricoleur" (p.4). A bricoleur is therefore a researcher who has the ability to utilize different approaches and piece together information in order to create images that describe the phenomenon or situation.

This study utilized a phenomenological perspective, discourse analysis and narrative analysis approaches to piece together the information gathered through face- to-face interviews in order to describe the meaning of the lived educational experiences of pregnant and parenting adolescents who participated in this study. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state that, "the use of multiple methods,

or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question” (p.5).

### Theoretical Context

The investigation of students lived educational experiences was undertaken using qualitative phenomenological perspective that attempts to understand the meaning(s) of the lived experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 1990; Van Manen, 1984; 1990). According to Merriam (1998), qualitative research design researchers are interested in finding out how individuals make conscious sense of their lifeworld and how they experience the world around them. She further contends that the narratives gathered from participants offer a “thick description”, giving readers a clear and more complete picture of the phenomena being studied (p.15). Thick description is a process whereby a researcher pays close attention to contextual details and interpretation for meaning of the phenomenon. This description enables readers to establish the trustworthiness of the study. This study aims to produce such thickly- layered description by utilizing a qualitative research design based on the phenomenological paradigm of inquiry.

The phenomenological perspective approach is suitable for this topic because the researcher seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the pregnant and parenting adolescents’ educational experiences in their new educational setting through in their own world. The study explores how these students’ make

meaning of their everyday lives in their new school. This method of inquiry will lead to a greater understanding of teenagers' educational experiences and it will also help to gain a greater insight and deeper understanding of the phenomenon of being pregnant or parenting in a new school setting. Marshall and Rossman (1999) described phenomenological study as "exploration or appreciation of lived experiences and attempts by researchers to bring deeper understanding to those experiences" (p.112). There is an underlying assumption that the participants' experiences can be analyzed to reveal shared themes and patterns – to bring a new meaning or significance to the phenomenon in the study (Van Manen, 1990).

Van Manen maintained that, "phenomenological research, unlike any other kind of research, makes a distinction between appearance and essence, between the things of our experience and that which grounds the things of our experience" (p. 32). The distinction helps in identifying the meaning of the experience. The process involves investigating the narratives of pregnant and parenting adolescences educational experience as they have lived, rather than re-conceptualizing it so as to appreciate the meaning of their educational experiences which are then organized into themes.

Sanders contends

Phenomenology seeks to make explicit the implicit structure and meaning of human experiences, it is the search for "essence" that cannot

be revealed by ordinary observations; it is the science of essential structure of consciousness or experience (Sanders, 1982, p. 354). Sanders applied Edie (1962) sentiments by suggesting that phenomenology “concentrates neither on the subject of the experience nor on the object of the experience but on the point of contact at which being and consciousness meets” (p.354). Thus, an individual is aware of who they are through their own experiences.

The role of a researcher in a phenomenological perspective study is to aid the participants in expressing their experiences as plainly as possible, making sure the participants reveal their lived experiences. The researcher asks questions such as: what is this kind of experience like? What does the experience mean? Or how does the lived world present itself to me or participants in my study? Researchers using phenomenological research design are faced with two challenges: how to help participants express their world as directly as possible; and how to demonstrate these dimensions in a way that the lived world (the life world) is revealed.

### Confidentiality

The information gathered on the participants was stored to ensure confidentiality is maintained. The interview narratives and identity of the participants was coded and locked up in a cabinet in my classroom. When transporting any research data to my house, the data was placed safe and

locked in the trunk of my car and then transferred from the safe into a locked cabinet in my house. The researcher was the only person who has access to the locked cabinets. The participants' identities did not appear on the final write up. All collected data including audio records will be destroyed two years after the completion of the study. The medical record information access form was kept separate from the research data. Anyone who had access to the participant's stories about their pregnancy and deliveries signed the authorization form to record their access (see appendix A).

I was aware the number of the participants in my study was small and it was difficult to conceal identities of the participants especially when it came to medical information such as sex of the baby, color of hair, eyes, weight, and date of birth. I purposely chosen to exclude this information from my final write up since the focus and aim of the study was to represent the participant's voices on their educational experiences.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the researcher have special obligation to protect the rights and welfare of subjects who are particularly vulnerable including all those who cannot themselves give informed and legal consent. The participants in this research are in that category of protected class because they are pregnant and also children under 18 years old.

The research proposal was approved after two resubmissions by IRB on April 6<sup>th</sup> 2012 (see Appendix B). One of the concerns, which emerged during the resubmission process, was that any information collected from the participants



that mentions their pregnancy amounted to medical data. A brief account of the IRB process follows.

The researcher informed the IRB that there would be no collection of health information. The researcher assured the IRB committee that the focus would remain on the participants' educational experience but the committee deemed that, because the young women were pregnant all information collected could be considered medical. So it is important to state that no questions aimed at collecting specific medical data were asked. At the same time the researcher recognized that the young women might talk about their deliveries and birth experiences and therefore it was considered prudent to ensure that HIPAA requirements were observed and any access to student data was logged, signed and dated.

### Subjectivity Statement

From my standpoint the participants in the study are victims of the system and circumstances. Society criticizes them for getting pregnant and assumes that criticisms will be a lesson to pregnant and parenting adolescents. Getting pregnant in the view of many is a sign that the teenagers should be aware of the consequences of their actions and therefore they should undertake the adult responsibilities which comes with child bearing. There are few considerations about the actual age of the teenagers and the fact that they are children themselves.

My upbringing and my love for education may overshadow the clear picture and circumstances of the subjects in the study. The lives of the subjects in this study did not progress the way the society expected. During the years I taught in the Cal SAFE program, I had an opportunity to learn about the program and its expectations. I also learned how to help the girls learn how to care for their new born babies. I acknowledge my biases might impact the process of data collection and analysis. Some of the questions I continually tried to answer throughout the study were; what are their experiences and do they change as the pregnancy progresses?

### Sampling

The participants for this study were pregnant teenagers attending a program in Southern California in the United States of America. Cal- SAFE is a comprehensive and integrated program that works in collaboration with school districts and other community agencies to serve expectant and parenting students and their children. The program admits students who become pregnant before their eighteenth birthday and need to complete a high school education.

The participants were purposely selected because they fitted the criteria which were; being enrolled in Cal- SAFE, between 14 and 17 years old, and in the second trimester of their pregnancy. It was assumed that the information given by the participants was not representational of all pregnant teenagers, but rather provided a relevant, valuable, and insightful look into the phenomenon in

question which was; what is educational experience like for a pregnant or parenting high school students in alternative educational setting?

### Data Collection

Phenomenological research employs in-depth interviews to collect data in the areas of inquiry. Semi-structured interviews and interactive open-ended questions were used. The purpose of in-depth interviewing was to elicit stories of their educational experiences and the meaning the participants make out of those experiences. The girls' stories revealed their educational experiences in their new school setting and the meaning they made out of these experiences.

The approach also let the participants interact with the researcher while still focusing on the topic. A feature of the phenomenological inquiry is that the researcher remains open to new revelations and interpretations as the data is compiled over time. Also, the researcher was open to the emergence of any new themes. Such themes were not decided by the researcher in advance of the interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) defined narratives as a "socially constrained forms of action, socially situated performance, ways of acting in and making sense of the world" (p.641). The researcher also had an opportunity to build rapport with the interviewees through sharing her own educational journey to establish credibility and rapport which allowed the data to be collected in as natural a setting as possible (Creswell, 2003).

The interview process and the interview questions were designed in a way that would allow the researcher to explore the meaning of the lived educational experiences of the participants through their own reflections. The researcher also used primary and secondary sources to collect data. The primary data source of the study included the responses from the participants in one-on-one interviews which were audio-recorded and transcribed. The secondary data source included the researcher's field notes. Field notes helped the researcher to note some observations or unstated body language of the participants and the researcher used them to understand the phenomena. The researcher kept a log of activities that helped with any kind of modification or revision of final data compilation.

The study utilized three sets of interviews. Based on Dolbeare and Schuman (1982) and Seidman (1998), "a series of three interviews that characterizes this approach, allows the interviewer and the participants to plumb the experience and to place it in context" (p. 11).

The three interviews assisted in understanding the experiences of the pregnant and parenting teenagers and more specifically, to determine whether their experiences or attitudes changed during the study or after their babies were born. Also, the series of interviews established consistency as participants were given the opportunity to respond to earlier comments in the second and the third interviews. The three interviews utilized semi-structured and open-ended questions. Patton (1990) indicated that open-ended interview questions help the

researcher elicit in-depth responses from the interviewee. Seidman (1998) recommends three interviews for qualitative research design, because they enable the researcher to validate the stories narrated by the participants over a period of time. This is important because it authenticated the interpretations and established the trustworthiness of the study.

### Conducting the Interviews

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggested that “we live in an interview society, in a society whose members seem to believe that interviews generate useful information about lived experiences and its meaning” (p. 642). They further suggested that interviews are forms of conversations where the interviewer asks question and listens as the interviewee responds. The first role of the researcher was to ask the questions and keenly listen and tape record the answers. Secondly, the researcher audio-recorded the answers, which were later transcribed.

The following constituted the first set of interview questions:

1. Tell me your story of what happened when you found out you were pregnant.
2. Tell me the story of how getting pregnant changed or did not change your schooling experience.
3. Tell me the story of your experience in your new school.
4. Tell me how your educational future has changed as a result of becoming pregnant.

The second set of interviews was conducted after delivery of their baby, when the girls had resumed school again or approximately three months after the first interview. The format of the second interview included reviewing what the girls had said in the first interview and inquiring whether anything has changed in the responses they gave in the prior interview.

The second set of interview questions were as follows:

1. You said (tell the student what they said in the first interview). Has anything changed since then?
2. Has anything changed about your educational goals?
3. Has anything changed about the way you feel about yourself or as a student?

The third interview was conducted approximately 6 weeks after the second interview. The third interview included the following questions:

1. Tell me your story about your future now that you have a child.
2. Is there anything else you would like to say about your educational experience in this program?
3. How can the Cal SAFE program help improve your educational experience?

The researcher added clarifying questions to facilitate and elaborate on what the participants had stated.

## Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is used to refer to the soundness of the findings and strength of the researcher's argument. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that "the aim of trustworthiness in a qualitative inquiry is to support the argument that the inquiry's findings are "worth paying attention to" (p.290). In order to validate the data collected during the first and second interviews, the researcher reviewed the narratives of the interviews with each participant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reviewing the narratives with each participant and discussing possible interpretation is a way of member checking ensured a greater data accuracy. The accuracy of the data gave a more authentic representation of the pregnant and parenting adolescent's voices. The strategy was also a way to help participants recall what they said in each of the previous interviews in order to ensure an accurate account of their experiences.

## Member Checking

Member checking is a technique used in qualitative research to validate improve accuracy and ensure credibility of the researcher's data and interpretations. Member checking means the researcher gives the participants an opportunity to validate the evolving narratives before the researcher complete the final analysis. Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest that member checking involves three different lenses, the researcher, the participants and the external reader(s).

Curtin and Fossey (2007) stated that member checking “is a way of finding out whether the data analysis is congruent with the participants’ experiences” (p. 92). The researcher verified with each participant the narratives they contributed in the first and second interview sessions. The researcher then asked each participant whether the data from the previous interviews was an accurate account of their experiences. Member checking for this study was an individual process and took place as a part of second and the third interviews. Participants were given opportunities to disagree with the researcher’s interpretation and revise some of their stories recorded in previous interviews. The participants appeared to agree with the interpretations, though there is a possibility that some may have chosen not to challenge.

### Limitations

Any study has limitations purposely imposed by the researcher. One of the limitations of this study was geographical; all participants were from one county in Southern California. Participants were all pregnant minors’ aged 14-17. Participants were included in the study because they met the basic criteria, and were recommended by their teachers as fitting the criteria. These deliberate limitations were necessary because they fitted the criteria and scope of the study- an inquiry into the educational experiences of pregnant minors in a publically funded education program.



## Data Analysis

In the general process of qualitative data analysis, the researcher compiles data into clusters of meaning (Creswell, 1998). The researcher then links the clusters of meaning to each other to create a general description of the experiences. These experiences are further described in narrative form (Creswell, 1998). This means that the researcher will write a description or write down the narratives of what happened and how each participant experienced the phenomenon.

According to Moustakas (1994), the researcher should begin and follow these general steps to analyze phenomenological data:

1. Consider each statement with respect to the significance of the description of the experience.
2. Record all relevant statements.
3. List non-repetitive and non-overlapping statements (such experiences can have a powerful meaning).
4. Cluster the invariant meaning units into themes.
5. Synthesize the unchanging invariant meaning units and themes into the descriptions.
6. Reflect on textual description, through imaginative variation and construct descriptions of the structures of the experiences.
7. Compile individual textual-structural descriptions of all experiences, construct a composite textual-structural description and the essence of all

the experiences and include all individual textual-structural descriptions into a universal description of the experiences for the whole group (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122).

The researcher used a professional transcriber and compared transcripts the audio tapes several times to ensure accuracy. Committee members also reviewed the transcripts and identified themes. I did not choose to use software analysis as I believe it would not appreciate the voices of the participants and their as natural conversations. The data analysis was ongoing through the study and the researcher also used structural coherences to triangulate the study. The researcher reviewed the interpretations of the data before the second and third interviews. This ensured that the researcher interpretations of the data were as accurate an account of the participants' experiences as possible.

### Challenges

The unanticipated challenges during the research included, the limited time to interview the girls. My work schedule limited how often I could meet with the girls. Secondly, I could only meet with girls during passing time when the other pregnant and parenting students went to the daycare to help with the babies or after school. The group of girls that participated in this study was small so it was difficult to conceal their participation in the study. The scope was limited to educational experiences of the pregnant and parenting adolescents and therefore access to the life world of the girls, which would have informed

some of the conversations, was not considered in the interview. Also, I was not permitted to observe the girls during class and extra-curricular activities, which would have offered me a more complete understanding of their lifeworlds.

Other challenges which phenomenological researchers face in designing and in the process of the study include conflict between one's own "world view" and those of the participants (Guba, 1990, p. 17) and the life world of the researched. For example, my experience as a teacher, former teen parent and concerned researcher has influenced the way I think and interpret in my life world. As a researcher, I attempted to set aside or suspend any biases in order to interpret the data as it is presented by researched as accurately as possible. It has been suggested that it is difficult "to discover what is really true of a phenomena of interpersonal knowledge and experiences" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 57). While these sentiments carry some truth, this study aim was to represent the voices of the girls by analyzing their stories as much as possible.

### Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 discussed the phenomenological research design and its process. In this study, the researcher described qualitative inquiry within a phenomenological perspective because it often yields in-depth understanding of other people's experience and the meaning they derive from such experiences (Seidman, 1998). Phenomenological research design is an essential and

valuable tool to use because it often enables educational researchers to discover people's experiences in this case, the experiences of the program.

This chapter provided the reader with the foundations and framework of the study. The reader was also provided with information about the scope of the study, the role of the researcher, the setting of the research where and how the study was conducted, participants, and requirements for selection. The instruments used for data collection, data analysis, and the limitations of the study. This study explored the educational experiences of pregnant and parenting adolescents. It has the potential to give participants a voice, challenge educational and political discourses, and alter educational policies and practices in the future.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

This chapter presents the results of phenomenological and narrative analysis of the data collected in the study. Phenomenological analyses were used to explore and describe the lived educational experiences of six pregnant and parenting adolescents who enrolled in a pregnant minor program. Narrative analysis was used as interpretive device to understand how participants presented themselves within the educational setting. In order to protect and maintain confidentiality, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. Each participant's educational experience was described in detail and caution was taken to ensure transcriptions represented the participants' stories as much as possible. In order to provide meaning, context and details of the lived educational experiences, quotes were extracted from the participants' narratives. Furthermore the direct quotes were used to improve upon the trustworthiness of the study.

The chapter is based on the first interview and it is organized into four sections: In the first section I present the profiles of the participants. In the second section, I present each participant's story about her lived educational experiences. Then I describe the main themes that emerged as a way to

understand the lived educational experiences of the participants. The chapter closes by giving a summary of the participant's experiences.

### Participants

This study involved six female adolescents who were pregnant and enrolled in a pregnant minor education program. The table provides demographics of the participants. The inclusion of brief descriptions about the participants is necessary because their experiences and narratives were the main source of data for this research.

Table 1. Participant Demographic Information.

Name	Months of pregnancy	Grade	Ethnicity	Months in the program
Participant 1	7	Eleven	African American	Three
Participant 2	6	Eleven	Hispanic	Four
Participant 3	5	Ten	Asian American	Two
Participant 4	6	Eight	Hispanic	Three
Participant 5	7	Twelve	Hispanic	Two
Participant 6	4	Nine	African American	Two

### Participant 1.

Participant 1 is an African American who comes from a family of ten. She is the youngest of ten siblings and the only one who got pregnant before completing high school. She talked positively about family members and their relationships they have with each other. She also talked about her father who had a difficult time communicating with her after she got pregnant. At the time of the interview she stated that her father had come around and was communicating with her more. She complained of being tired most of the time.

### Participant 2.

Participant 2 is Hispanic American female from a family of five. She has two older brothers who are both college graduates and lived on their own. She lives with both her parents and the dad works while the mother stays at home. She considers herself social but she stated that she does not have a lot of friends. She talked about her parents being very upset with her when she got pregnant but they have since then they have started to be more supportive.

### Participant 3.

Participant 3 is an Asian American female from an extended family which includes grandparents and Aunts. She stated that her parents are very hard working and therefore most of the times the grandparents help them in taking care of the kids. She also stated that her family is very close to one another. Her main concern was to be able to graduate from high school and be able to college.

#### Participant 4.

Participant 4 is Hispanic American Female from a family of six. Both of her parents' live in different cities and are divorced. Her dad left before her 1st birthday and never came back therefore she has no relationship with him. She lives with her maternal grandmother and her grandfather was deported 4 months ago. Participant 4 is fourteen years old and in eighth grade.

#### Participant 5.

Participant 5 is Hispanic American female from a family of three. Her parents divorced when she was two and they had to move in and live with grandmother. She did not get along with her mother and she moved out when she was sixteen and half to live with her paternal grandmother. She was kicked out when she was seventeen because of missing school and hanging out with the wrong crowd. Participant 5 is 17 and in twelfth grade.

#### Participant 6.

Participant 6 is African American female enrolled Cal- Safe for two months. She talked about talked her family, how she grew up with her mother and her two older brothers. She described how her mother was hard working and provided a good home for them. Her mother felt disappointed that she got pregnant before she graduated from high school. At the time of the interview Participant 6 was in ninth grade.



## The Educational Experiences of the Participants

Below is the data that was extracted from the participants' narratives. The purpose of this study was to represent stories of the pregnant and parenting adolescents regarding their educational experiences in their new school setting. These are segments of their stories regarding their lived educational experiences.

### Participant 1

She described her educational experience after getting pregnant as unique because she had to change schools.

Um, I don't know. I thought my [inaudible] was changing. I was changing, and so, I didn't know. And then I was, like, kind of thought about it and then I didn't get my period for, like, a month. And I was, like, Oh, I'm going to take the test. And then, I look a test. Oh, I was like, I'm pregnant. And I didn't believe it. What am I going to do? Like, it's a baby. Like, what am I going to do? How am I gonna tell my parents? How am I going to tell my parents and stuff? And I didn't tell my parents, like, for like a month. But when I told them, they were, like, disappointed in me and stuff. And they asked me about abortion, but I was against that. And so, over the time, I was like, No. I'm not going to do it anymore. And my dad was kind of disappointed, and so, he stopped talking to me like a long time. And then, my mom was like, you know, my biggest supporter. It's all right. You want to just stay in school and keep doing what you do and

you'll be all right. And so, I was like, I'm just going to finish school. That's the only thing I can do, and just move on with my life.

That's what my parents keep telling me; Just to finish school...and you'll be all right. It will be all right. [Inaudible]. I was thinking, um, What are my friends going to think? My teachers? And that was the thing; I don't know what they're going to think. Are they going to still talk to me? Treat me the same? Treat me differently? And then, I was like -- that's why it took me a while to, you know, want to go back to school. And then, I just got the courage to go back, like, a regular school or to just do that. I was, like -- and a lot of my friends, they stopped talking to me too. But I was like; I was like already prepared for it because I knew this would happen I think people change when they become pregnant. A lot of them stop talking to you. But then, I still got the strength to get up and want to go to school. I was like, "I'll go to school. I don't care what people think anymore. It's going to help me and my child out, so I might as well go and face it". And that's what I did. And that's why I'm still going to school but I'm just going to transfer to this school because it's better for me.

Because, like , being at a regular high school and trying to take care of a kid at the same time, sometimes I may not be in school. Sometimes I might miss a lot of days. So here you can just catch up when you need to and just come back to school and stuff. And you won't miss out on anything because you're not -- basically, working at your own pace. And

so, that's why I was like, I just might as well come here, and came here. [Inaudible]. The differences between my old school and this school are that there are pregnant girls whenever you look. There are girls with kids, and it's kind of, like, weird to me. I was like -- I don't know why, but I felt awkward around, like, so many pregnant girls. I'm used to be around, you know, just one person or two people being pregnant. But when you're around, like, a lot of people being pregnant, you could kind of relate to them and you know, they could feel what you're feeling because some of them have two kids, and so they know what you're going through, so that's why it's so different. And regular school, like, nobody understands. They don't understand what you're going through. But as soon as you get to a school like this, it's better. You're better and so, I actually kind of like -- I like it here. Yeah. I like it, the teachers? Yeah. They're nice. Like, they are really nice. And I get they've seen it all, so, like, they'll relate to you too. They understand because they've seen it all. I was like, they've probably seen plenty of them come in, come out, and everything. And so, I relate with them really good I'm looking forward to finishing school. Yes, "Big time". My plans, um -- I was going to go to this school and -- it was like a training school to be in the Marines. And that's what I wanted to do. And I was waiting to get into this school, but then this happened and I was like, Oh, my plans are ruined. And I was like, I can't go train for what I want to become, and it kind of set in me. I was like, Oh, my gosh... now I

have to do this by myself, and I was kind of mad because my boyfriend, like, he didn't have dreams or you know? He didn't have goals, and I did. And so, I felt like, why do I have to give up my goals? And you don't because you never had anything. And so, that was kind of like the biggest problem. So I was just, like, I guess I'll finish school and then just go to college and do something else and work with something else. But I didn't like the fact that I had to do that. I had to -- I couldn't go to the school anymore. I was like, "I couldn't even just go." I was like, "It just messed up a lot of stuff." And then, I had just had to move back out here and start over again (Participant 1 May 2012).

Participant 1 was disappointed that she became pregnant but she wanted to complete high school. Her determination was evident as she continued narrating her story.

Um, I see my education turning out good because I don't mind going to school, and I want to go to college really bad... (Participant 1 May 2012).

### Participant 2

Participant 2 described her schooling experience after becoming pregnant as pleasant in the sense that after she become pregnant , she was more involved and working harder that before. The following is her story.

My schooling experience? Um, no. Well, it's not the same. I feel like I'm actually trying now because I'm doing it for somebody else, for my

daughter. And because when I was out in high school, regular high school, 9th, 10th -- I took everything as a game, I didn't do work. I would just sit there, be on my phone, I wouldn't listen to teachers. I was bad you can say. I would talk back to them. I had no respect for them. And I didn't care about school. And once I got pregnant----I'm trying my best to take -- like, to do what I have to do. I mean, it's hard now -- because I'm way behind credits. And, um, but I'm trying to do my best to graduate. Because I mean, I fucked up on my (inaudible) well, very bad. I messed up on my parents. Like, I did them wrong and I want to show my dad that I can still do it. Uh-huh. I just never really paid attention in school. I was just like, "Oh, yeah. I go to school. Okay. I don't want to go." But, I never paid attention, like, what I want to do or whatever. But now, like, now that I'm pregnant, and I have a baby that's on the way that I want the best for her. I need to put an effort in it and do what I have to do. So eventually I can graduate and get a good job. And have the money to raise her and give her what she wants. Yeah. This school? Well -- I do like it because, I mean, it's easier. They help us out. It's easier and, like, I can -- I actually do try. But then, I'm not going to be here next year anymore. I am doing -- because I'll have my baby in August. So I'm doing independent studies. So, hopefully -- yeah. Actually, no, because there is a waiting list, I believe. So I'm doing it at "Rising stars". I don't know if you heard

about that program? It's Rising Stars Business Academy. And I'm doing independent studies over there. (Participant 2, personal communication, May 2012).

### Participant 3

Participant 3 had planned to get an abortion after she learned that she was pregnant. Her parents gave her a choice either to have the baby and keep it or have an abortion. She decided to keep the baby. She stated her that becoming pregnant changed her schooling experiences. The following is her story;

Um, my cousin suspected but my mom didn't suspect anything... until I told her. She was upset for a couple of days. She wouldn't talk to me. Because I was, um -- actually, I was going to get an abortion, but they, um -- but my mom told me to think about it because the baby was really developed. So, um, she asked me to think about it and if I really wanted to get the abortion. So I just kept the baby. And she finally got over it. And she is happy now. My mom was supportive because I was going get an abortion. Going to school now is better. Because, well, before I didn't really go to school. Well, I just stayed home. I didn't like the teachers or any of them so. Yeah. But after I got pregnant, I tried to get my diploma and all that stuff. Oh, because my baby. Yeah, because I'm going to try to look for a job when I hit 17. I want to do, like, nurse's assistant or like anything with computers. My Aunt owns a restaurant.

And I used to work with her until I -- got pregnant. Um, actually, I was trying to sign up for, um, "Comeback Kids" because I didn't want to go to a regular school, and, um, they sent me here because I was pregnant. I was trying to get into Comeback Kids, and they sent me here. Um, I stopped going there a couple months. I think this program is better than regular school. All the people here are pregnant. So I feel more comfortable. I have friends here and also in my previous school. Well, they were happy for me. They didn't judge me or anything. Yeah. Uh, I don't know. I don't really know my neighbors and the teachers are better. And I feel like I can catch up on my credits faster than regular school because I'm working at own pace here. Um, well, my teachers said that if I work hard enough I could be able to graduate on time. So that's what I'm trying to do. We do everything in class, and then, if we want, we can take it home and do it at home. I'm trying to get as much rest as I can before the baby comes. Actually, I haven't asked any of them that. Um, after high school, I still want to do the same things... Yeah. Well, when I first found out, yeah. I was kind of upset with myself. Um, how did I get pregnant? now everything is going to be hard. (Participant 3, May 2012)

#### Participant 4

Participant 4 narrated in her story how she could not believe, she was pregnant. She tried to take as many pregnancy tests as she could but it all came

positive. She was nervous to face her grandmother and tell her she was pregnant. The following is a part of her story.

I lied to my grandma until like I started feeling nauseous and throwing up. And she was like, "Just tell me the truth If, um, you haven't gotten your period." So I was like, you know, she is my grandma. I can't really lie to her. So I told her, and the next day, she took me to the clinic -- to check if, um, if I was pregnant. Before that, I had taken two pregnancy tests, and they came out negative. So I thought I wasn't pregnant. Until that day until we went to the clinic. It came out positive, and I was just like, "Oh." I was really upset when I saw her face. And ever since then, you know -- Yeah. I mean, she didn't talk to me for, like, two days but then, eventually she -- like, I didn't even want to eat. I didn't want to come out of my room or anything until she was just like, you know, "It's okay. It's just not -- I'm really upset you -- I feel like you betrayed me." And then ever since then, she is just a lot caring and saying, "Oh", let's go eat this. Or do you want anything from the store? She is a lot caring now and trying to support me better. Yeah. Um, well, my grandma called to my counselor at my old school. And he suggested this school because he thought this was going to be a better. I was really nervous. I didn't really want to leave all my friends and everything but -- I didn't want to come here until the first day I came here. I already knew somebody from my old school. So I felt a lot better after that. I hang out with my friends but we



just go out to movies or the park or something. And that's pretty much it. Um, well, pretty much, I don't really want to gain a lot of weight. And, um, and since, like, I had anemia. Starting like, I feel like I need to eat a lot healthier for the baby. But since we went to the doctors, they said my blood test was fine, and I didn't have anemia anymore because of the baby. I might stay in this program until I graduate. It's pretty good. Well, I don't know but I like pretty much everything. I don't find it weird anymore. At the beginning, I was just a little freaked out, especially, when I went in the little room with the little babies. Yeah. It was my first day, and I didn't know how to take care of a baby until Ms. Burden was just helping me out. So I'm getting used to it and yeah. Plus, I can graduate a year earlier. I'm doing half and half, middle and high school work. Well, it kind of sucks, not to do the things I used to do but like my grandma said, "You really have to deal with it now since you did it." Mostly I miss my friends... Yeah. In my middle school we had six classes in total and we got out at 3:30. Um, I played volleyball, we used to run the mile, but now -- I couldn't run so. I'm not sure what I want to be when I graduate, but I'm still having my mind open just to see what's out there. Just because a girl gets pregnant doesn't mean that they don't like all the things we like. We still like -- you still are the same person. You're still the same [inaudible]. You still have the same ambitions wanting to hang out with friends, think about life and clothes. (Participant 4, personal communication, May 2012).

## Participant 5

Participant 5 described her reaction to the news that she was pregnant as a shocked. Her schooling experience was pleasant after realizing that she had to work harder to finish high school because she was going to have a baby. The following is her story.

I knew I was pregnant because I didn't have my period. And then, my aunt bought me a pregnancy test, and that's how I found out I was pregnant. I was shocked, nervous, but at the same time, happy. I was not in talking terms with my parents but when they found out, they were actually very supportive. My parents didn't seem to worry about me not going to school because I was going to turn eighteen. Well, my boyfriend's mother had said that if I wanted to stay at her house, I would have to go to school. So we found a program for me that was helpful for me and the baby. So that's why I came here. I don't know how to explain it. This program is actually easier than being at a regular school. Because in a regular school, you're, like, around more people. You're less--you're actually more distracted over there. It's just you're moving a lot too. Like, here it's just one class. And they give you all your books there. So it's really easy here. Yeah, because you have many other teachers at a regular high school forming a good relationship with them is hard. The students here are actually different. They're different because they have kids and they're more mature. They try to act more mature for their

children. And there's less drama and friends. Well, my goal was to return to school and actually finish high school, so I could go to a, like, a medical, like what they have here. Medical class to be, like, a nurse or a doctor's assistant. That's my goal, and then, to go to a four-year college to be a probation officer. I graduate this year. Yeah, but I don't think I'm going to be going to a four-year college I think I'm going to do community college first, and then, go. I just thought it would be easier for me. Yeah. I'm on top of my work because I want to get everything done. No. Oh, well, I did. I had to do a parenting book, but I finished it really early, my teachers are very supportive. And I mean, there's some drama here, and it's mostly in-- not my class, the other class. But if you like, stay away from it, it won't bug you. That's what I do. I stay away from it. I'm very quiet because I just wanna get my work done. The girls are actually very friendly. The drama is usually because--usually out of school than in school. They had drama before they came to this school. Being pregnant makes me feel, like--it makes me feel fat because--I don't know. I kind of liked it because it's just something new. You're having something inside you growing. At a regular school, eve everybody just stares at you. And talk about you and say mean things about you, but here, they don't do that. I'm usually tired in the morning. That's it. During the rest of the day, I'm not. I'm just preparing for parenting. That a new experience (Participant 5, personal communication, May 2012).

## Participant 6

Participant 6 shared that her mother become upset with her when she learned she was pregnant. She decided to stay with relatives, which made her mother calmed down. This is what she said

I didn't want to tell my mom'. She asked me if I had my period and --I told her I had it, and I didn't because I didn't know how to tell her. She saw that I was getting big... And then, she was mad while' Yeah. I was staying with my aunt. Then, I came back like a week before school. Yeah, she took me to the doctor's appointments, and she came every Friday. We also went to Bible study. I was going to Valley View. It was only like a few weeks left of school when I found out, so it was like three weeks left. I was not afraid what other kids will say... I don't really care if they--it's natural. It's something beautiful, so there's no need to be ashamed of it, Yeah. My mom found out about this school...I don't know how she found out, but she found it. I didn't expect any of this. It's, like, all girl here. There's only, like, three boys. And you're in one classroom all day. And you get, like, a break. You get, like, a snack. You're just with a whole bunch of girls, and you can bring your baby to school. So it's nothing like a regular high school. And you get credits much faster. I don't like it. I'd rather, like, move around. I don't like being in one place for too long. 'Cause sitting in that one chair all day is just annoying. Yeah. Walk to another room. Like, go outside for a little, get some fresh air. I

wanted to finish school. I was playing volleyball. And then, I found out I was pregnant, and then, I was still going to play. 'Cause I didn't know, like, I didn't, like, really think I was pregnant. I don't know, like, what I was thinking. I was just like, "No, I'm not pregnant. I was like, "I'm not pregnant. It's okay." It's just--my stomach got bigger. I just realized. I wanted to go to college. I wanted to get a job before. Oh, I did wanna work with dogs or, like, go work at the pound, but more, like, with dogs, not every animal. I love dogs. It makes me wanna, like, it's, like, pushing me more. Because at a normal high school, I was just like, "Oh, I don't really care." But now that I'm pregnant, I'm just, like, "I just want to get it out of the way, graduate early". Pushed me more, and I, like, do my work. When I get here, I get here at 7:40, and I start doing my work. I don't waste any time, Yeah. My friends, when I told them, they were more, like, in shock, but they were happy. I was still, like, I was kind of sad. Yeah. Like, I'm still young.... I'm 17...Yeah. Definitely, pushing me more... Well, next year when school's out, I will graduate, class of 2013. I have 105, and I need to get 95 to graduate. And I get--if I pass everything, I get 50 this semester, and next semester I get 45. Yeah. I was more, like--'cause I knew how my mom would feel, so I was more, like, sad. Uh-huh, and he would just, like, try to cheer me up. But I still feel sad. That's why I didn't want to tell her. It's so hard to be a single parent. My teacher said when I-

-when I get to leave for maternity that I can take my books. Yeah. She is very supportive (Participant 6, personal communication, May 2012).

### Group Descriptions

Several themes emerged from the transcriptions. The themes include consciousness of the bad girl discourse, responses to the judgments of other, and perspectives on the regular school as they look back, perspectives on schooling in , educational and career goals, and personal determination. With regard to their consciousness (awareness) of the bad girl discourse, the girls described how they felt when they got pregnant. Within this theme, participants describe feeling afraid of the reaction from their parents, teachers, and friends. For example, participant 1 shared,

I was thinking, um, "What are my friends going to think? My teachers?" And that was the thing; I don't know what they're going to think. Are they going to still talk to me? Treat me the same? Treat me differently? (Participant 1, personal communication, May 2012).

These feelings were based on the core values of society, which dictates and assumes certain behaviors and roles. Adolescent girls are expected to take certain roles that presumably, prepare them for adulthood. Society views girls who get pregnant as bad girls and a bad influence to other non-pregnant girls.

Another theme was their response to the judgments of others. Participants were aware of what people were saying about the participants after

they got pregnant. They discuss how they wanted to disappear and cease to be a part of society. They shared how they pretended that they did not exist and being pregnant was just a bad dream. Finally the participants shared how they avoided going out when they were pregnant.

The third theme was their perspectives on regular school as they looked back. The participants shared and recognized their lack of academic effort, deliberately skipping school before getting pregnant. Also included within this theme was the participants' recognition of their inappropriate behavior towards their teachers, school and getting pregnant.

Regarding their perspectives on schooling at Cal- Safe theme, the participants shared how they were reluctant to come to Cal- Safe at first. They further shared how after enrolled, they found the program was easier and more flexible to accommodate their needs such as when they missed school during doctor's appointments or when they got sick. They viewed the school climate at the Cal- Safe program as friendly; they felt understood, and not judged. The participants felt they had developed more satisfying relationships with other girls, teachers, and had fewer distractions unlike in regular schools. Some participants felt the students at the Cal- Safe program were more mature. Finally, the girls shared missing their friends since they were attending different schools.

Educational and Career goals theme: Within this theme some participants shared how their educational and career goals had changed since they got pregnant. They realized some of their educational and career goals were no

longer realistic. For example, one participant shared how joining the marines was unrealistic because she might be separated with her child for a long time. Others shared how their educational and careers goals remained the same.

Finally, all the participants were more focused on graduating from high school. Personal determination increased theme: Within this theme the participants shared their increased interest in completing high school. They realized education was a way to gain access to opportunities such as employment and college entry. They placed stronger value on schooling than before. Their interest in graduating from high school, securing a good job, and a good career was to provide a better life for their children than what they had growing up. The behavior of the participants changed after they became pregnant. They wanted to take responsibility for their children.

### Theme 1: Bad Girl Discourse

#### Consciousness of the Bad Girl Discourse

According to Kelly (2000), the “wrong girl” label by the public has inhibited a true understanding of the phenomenon of being pregnant or parenting and attending a new school setting. Many who are involved with pregnant and parenting adolescents turn their back on girls and instead of helping and supporting them, view them as a disgrace and a shame to their families.

The participants described how they felt when they got pregnant. Their reactions evidenced they were aware of the image the society have for those



girls who get pregnant while they were still attending school Participant 1 and Participant 2 shared how their reaction after they learned they were pregnant.

### Participant 1

She described her experience as that of disbelief.

When I didn't get my period for, like, a month and I was, like, Oh, I'm going to take the test. And then, I look a test. Oh, I was like, I'm pregnant and I didn't believe it. So I got another one. And I kept getting how many of them? And after I know it, I have, like, ten tests, and they all said the same thing -- What am I going to do? Like, it's a baby. Like, what am I going to do? How am I gonna tell my parents? How am I going to tell my parents and stuff? And I didn't tell my parents, like, for like a month. [Inaudible] its okay. I'm going to tell them. And then, I thought about it. I was, like, I have to tell them because I need help. I was like; I can't do it by myself. And so, I told them, and then, I was like -- it took me a month to tell them. But when I told them, they were, like, disappointed in me and stuff (Participant 1, personal communication, May 2012)

### Participant 2

She was afraid of the outcome of being pregnant but at the same time she didn't believe what happening to her. She did not want to worry about how her parents were going to respond.

Yeah, because I was scared, and it came out. So, I was like, "Whatever," and then, I wasn't worrying about it. Like, I was trying to not

to stress. Oh, I'm just going to wait until my period gets here. And it wouldn't get here. And then, um, weeks kept passing the time my period was supposed to come, and it didn't come. And I was like, huh? And so then, it -- like, I didn't want to tell my mom because I was like, fuck. What did I do? I was like, going to get into trouble (Participant 2, personal communication, May 2012)

Two other participants, 4 and 6, also shared similar reactions when they found out they were pregnant.

#### Participant 4

Who lives with her Grandmother was afraid to tell her. The grandmother noticed the changes in her body and wanted to confirm if she was pregnant.

So I thought I wasn't pregnant. Until that day we went to the clinic. It came out positive, and I was just like, "Oh." I was really upset ...when I saw her face. And ever since then, you know -- Yeah. I mean, she didn't talk to me for, like, two days (Participant 4, personal communication, May 2012)

#### Participant 6

She shared that, she was afraid to face her parents after be realized she was pregnant.

I missed my period and so, I took a pregnancy test. And the first one was negative, and the second one was positive. I took the test two weeks a part. I don't want to tell my mom'. She asked me if I had my

period and I told her I had it, and I didn't because I didn't know how to tell her (Participant 6, personal communication, May 2012).

## Theme 2: Social Judgments

### Responses to the Judgments of Others

Throughout the interview most of the girls made statements that described self-awareness of what people were saying regarding their pregnancies.

#### Participant 5

Participant 5 stated that;

At a regular school, everybody just stares at you. And talk about you and say mean things about you, but here, they don't do that". Most of the girls echoed Participant 5's sentiments. They felt people talked behind their backs and said mean things about being pregnant (Participant 5, personal communication, May 2012).

#### Participant 4

She described her experiences as hard.

I didn't want to come out of my room or anything until she was just like, you know, it's okay. It's just not -- I'm really upset you -- I feel like you betrayed me. "I was really nervous" (Participant 4, personal communication, May 2012).

### Participant 3

Participant 3 stated that, when she went to the counselor's office find out about her educational options since she was pregnant the send her to the pregnant minor program. She said "um, they sent me here because I was pregnant. I was trying to get into Comeback Kids, and they sent me here. I did not know about this program until I met with the counselor's" (Participant 3, personal communication, May 2012).

### Participant 1

She shared that people talked behind her back when she became pregnant. She described how she was

Walking around, people talk about you and being -- it's a long journey. But then, if you just make something out of yourself, like, people look at you really different. They don't think you just got pregnant for no reason or you're not doing anything or anything like that" Yeah. We feel a lot of people don't understand. They think we just asked to be pregnant. We don't. I think people change when they become pregnant. A lot of them stop talking to you. But then, I still got the strength to get up and want to go to school (Participant 1, personal communication, May 2012)

### Theme 3: Regular Schooling

#### Perspectives on Regular School as They Looked Back

The participants shared their educational experience in their regular schools. They recognized their lack of academic effort and poor behaviors.

#### Participant 3

She described her schooling experiences as being more meaningful now that she was pregnant. She said

“Going to school now is better. Because, well, before I didn't really go to school. Well, I just stayed home. I didn't like the teachers or any of them so. Yeah (Participant 3, personal communication, May 2012)

#### Participant 2

Participant 2 described her schooling experience after she became pregnant as better. She said,

I feel like I'm actually trying now because I'm doing it for somebody else, for my daughter. And because when I was out in high school, regular high school, 9th, 10th -- I took everything as a game, I didn't do work. I would just sit there, be on my phone, I wouldn't listen to teachers. I was bad you can say. I would talk back to them. I had no respect for them. And I didn't care about school. And once I got pregnant----I'm trying my best to take -- like, to do what I have to do. I mean, it's hard now -- because I'm way behind credits. And, um, but I'm trying to do my best to graduate. Because I mean, I fucked up on my -- well, my bad. I

messed up on my parents. Like, I did them wrong and I want to show my dad that I can still do it. But now, like, now that I'm pregnant, and I have a baby that's on the way that I want the best for her. I need to put an effort in it and do what I have to do (Participant 2, personal communication, May 2012)

### Participant 1

She acknowledged people looked at her differently that she was pregnant. She stated that going to regular school was easy but didn't pay attention. Now that she was pregnant her educational experience had changed. She said

Um, I see my education turning out good because I don't mind going to school, and I want to go to college really bad. And I want to study in a lot of stuff, and so, it's like, I see it going good if I just keep going to school and keep focusing on the main thing. I was like, that's why my parents... they're a big help because they know, like, I want to go to college and stuff. And so, like, I see my future going good, as long as I'm in school. And, you know, still focusing. I'll look better that way. I was like, because school, you need school. You can't really do anything without it. And so, my future, I think it's going to be good, yeah. My focus is on graduating and getting out of school already. Because you already have a kid, and so, you should already, like, be ready to just go be on your own (Participant 1, personal communication, May 2012)

## Theme 4: Cal-SAFE

### Perspectives on Schooling at Cal-SAFE

The participants shared their feeling about leaving their regular school and getting enrolled at the program. They were hesitant to enroll at first.

#### Participant 1

Participant 1 said the following regarding her schooling in ;

I was like I'm just going to transfer to this school because it's better for me. Because, like, being at a regular high school and trying to take care of a kid at the same time, sometimes I may not be in school. Sometimes I might miss a lot of days. So here you can just catch up when you need to and just come back to school and stuff. And you won't miss out on anything because you're not -- basically, working at your own pace. And so, that's why I was like, "I just might as well come here," and came here. There are pregnant girls whenever you look. There are girls with kids, and it's kind of, like, weird to me. I was like -- I don't know why, but I felt awkward around, like, so many pregnant girls. I'm used to be around, you know, just one person or two people being pregnant. But when you're around, like, a lot of people being pregnant, you could kind of relate to them and you know they could feel what you're feeling because some of them have two kids, and so they know what you're going through. So that's why I it's to different. And regular school, like, nobody understands. They don't understand what you're going through. But as soon as you get

to a school like this, it's better. You're better. And so, I actually kind of like -- I like it here (Participant 1, personal communication, May 2012)

She asserted that her schooling experienced was changed partly because of her determination and also by the other girls who had more experiences with children than her.

### Participant 3

I think this program is better than regular school. All the people here are pregnant. So I feel more comfortable. I have friends here and also in my previous school. Well, they were happy for me. They didn't judge me or anything and the teachers are better. And I feel like I can catch up on my credits faster than regular school because I'm working at own pace here. Um, well, my teachers said that if I work hard enough I could be able to graduate on time (Participant 3, personal communication, May 2012)

Other participants shared similar sentiments about their experience at the pregnant minor program.

### Participant 4

I was really nervous. I didn't really want to leave all my friends and everything but -- I didn't want to come here until the first day I came here. I already knew somebody from my old school. So I felt a lot better after that. I might stay in this program until I graduate. It's pretty good. Well, I don't know but I like pretty much everything. I don't find it weird anymore.



At the beginning, I was just a little freaked out, especially, when I went in the little room with the little babies. Yeah. It was my first day, and I didn't know how to take care of a baby until Ms. Burden was just helping me out. So I'm getting used to it and yeah. Plus, I can graduate a year earlier. I'm doing half and half, middle and high school work. Well, it kind of sucks, not to do the things I used to do but like my grandma said, "You really have to deal with it now since you did it." Mostly I miss my friends... Yeah. in my middle school, we had six classes in total and we got out at 3:30. Um, I played volleyball, we used to run the mile, but now -- I couldn't run so (Participant 4, personal communication, May 2012)

#### Participant 2

She likes the program because she thinks it's easier than regular school.

Well, I do like it because, I mean, it's easier. They help us out. It's easier and, like, I can -- I actually do try. But then, I'm not going to be here next year anymore. I am doing (Participant 2, personal communication, May 2012)

#### Participant 5

Participant 5 described her schooling at as pleasant.

It's actually easier than being at a regular school. Because in a regular school, you're, like, around more people. You're less--you're actually more distracted over there. It's just you're moving a lot too. Like, here it's just one class. And they give you all your books there. So it's

really easy here. Yeah, because you have many other teachers at a regular high school forming a good relationship with them is hard. The students here are actually different. They're different because they have kids and they're more mature. They try to act more mature for their children. And there's less drama and friends. And I mean, there's some drama here, and it's mostly in--not my class, the other class. But if you like, stay away from it, it won't bug you. That's what I do. I stay away from it. I'm very quiet because I just wanna get my work done. The girls are actually very friendly. The drama is usually because--usually out of school than in school. They had drama before they came to this school (Participant 5, personal communication, May 2012)

Further, she mentioned that there were fewer distractions in in comparison with her regular school experiences.

#### Participant 6

Participant 6 mentioned that she didn't expect program to be an only girls' school. This came as a shock to her expectations. She said,

My mom found out about this school...I don't know how she found out, but she found it. I didn't expect any of this. It's, like, all girl here. There's only, like, three boys. And you're in one classroom all day. And you get, like, a break. You get, like, a snack. You're just with a whole bunch of girls, and you can bring your baby to school. So it's nothing like

a regular high school. And you get credits much faster (Participant 6, May 2012)

## Theme 5: Goals

### Educational and Career goals

Some participant shared that some of their educational and career goals have changed or they were no longer realistic due to their new responsibilities. Other shared that their educational and career goals remained the same after getting pregnant. All participants shared their interest in graduating from high school and a plan to attend college.

### Participant 1

Participant 1 shared that she had plans about what she was going to do after graduating from high school. All this changed after she became pregnant.

My plans, um -- I was going to go to this school and -- it was like a training school to be in the Marines. And that's what I wanted to do. And I was waiting to get into this school, but then this happened and I was like, "Oh, my plans are ruined." And I was like, "I can't go train for what I want to become," and it kind of set in me. I was like, "Oh, my gosh now I have to do this by myself," So I was just, like, "I guess I'll finish school and then just go to college and do something else and work with something else." But I didn't like the fact that I had to do that (Participant 1, personal communication, May 2012)

### Participant 3

Participant 3 experiences were positive and she stated that she had good communication and guidance from her teachers.

Um, well, my teachers said that if I work hard enough I could be able to graduate on time. Um, after high school, I still want to do the same things... Yeah. I want to do, like, nurse's assistant or like anything with computers (Participant 3, personal communication, May 2012)

### Participant 2

Participant 2 shared similar feeling about graduating from high school and enrolling in community college or looking for a job. She said,

I'm actually -- well, I mean, I don't know what it takes to be -- you know those pharmacist? I want to do that, or I want to be a translator in, like, the courts and stuff. But I don't know what I have -- I don't know. But I think it's just -- it's a short -- it's either, like, a two-year thing or -- I don't know. But yeah, that's what I want to do. Yeah. Because I wanted to be a professional makeup artist. But now with the baby, I'm just like, "Oh, I don't think I'm going to be able to do that." And I can do it, but I heard they get paid good being a pharmacy's assistant. And my mom was telling me about a translator. She like, "You know how to translate. " You do all that." She said, "You could get a good job by doing that." I was like, "We'll see." So I'm -- it's either in between one of those. Yeah (Participant 2, personal communications, May 2012)

### Participant 5

Participant 5 shared that her main goal that she is pregnant was to graduate from high school and attend college. She said,

Well, my goal was to return to school and actually finish high school, so I could go to a, like, a medical, like what they have here. Medical class to be, like, a nurse or a doctor's assistant. That's my goal, and then, to go to a four-year college to be a probation officer. I graduate this year. Yeah, but I don't think I'm going to be going to a four-year college. I think I'm going to do community college first, and then, go. I just thought it would be easier for me (Participant 5, personal communication, May 2012)

### Participant 6

Participant 6 like most other girls wanted to go to college after graduating from high school. She said,

I wanted to go to college. I wanted to get a job before. Oh, I did wanna work with dogs or, like, go work at the pound, but more, like, with dogs, not every animal. I love dogs. It makes me wanna, like, it's, like, pushing me more. Well, next year when school's out, I will graduate, class of 2013 (Participant 6, personal communication, May 2012).

## Theme 6: Personal Determination

### Increased Personal Determination

Some participants mentioned that they wanted a bright future for their children, to realize their educational and career goals. They shared how getting pregnant had brought a new realization about the value of education. They put more effort and stronger value in their schooling. Their behavior towards the value of educations, others changed.

### Participant 1

Participant 1 described her new determination to complete high school and continue to vocational training or community college.

And so, I felt like, why do I have to give up my goals? I was like, because school, you need school. You can't really do anything without it. Um, I see my education turning out good because I don't mind going to school, and I want to go to college really bad. And I want to study in a lot of stuff, and so, it's like, I see it going good if I just keep going to school and keep focusing on the main thing (Participant 1, personal communication, May 2012).

As Participant 1 explained her new determination, her body language confirmed what she was saying. She was strong and firm on her future endeavors that include securing a good job to provide for her son.

#### Participant 4

Participant 4 shared that she still desired the same things and would like graduate from high school. She hesitated to state clearly what she wanted to be when she grew up. At fourteen years old she was strong to narrate her story than most fourteen years old and she was very emotional. She was tearing up sharing her story.

Just because a girl gets pregnant doesn't mean that they don't like all the things we like. We still like -- you still are the same person. You're still the same [inaudible]. You still have the same ambitions wanting to hang out with friends, think about life and clothes (Participant 4, personal communication, May 2012).

These sentiments indicated that Participant 4 was aware of what she wanted to do in her life and she had not changed. In her view, becoming pregnant did not take her desires for good life and bright future.

#### Participant 2

Participant 2 describes her desires to include proving for her daughter and being able to live on her own.

I don't -- I don't need my daughter to be seeing all this and because I don't want her to go through what I go through or whatever. I want something better than what I went through. I mean, I didn't go through the worst, but she could still go through something better. Yeah. It's actually nice, and you actually go in the nursery, and you get ready to, like, for

when you have your baby (Participant 2, personal communication, May 2012).

### Summary

This chapter presented the first interview findings. It includes demographic information, participants' narratives, and themes. Six pregnant adolescents enrolled in a pregnant minor program and who met the criteria set on chapter 3 were interviewed. Six themes emerged from the transcripts of the first interview: Consciousness of the bad girl discourse, Responses to the judgments of others, Perspectives on regular school as they look back, Perspectives on schooling at , Educational and Career goals, and Personal determination Increased. Extracts from the girls stories where used to explain their lived educational experiences. Quoted statements were also used to further explain the themes and also allow a deeper understanding of their experiences.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### SECOND AND THIRD INTERVIEWS

#### Introduction

This chapter is based on the second and third interviews with each of the participants. The interviews took place after the participants had had their babies. In the first interview the participants had focused on their current situation: Being pregnant and going to school. Their focus had shifted in the second and third interviews toward their babies and their responsibilities as parents. The participants were more conscious about what was happening in their babies' lives, focused on their babies' needs, and were aware of what needed to be done to care for a baby than when they were pregnant. The participants overwhelmingly demonstrated through their narratives that they were conscious of the responsibilities that come with a baby and they wanted to make a contribution towards its upkeep and upbringing. They focused more on actions, which were practical, and on the immediate needs for their babies than they had indicated in first interview.

Although the participants mentioned many things, their focus had shifted towards what was realistic and beneficial to their babies. There were four themes that emerged. Some themes were consistent among the participants' experiences while others were not. These themes included: Focus on immediate

and realistic needs, orientation towards the future, developing a sense of responsibility, and negotiation of a different self (see Figure 1).

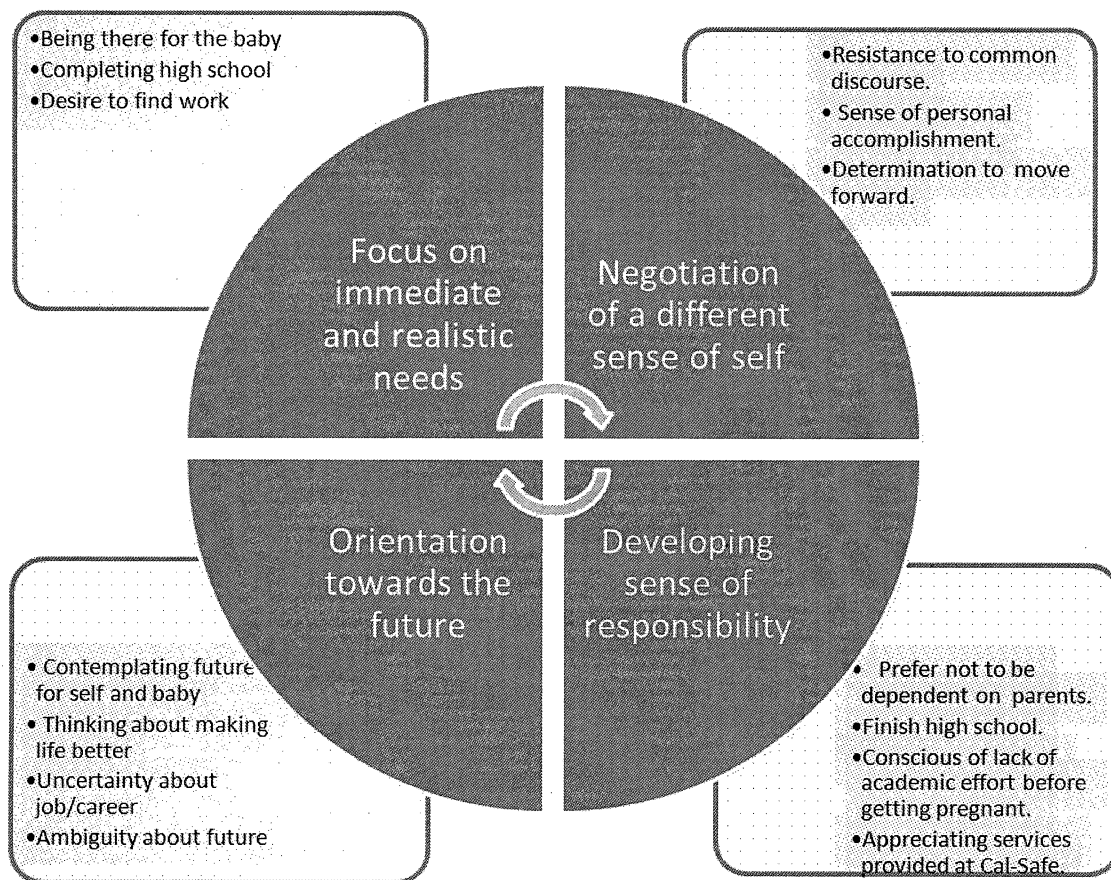


Figure 1. Summary of Second and Third Interview Themes.

## Theme 1: Needs

### Focus on Immediate and Realistic Needs

The participants' educational and career goals had changed after they had had their babies. They wanted to have realistic plans, which included plans to deal with the immediate need of providing for their babies, such as getting a job instead of completing high school and going straight to college. For example, Participant 1 mentioned that school had become harder after she had her son.

Um, school wise, being tired, and getting up in the morning because he's actually here now so, you know, I have to be there. So now it's harder because I don't have time to do anything else. Before it was whatever, like, I could just walk around, like, go wherever I want, but now it's harder especially because I take a lot of classes in the morning and at night too. And so when I go home, I have to deal with him, and he stays up all night (Participant 1, personal communication, May 2012).

Participant 1 talked further about how her educational plans had changed after she had had the baby. She mentioned that having her son had changed her plans to progress toward her educational goals.

Before I was like, wanted to go to college but now I want to go for law enforcement and stuff and become a correction officer okay. I changed to these goals now that I have a child. Yeah, they're better. Because, like, I don't wanna stay home and--what I wanted to go for before would take so many years after high school. You know, like, how

would I be able to pay for college? You know? And this is just something to help me get to where I need to go. You know, help basics, stuff and me. And so, I'm going to do that (Participant 1, personal communication, May 2012).

From her perspective law enforcement training was going to take a few months and then she would start making money immediately and be able to provide for her baby. She saw herself going back to college and earning a bachelor's degree after her son was bigger and in school.

Participant 3 had had different plans when she was pregnant. She was going to complete high school and enroll in a vocational training program to become a health care or nurse assistant but that changed after she had had her baby. Instead, she felt obligated to get a job in order to help her mother with the bills and to be able to buy some of the baby stuff.

I have a job. I work at my aunt's restaurant. I start from 3:00 to close, which is 9:00 closing time, 9:30. The money helps in buying stuff for my daughter. My mom or my brother watches her when I go to work (Participant 3, personal communication, May 2012).

Although Participant 3 still aspired to go to college after graduating from high school, those plans were not her immediate concern. Instead, she was focused on completing high school and keeping her job to help her mother with the bills.

I'm expected to graduate next year, but I'm going to take this test called the CHSPE, and if I pass it, I'll get my diploma. 'Cause I'll be 18 in

the summer, next summer. And I won't graduate until a year after that. So, it's just wasting a year, and so, I'm gonna try and take the CHSPE test. And if I pass, I get the diploma, and then, I'm doing more hours at work. Then I will try to get into college (Participant 3, personal communication, May 2012).

Like most participants, Participant 5 had plans to further her education beyond high school. However, her plan had to be suspended to deal with the immediate needs of her son. Her decisions were based more on what was good for her baby and its future.

Well, my goal was to return to school and actually finish high school, so I could go to a, like, a medical, like what they have here. Medical class to be, like, a nurse or a doctor's assistant. That's my goal, and then, to go to a four-year college to be a probation officer. I graduate this year. Yeah, but I don't think I'm going to be going to a four-year college. I think I'm going to do community college first, and then, go. I just thought it would be easier for me (Participant 5, personal communication, May 2012).

Participant 5's sentiments similarly showed that she was concerned primarily about the welfare of her baby and she was willing to overcome the challenges to ensure her baby has a bright future.

Other participants' mentioned that while the pregnant minor program was easier than their previous high schools, they did not find education easier than

before and they had to work hard. Some of the challenges that made their schooling experience harder were the amount of time required to prepare their babies in the morning. Despite these challenges, Participant 5 was more focused on the present, which included completing high school and seeking employment, than on future plans which included going to college.

## Theme 2: Negotiations

### Negotiation of a Different Sense of Self

The participants mentioned that after they had delivered their babies they felt like their lives had been transformed. They expressed a readiness to do anything in their power to protect and provide for their babies. They wanted to take responsibility for their babies, contrary to the discourse of welfare mothers as irresponsible. They felt empowered to shape their old selves into a new self that included resistance to the common discourse of “bad girls”. In their view, the current situation was temporary and they were willing to pursue their educational and career goals in the future.

Participant 4 mentioned in her first interview that she had been afraid to go outside because she was afraid about what people were going to say about her being fourteen and pregnant. In the second interview her attitude had changed and she shared that she loved her son and she was not afraid anymore about people and she was going to do whatever she could in her power to provide for

her son. "I guess because I didn't go out because I was scared of what people might say. But now I have him, I don't care what they say".

This suggests that Participant 4 had developed a stronger sense of agency and was taking a stand against what she had previously been afraid of. This amounts to a different sense of herself in relation to others. She is now more resistant to the common discourses in which she might be characterized as a "bad girls" and a "welfare mother". She is still aware of this discourse but is less persuaded to think less of herself because of it.

Studies show that generally women, regardless of age are faced with many challenges and barriers as they pursue educational and career goals (Carnevale & Reich, 2000; McWhirter, 1997). In this sense teen mothers' struggle, as do most poor women, to provide for their children and educational pursuit understandably take a secondary position.

Participant 1 projected into the future what she would say to her baby when he had grown and able to understand her struggles and achievements. She wanted to think of herself as a role model to her son and imagined making him understand that anything was possible with hard work.

I wanna look back and be like, 'Man, I'm glad I didn't give up because I'm happy where I am today.' So, like, you know, my son, when he gets older, I'm gonna tell him, 'Anything is possible', you know? 'Don't give up 'cause it will be all worth it. So that's why, like, I need to get my diploma to show him, like, you know, I did it even if I had a kid or

whatever, and I did night classes. I did whatever I had to do for you know, finish high school and give you a better life. So, you know, like, anything is possible. That's how I look at it. It's just a lot of work and stress and stuff with me dealing with him at the same time. I'm like so tired all the time, but I still come to school (Participant 1, personal communication, May 2012).

Participant 1's sentiments indicated that she was aware of what it was going to take to accomplish the things she wanted to accomplish, but she felt it was going to be worth it. Her sentiments might have been hypothetical but the intentions were positive and the willingness to sacrifice a short-term struggle for a better future seemed clear. She also commented that even though she was tired most of the time she was determined to complete high school and pursue her career goals. She sometimes thought of giving up but the benefits of her success outweighed the challenges she was going through. She was thus incorporating into her sense of herself a motivation built on an imagined future conversation with her son.

Other participants who shared similar feelings included Participant 2 and Participant 3. Both of them mentioned that they would like to provide for their babies through finding part-time jobs. Both spoke with convictions that indicated they had found new strength in themselves. They were now concentrating on completing high school requirements to earn a high school diploma and on finding employment.



### Theme 3: Responsibility

#### Developing a Sense of Responsibility

The participants indicated that they were aware of what it takes to be a mother and they were willing to do anything in their power to provide for their babies. They had increased determination to complete high school and also to do what was right for their babies. Their determination before having their babies had been to prove others wrong but this time around, they spoke about doing it for their babies. They consciously acknowledged how the experience of pregnancy and delivering their babies had transformed them. The experiences had brought deeper understanding about responsibility, especially towards their babies. They also mentioned that they felt a need to protect and care for them. Through the pregnancy and delivery experience, the participants went through changes of behavior which previously could have been described as destructive, self-centered or selfish. They also described how they did not want to continue being dependent on their parents.

Participant 1 mentioned that her parents were very supportive and had provided for her son but she did not want them to continue doing so. That was why she was so determined to complete high school and move on with her career goals.

I wanna be able to provide for my child, you know, and not depend on my parents and stuff. Like, I already wanna finish high school. From that point on, I'll be able to move on. I'll be able to just go, like, you know,

start what I need to do. I did whatever I had to do to; you know, finish high school and give you a better life (Participant 1, personal communication, May 2012).

Participant 1's comments indicated that she wanted to be responsible for her son and she valued his wellbeing more than her own. She wanted to be seen as a role model by her son when he grew up and learned about his mother's educational and career accomplishments.

Participant 2 mentioned that her life had been totally transformed after she had had a baby. Her attitude towards school and people had changed and she was now determined to continue doing what she needed to do to complete high school. She acknowledged her lack of academic effort before getting pregnant and having her baby.

When I was out in high school, regular high school, 9th, 10th -- I took everything as a game, I didn't do work. I would just sit there, be on my phone, I wouldn't listen to teachers. I was bad you can say. I would talk back to them. I had no respect for them. And I didn't care about school (Participant 2, personal communication, May 2012).

The transformation brought about by giving birth helped Participant 1 and Participant 2 recognize that their behaviors were destructive and could have had negative effects in their lives. For example, Participant 1 talked about the future but she knew she had to struggle to accomplish all the things to make the future as bright as she sees it now. She mentioned that staying in school and

graduating from high school would be the first step towards her future goals.

Participant 2, on the other hand mentioned that she lacked academic motivation and she had disrespected her teachers prior to getting pregnant. They also mentioned that their experience as mothers had changed how they viewed, acted and conveyed their attitude towards education. They were more appreciative of the services provide by other people to their children. For example Participant 1 mentioned the staff at the program daycare.

They provide day care. They provide all the stuff for you and your child, you know? And they're just helping me get to where I want to go  
(Participant 1, personal communication, May 2012).

The participants had a different attitude towards school, school staff and their educational and career goals. They conveyed that they had previously taken everything for granted but this approach had changed since their babies had been born. They now indicated that going to college straight after graduating from high school was not going to be a realistic option, because they needed to find employment to support their babies. They showed they were aware of the struggle they were going to face to achieve their goals but they were determined. For example, Participant 1 mentioned college was going to be another expense on top of her baby's needs.

Because, like, if I was just to go to regular college, it's like, there's fees, and it's like, I would still have to find a way to pay for my baby's diapers and stuff. I can't let my parents pay all these. And they're helping

me out more. You know, I would have to work a job and be going to pay for college and the same time. I wanna be able to provide for my child, you know, my parents are happy. They said, "They're proud of me. That I'm, like, you know, actually trying to finish school and stuff 'cause most girls don't finish or whatever. They're happy though. They're real happy (Participant 1, personal communication, May 2012).

Participant 1 indicated that she would like to go to college in future but recognized it was not realistic to go to college straightaway after graduating from high school because of college fees. She wants to be able to provide and meet her son's needs first.

Participant 2 described how her experience had led her to the realization that she had not cared enough about school in the past. She mentioned that her life had changed and that she now wanted the best for her daughter. This was a transformation from her first interview where she had focused largely on herself. She was now more concerned about caring for her daughter.

I want to have the money to raise her and give her what she wants because I don't want her to go through what I go through or whatever. I want something better than what I went through. I mean, I didn't go through the worst, but she could still go through something better (Participant 2, personal communication, May 2012).

Participant 2's comment shows that she was placing greater importance on her daughter's needs more than her own. She was also thinking about what kind of

life she wanted to provide her with. She cared about her daughter and she did not want her to go through a hard life and also wanted her daughter to have a better life than the one she has had.

Participant 4 was fourteen years old when I first met her. During the first interview she had not been sure what she wanted to do after high school. She was still in middle school and she had not been thinking so much about her educational and career goals. During the second interview, after she had had her son, she seemed to have had a transformation. She mentioned that she cared about the future of her son and she wanted to go to college and get a part-time job to provide for him. "Well, I'm just trying to do the best I can to give him a good future (Participant 4, May 2012)".

Participant 4's comments indicated that her attitude had changed from her first interview where she had mentioned she had no plans for what she was going to do after graduating from high school.

#### Theme 4: Future

##### Orientation Towards the Future

Participants in this study talked about their increased interest in securing a job or training while still planning to go to college to realize their long-term career goals. Some of the participants mentioned that they were more focused on creating a better future for their babies, while others stated that they wanted to make their babies' lives better. Others shared that they were uncertain about

which career or job they would pursue. Most of the participants indicated that the ambiguity of life made their decisions about their future unclear but they hoped all would turn out well.

Participant 1 talked about getting motivated to finish school and to find a way to provide for herself and her son.

I have to think about me and my child. So I have to think about us. I have to think about finishing school. I have to think about, oh, how he is going to eat and have clothes on his back. So, it's like, I just don't care anymore. I'm just trying finish school. You know? And I need my child to be positive and stuff. Yes, I think by myself about my child and how I can make it better. Yeah. Every day, it goes through my mind, like, oh, my gosh. Like, I wanna finish school. I wanna be able to provide for my child, you know, and not depend on my parents and stuff. Like, I already wanna finish high school so, like--I feel like after I finish high school, from that point on, I'll be able to move on. I'll be able to just go, like, you know, start what I need to do. It's just, this is just taking forever. It makes me so mad 'cause, like, sometimes I'm like; okay. Forget it. I don't care anymore. I just wanna give up sometimes, but then I can't. I just think about my son  
(Participant 1, personal communication, May 2012).

Participant 1's sentiments indicated that she got impatient sometimes with the slow process of meeting the requirements to earn a high school diploma.

Thinking about her son and future kept her going and she was determined to complete high school.

Participant 2 shared similar sentiments. She mentioned that her mother had had poor health and therefore had been unable to provide for her and her daughter. She was uncertain which career or job to choose, but she was sure she wanted to provide a better future for her child. The future seemed ambiguous to her too but she was determined to try and make it better.

I'm actually -- well, I mean, I don't know what it takes to be -- you know those pharmacist? I want to do that, or I want to be a translator in, like, the courts and stuff. But I don't know what I have -- I don't know. But I think it's just -- it's a short -- it's either, like, a two-year thing or -- I don't know. But yeah, that's what I want to do. I wanted to be a professional makeup artist. But now with the baby, I'm just like, "Oh, I don't think I'm going to be able to do that." And I can do it, but I heard they get paid good being a pharmacy's assistant. And my mom was telling me about a translator. She like, "You know how to translate. " You do all that." She said, "You could get a good job by doing that." I was like, "We'll see." So I'm -- it's either in- between one of those (Participant 2, personal communication, May 2012).

Even though Participant 2's comments showed that she was unsure which job or career to choose from, one thing was certain, she wanted a better life for her baby.

Like Participant 1 and Participant 2, Participant 3 indicated that she would like to pursue her educational goals as her baby grew up but she needed a job immediately. Therefore, she was, planning to enroll in some kind of training, such as for a nurse assistant, so that she could secure a job.

I'm going to try to look for a job when I hit seventeen. I want to do, like, nurse's assistant or like anything with computers (Participant 3, personal communication, May 2012).

Other participants who shared an interest in furthering their education or training after high school include Participant 1, Participant 6, and Participant 5.

Participant 1 described how she was determined to enroll in college and believed that as long as she stayed in school she could become anything she dreamed of and her future will be secure.

Um, I see my education turning out good because I don't mind going to school, and I want to go to college really bad. And I want to study in a lot of stuff, and so, it's like, I see it going good if I just keep going to school and keep focusing on the main thing. I was like, that's why my parents, they're a big help because they know, like, I want to go to college and stuff. And so, like, I see my future going good, as long as I'm in school (Participant 1, personal communication, May 2012).

Participant 1's narrative described how she was determined to continue with her education despite being a single teen mother. Even though she had not yet



achieved all the things she mentioned in her story, such as getting a job and proving for her son, her thoughts were positive.

After realizing she was pregnant, Participant 6's attitude towards school had changed. Her attitude changed further after she had had her baby. She had become more concerned about how her baby was going to grow up. She was now planning to get a job to provide for her. She also planned to continue her education beyond high school. She describes this ambition as a new realization.

I just realized. I wanted to go to college. I wanted to get a job before. Oh, I did wanna work with dogs or, like, go work at the pound, but more, like, with dogs, not every animal. I love dogs. It makes me wanna, like, it's, like, pushing me more to complete high school and secure a job (Participant 6, personal communication, May 2012).

Participant 6 made further references to how she had perceived her education when she had been pregnant and then later when she had a baby.

I feel like I'm pushing more on my education than before. "But now that I have a baby, I'm just, like; 'I just want to get it out of the way, graduate early' pushed me more (Participant 6, personal communication, May 2012).

Participant 6's attitude towards education had changed and she thought now that getting a high school diploma would something she wanted to do. This may have been partly because having a high school diploma would help her secure a job

and be able to provide for her child. Her sentiments implied that she had started seeing education as a way to success, either going to college or getting a job.

### Summary

In this chapter, the findings from second and third interviews were presented and discussed. The participants mentioned many things. Four themes emerged that were consistent in all participants. Each participant's voice was represented. The range of comments has needed to be presented in its totality. The four themes included

1. Focus on the immediate and realistic needs
2. Negotiation of a different self
3. Developing Sense of Responsibility
4. Orientation towards the future

The above themes indicated that the participants thinking and attitudes had shifted from a simpler focus on their own needs, which had been noticed in the first round of interviews. They were instead focusing more on the needs of their babies in their second and third interviews. Education and training for themselves were still valued but the focus had shifted more towards what was reasonable and practical. All participants expressed commitment to graduating from high school and seeking employment as their major priority. The participants also frequently expressed a sense of transformation from an old self

to a different sense of self. The old self had featured a lack of academic effort and a lack of respect towards other people who had tried to help them for example, their teachers and their parents. Their newly transformed sense of self brought renewed commitment to graduating from high school and pursuing career goals, embracing the role of parenthood, wanting to be a role model for their children and doing what they needed to do to provide for them.

This chapter showed participants were in between two stages in rite of passage. They had not fully arrived in the post- liminal stage but also they were no longer clearly in the liminal stage. They displayed some of sense of new identities and there were some examples of developing resistance to the common discourse about young mothers. Such resistance could be said to signify the third stage of the rite of passage (incorporation). In this stage individuals are usually incorporated back into the mainstream society. But this stage, they might be expressed to have acquired new identities. In this case, the participants had acquired or had renewed determination and they were focused on completing high school. They were aware of what they needed to do as far as education and career goals were concerned. There are noticeable elements of difference in the sense of self that they were expressing.

## CHAPTER SIX

### DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

#### Introduction

This study has explored the lived educational experiences of pregnant and parenting adolescents enrolled in a pregnant minor educational program in Southern California from a phenomenological perspective. By this I mean that the study has attempted to privilege participants' own accounts of their educational experiences and their understanding of being pregnant or parenting and attending a new educational setting. The group of participants was composed of six female adolescents who were enrolled at a pregnant minor education program. The participants were between fourteen and seventeen years old. At the beginning of the study, they were all in the second trimester of their pregnancies. The experiences of these six pregnant teens were captured through a series of three interviews each in order to address the research questions.

The research questions outlined in chapter one were:

1. What are the lived educational experiences of pregnant and parenting adolescents in a pregnant minor program ()?
2. How were these experiences impacting their educational goals?
3. And what role does the achievement of agency play in pursuit of these goals throughout the course of and after their pregnancy?

This chapter provides a summary of the findings from these interviews and discusses the findings in relationship to the literature and research questions. It also makes recommendations for future educational practice, offers suggestions for future research, comments on the researcher's experience, and acknowledges the limitations of the study.

### Summary of the Findings

The themes that emerged from the first round of interviews were as follows:

1. The participants' awareness or consciousness of the bad girl discourse.
2. Their response to the judgments by others
3. Their perspectives on regular school as they looked back
4. The participants' perspectives on their schooling in
5. The participants' educational and career goals.
6. The participants' increased personal determination to complete high school.

#### Consciousness of the Bad Girl Discourse

According to Kelly (2000), the "wrong girl" assumption by the public inhibits a true understanding of the phenomenon of teenage pregnancy. Many agencies and individuals who had supported the pregnant and parenting adolescents before their pregnancies distanced themselves and viewed them as a disgrace and as a source of shame to their families. The participants showed

that they were well aware of the image the society has for girls who get pregnant while they are still in school. All the participants in this study stated that their first reaction when they learned about their pregnancies was fear. They were afraid of the reactions from their friends, teachers and families.

At first, they had tried to conceal their pregnancies and had had to take many pregnancy tests to confirm the pregnancies. They felt that being pregnant and attending regular school was viewed as physical sign of immorality. Pregnant teens are stigmatized and more often than not viewed as delinquents, a label that many schools try conceal by placing them in pregnant and parenting minor education programs. They were also viewed as capable of contaminating other non-pregnant girls and therefore as dangerous to the moral order.

#### Response to the Judgment by Others

Participants indicated that they were aware of what people were saying about them after they got pregnant. They discussed how they had wanted to disappear and to cease to be a part of their society. They went on to share how they had often pretended that they did not exist and that being pregnant was just a bad dream. Finally the participants mentioned they avoided going out when they were pregnant.

They expressed the feeling of being misunderstood and judged by others and they preferred the pregnant minor education program where such judgments were not as common. In their new school setting they felt accepted and not

judged. Most of the participants had received support from their families and teachers at the pregnant minor education program.

### Perspectives on Regular School as They Looked Back

The six interviewee's perspectives on regular school as they looked back indicated that they had usually put minimal effort towards succeeding in school. The participants acknowledged their lack of academic effort before getting pregnant and deliberately skipping school. Also included within this theme is the participants' recognition of their inappropriate behavior towards their teachers. What had appeared to be normal to them had changed after they had gotten pregnant and they had realized that their failure to concentrate in school was going to be costly as far as graduating from high school was concerned.

The data showed that the participants had acknowledged their mistakes and they were ready to make it right. To make such an acknowledgement, one has to have made a shift to a new sense of self. From the new position the old self looks different. All participants indicated that they were determined to pursue their educational and career goals. Some mentioned that their educational and career goals might lead them to take a different path as a result of their obligations and commitment to their babies but they were still determined to pursue those goals in future. The regular school experience as relayed by the participants had not been positive and they characterized their experience as disconnected, lacking in passion, and lacking commitment towards their educational achievement.

## Perspectives on Schooling at Cal-SAFE

The participants shared how they had been at first reluctant to come to . They further mentioned that after becoming enrolled, they had found the program to be easier and more flexible in accommodation of their needs such as when they had missed school during doctor's appointments or when they had gotten sick. They viewed the school climate at the Cal-SAFE program as friendlier. They felt understood, and not judged. The participants believed they had developed more satisfying relationships with other girls, and with teachers, and had fewer distractions, than they had achieved in regular schools. Some participants thought that the students at the Cal- SAFE program were more mature. Finally, the girls reported missing their friends since they had been attending different schools.

The participants also mentioned that their schooling experience was positive and that, more than before, they believed they could graduate from high school. The common belief about most programs was that they were not fully equipped to provide equal access to opportunities for pregnant and parenting students like their non-pregnant students who attended regular comprehensive high schools. The participants in this study did not share that belief; instead they had positive feelings about their new school setting. The participants were aware that the programs lacked varied of activities but that did not overshadow all the benefits they believed they were receiving from the program.



## Educational and Career Goals

Some participants indicated that some of their educational and career goals had changed since become pregnant. They realized that some of their previous educational and career goals were no longer realistic. For example, one participant shared how joining the Marines was now unrealistic, because she might be separated from her child for a long time. Others' educational and careers goals remained the same. For example, Participant 3 stated, "Yeah, everything is the same", "I want to do, like, nurse's assistant or like anything with computers".

Finally, all the participants were more focused on graduating from high school as stated in their personal stories in chapter four. All participants appeared determined to pursue their educational and career goals. However, to achieve these goals was going to take them longer than they had planned before getting pregnant. Some of the participants indicated that their career choices and goals were now going to be more determined by the best welfare of their babies. They acknowledged that educational and career success was of paramount importance for their own future and that of their babies. One thing to be noted from the way the participants conveyed their messages was that they had realized their role as parents and what they needed to do. The participants' personal determination to complete high school was increased.

The participants shared also their increased interest in completing high school. They realized that education was a way to gain access to opportunities

such as employment and college entry. They realized also getting pregnant gave them responsibilities or obligations to care for someone else other than themselves. They placed stronger value on schooling than before. For example Participant 3 stated that

Going to school now is better. Because, well, before I didn't really go to school. Well, I just stayed home. I didn't like the teachers or any of them so. Yeah. But after I got pregnant, I tried to get my diploma and all that stuff (Participant 3, personal communication, May 2012).

Their interest in graduating from high school, securing a good job, and a good career was to provide a better life for their children than what they had growing up. The behavior of the participants had changed since they had become pregnant and they now wanted to take responsibility for their children. We have heard about the problems that each teen mother faces (McWhirter, 1997). These problems include social rejection, academic failure, and stigmatization. The stories from the participants in this study confirmed these problems but also indicated the presence of sense of agency that was growing in response. The participants were often determined to overcome these challenges. Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer (1998) suggested that success was attainable through a combination several things such as self-determination, skills, knowledge, and belief in personal success. Field et.al (1998), further argued that success is also based on the individual's own engagement in setting goals, self-regulation, and having autonomous behavior.

Individuals who overcome challenges such as being pregnant or parenting may be able to identify and understand their own strengths and limitations and gauge their own level of belief in their capabilities. The participants' in this study spoke about their determination to be successful through hard work and staying the course.

The second and third interviews indicated a shift from what the participants had expressed in their first interview. The shift was more towards the immediate needs of the baby than focused on the long-term educational and career goals. The shifts were towards a renewed sense of self, one that featured a different sense of agency, more responsible, more realistic, and more clearly oriented to the future included (see Figure 2).

#### Focus on Immediate and Realistic Needs

The participants' consistently talked about how their life had changed after they had had their babies. Some of the changes included changes in their educational goals to deal with the immediate need of providing for their babies, such as the urge to get a job instead of completing high school and going straight to college. For example, Participant 1 mentioned that having her son changed her plans on how she was going to progress with her educational goals. From her perspective law enforcement training was going to take a few months and she would be able to start making money immediately and could thus provide for her baby. She saw herself going back to college and earning a bachelor's degree after her son was older and in school.

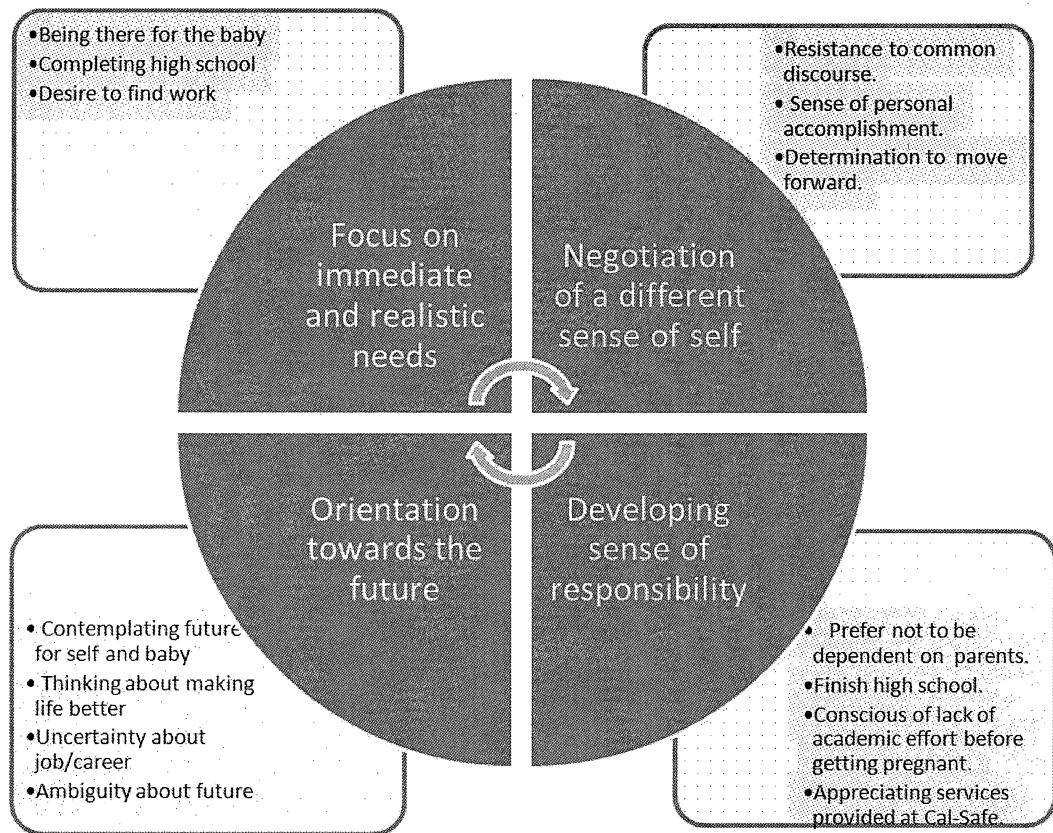


Figure 2. Summary of Chapter 5 Themes.

Others echoed similar sentiments, including Participant 4, Participant 3 and Participant 2. They agreed that graduating from high school was their first priority, and then finding employment had become their second. This priority was sometimes stated in terms of obligation. They felt obligated to get a job in order to help their parents with the bills and to be able to buy some of the baby's supplies. For example Participant 4 stated the experience of becoming a mother had changed her. In the first interview she had mentioned that she had not been

sure what she had wanted to do when she graduated from high school.

However, in the second interview she mentioned that she wanted to provide for her son and, therefore, she wanted to look for a job after she graduated from high school. She planned to go to college later, when her son was old enough.

Well, I'm trying to do the best I can to give him a good future. I'm thinking of getting a part-time job when I graduate and go to college later  
(Participant 4, personal communication, May 2012).

Participant 4's contribution showed that her new self was willing to work hard to place on hold her personal ambitions in order to be able to provide for her son.

#### Negotiation of a Different Sense of Self

The participants mentioned they were ready to do anything in their power to protect and provide for their babies. They wanted to take responsibility for their babies, which was contrary to what is commonly assumed in the discourse of irresponsible welfare mothers. They felt empowered to shape their old selves into a new self that featured resistance to the common discourse of "bad girls". In their view the current situation was temporary and they still appeared determined to pursue their educational and career goals in future. For example, Participant 4 mentioned in her first interview that she had been afraid to go outside, because she had been afraid of what people were going to say about her being fourteen and pregnant. In the second interview her attitude had changed and she shared that she loved her son and she was not afraid anymore

about people. Rather she was going to do whatever she could in her power to provide for her son.

I guess because I didn't go out because I was scared of what people might say. But now I have him, I don't care what they say

(Participant 4, personal communication, May 2012).

This shows that Participant 4 had shifted her position in relation to the bad girl discourse. She has developed a stronger sense of agency and is now displaying resistance to the common discourses such as "bad girls" and "welfare mother".

#### Developing Sense of Responsibility

The participants mentioned that, prior to getting pregnant; their focus had been mainly on their own personal needs. They consciously acknowledged how the experience of pregnancy and delivering their babies had transformed them. The experiences brought deeper understanding about what it takes to be a mother. This was evident especially through their expression of responsibility for their babies but they also often mentioned that they felt a need to protect and care for those who loved them and their children. Through the pregnancy and delivery experience, the participants went through changes of behavior which could have been described as movement away from destructive, self-centered or selfish behaviors and toward being more considerate and caring for others. For example, some participants acknowledged having disrespected their teachers and others mentioned their lack of effort in school, which could threaten academic failure and thus not graduating from high school. The participants also

mentioned that they preferred not to be dependent on their parents. For example, Participant 1 mentioned that her parents had been very supportive and had provided for her son but she did not want them to continue doing so. That was why she was so determined to complete high school and move on with her career goals.

I wanna be able to provide for my child, you know, and not depend on my parents and stuff. Like, I already wanna finish high school. From that point on, I'll be able to move on. I'll be able to just go, like, you know, start what I need to do (Participant 1, personal communication, May 2012).

#### Orientation Towards the Future

Participants in this study talked about their increased interest in securing a job or training while still planning to go to college for their long-term career goals. Some of the participants mentioned that they were more focused on creating a better future for their babies, while others stated that they wanted to make their babies lives better. Furthermore, others shared that they were uncertain about which career or job they were pursuing. Most of the participants indicated that the ambiguity of life made their decisions about their future unclear but they hoped all would turn out well. For example, Participant 1 talked about getting motivated to finish school and find a way to provide for herself and her son.

I have to think about me and my child. So I have to think about us.

I have to think about finishing school. I have to think about, oh, how he is

going to eat and have clothes on his back. So, it's like, I just don't care anymore. I'm just trying finish school. You know? And I need my child to be positive and stuff. Yes, I think by myself about my child and how I can make it better. Yeah. Every day, it goes through my mind, like, oh, my gosh. Like, I wanna finish school. I wanna be able to provide for my child, you know, and not depend on my parents and stuff. Like, I already wanna finish high school so, like--I feel like after I finish high school, from that point on, I'll be able to move on. I'll be able to just go, like, you know, start what I need to do. It's just, this is just taking forever. It makes me so mad 'cause, like, sometimes I'm like; okay. Forget it. I don't care anymore. I just wanna give up sometimes, but then I can't. I just think about my son (Participant 1, personal communication, May 2012).

Participant 1's sentiments indicated that she gets impatient sometimes with the slow process of meeting the requirements to earn a high school diploma.

Thinking about her son and future kept her going and she was determined to complete high school.

## Discussion

### Significant Findings

It is reasonable assumption, as human beings; we are the best authors and storytellers of our own lives and experiences. The participants' in this study told their stories in a setting that was as natural as possible and the findings



reflect their voices. The aim of this dissertation was to explore and describe the educational experiences of pregnant and parenting adolescents enrolled in a pregnant minor education program (). The first interview led to the extraction of six themes, which were common to all participants'. The second and third interviews yielded four different themes. All participants lived through the educational experiences, which they verbalized through these themes.

The first interview themes were

1. Consciousness of the bad girl discourse
2. Responses to the judgments by others
3. The participants' perspectives on regular school as they looked back
4. The participants' perspectives on schooling at
5. The participants' educational and career goals
6. The participants' personal determination increased

These themes align with the participants' experience of what has been described as going through a rite of passage. At the time of the first interview the participants had entered into the stage of pre-liminal that is the first stage of rite of passage. Turner (1967) defined liminality as a state of life where individuals are caught in between two conflicting sides, thus they are "neither here nor there" (p.95). Turner further re-discovered and enhanced the knowledge on rites of passage by applying concepts from Van Gennep (1960). The three stages in a rite of passage which were identified by both Van Gennep and Turner included; rite of separation (pre-liminal), transition rites (liminal rites), and rites of

incorporation (post- liminal). Turner identifies these stages as culturally influenced and after the individual has been incorporated, they find their own internal structures.

The first three themes align with the first stage of the rite of passage. In this stage several things have happened which have made the individuals detach from the mainstream social structure (including the educational structures). They are alienated from the society, they seem disoriented, and there is a sense of dissolution of the social order. This is consistent with the participants' stories of when they received news of becoming pregnant. The participants were conscious of the bad girl discourse, which made them become afraid of their parents, friends, and teachers reactions. They also felt judged by others. Therefore, their response was withdrawal from public space. Their perspective on the regular school, as they looked back, was negative. They also acknowledged their own destructive behaviors, which had resulted in their departure from their regular schools.

The fourth theme aligns with the second stage of the rites of passage (liminal rite). In this stage, individuals are secluded and separated from the mainstream. They make boundaries around themselves, and start developing a transition plan. The participants in this study were enrolled in a program (an alternative school). They were secluded from regular schools because they were pregnant. They spoke about their perspectives on schooling at . Their experiences included how they had been reluctant to come to the program at

first, their learning experience about the program, how flexible the program was, and how they had felt accepted and not judged. Further, their experience was positive and they had made satisfying relationships with other students in the program. They mentioned that they experienced fewer distractions than in their regular schools and the students believed that they now acted more maturely. They had experienced a shift in their sense of being and they were developing their personal strength to be able to pursue their dreams.

The participants educational and career goals and their increased personal determination, which were fifth and the sixth themes respectively aligned with the third stage of the rite of passage (incorporation). This stage is also seen as reintegration or as the post- liminal stage. During this stage, individuals are incorporated back into the society. They have acquired a new image, a new identity or a new self. The participants in this study spoke of their new-found strength and determination. The participants were realistic about their educational and career goals. Some participants acknowledged that their career goals before getting pregnant now seemed to be unrealistic, for example, joining the Marines, while other participants educational and career goals remained the same. All participants expressed that their main intention was to graduate from high school and that they planned to attend college in future. The participants spoke about their personal determination increased to complete high school after they had become pregnant.

Some participants mentioned that they wanted a brighter future for their children and achieving their educational and career goals appeared to be the best way to realize this dream. The participants mentioned that becoming pregnant had brought a new realization about the value of education. They put more strength and effort into their schooling than they had done before.

### Other Significant Findings

#### Dominant Structuring Discourses

The dominant structuring discourse about school-age teenage pregnancies includes the discourse of “contamination”, the disparagement of “welfare mothers”, and concepts of the “bad girl”. The findings in this study supported the literature by showing that the participants were aware of these discourses. They described how they felt after become pregnant. Their feelings were based on the core values of their society that dictates and assumes certain behaviors and roles. Adolescent girls are expected to take certain roles that are assumed to prepare them for adulthood. The participants’ feelings were also based on the dominant discourse of normality, which describes teenage pregnancy as a form of “contamination” and as a sign of a threat of general moral decay. The participants expressed feeling afraid or guilty, and blamed themselves for getting pregnant and placing a risk their own educational futures. This finding is supported by literature especially the studies done by Kelly (2000), Pillow (2004), and Hunter (2007). Pillow found that the debates surrounding the

education of pregnant and parenting adolescents have brought up a common unifying idea of contamination. According to Pillow (2004), these “themes circulated the idea that the presence of a sexually active female student (as pregnant students or as a mother), will contaminate the student body, leading to an epidemic of immoral and promiscuous behavior” (p. 63). This contamination discourse makes pregnancy look like a disease and positions the pregnant girls as “contaminators”. Hunter (2007) found “a growing political discourse defining teen mothers as ‘welfare mothers’ which reinforced the image that Ronald Reagan articulated in his description of the ‘Chicago welfare queen’ (p. 77). “Welfare queens” is a term used in the United States to describe people who manipulate the welfare system and collect excessive welfare benefits. Kelly mentioned that society has portrayed teen pregnancy as a sign of moral decay, a shame to society, and as a drain on social welfare resources. This kind of reaction is influenced partly by traditional beliefs that teenage pregnancy is morally wrong and shameful.

This study complicates the belief in a simple common, dominant structuring discourse which views teen mothers as dependent on social welfare benefits. The study found the participants’ were willing and determined to change their life for the better after they became pregnant. They were determined to pursue educational and career goals despite the challenges they faced. They were determined to find employment after graduating from high school in order to support their children. This finding indicates the participants

did not appear to be performing the discourse of welfare queens and they were determined to be self-supporting. This assertion contradicts the research studies, which were done by Card and Wise, (1978) and Adler, Bates, and Merdinger (1985), which suggested that early or unplanned motherhood low educational aspirations.

Teen pregnancy has often been labeled as a situation only for the “wrong girls” and society views the girls as culprits instead of victims. According to Kelly (2000), the “wrong girl” label by the public has inhibited a true understanding of the phenomenon. Many who are involved with pregnant and parenting adolescents often turn their back on girls and instead of helping and supporting them; they view them through the lens of disgrace and as bringing shame to their families. Participants in this study were aware of but resisted this common discourse and, especially after their babies were born, they refused to view themselves as failures but instead they showed determination and personal agency to struggle for what they believed would benefit them and their children. The participants’ feelings appeared to contradict the common belief about teen mothers lacking motivation for education. Participant 4, for example, mentioned,

When I was pregnant I didn’t really go out because I was scared of what people might say...But now that I have my son, I don’t care what they say (Participant 4, personal communication, May 2012).

Other participants shared similar sentiments. They were determined to pay little attention to what people might say. Instead they were focused on accomplishing

their goals which included graduating from high school, looking for employment, and enrolling in a vocational training college.

This study allowed the researcher the opportunity for in-depth listening to the stories of pregnant and parenting adolescents about their educational experiences in their new school setting (). The voices of the participants were heard and recorded. Van Manen (1990) suggested that the meaning of experience in phenomenological study could be understood as participants acting thoughtfully and adjusting to the study setting. This study was conducted in as natural a setting as possible and will add to the research on pregnant and parenting adolescents' educational experiences.

The findings will also allow educators, curriculum designers and policy makers to understand the students' needs better as they go through their education in programs. The enrollment process of pregnant and parenting adolescents should be modified to include information about the program, services available for the girls, and the girls should have an opportunity to ask questions. The findings from the study can also be used by school counselors and social workers during orientation to break down the barriers of communication, and help the girls recognize the liminal process they are going through. The counselors and social works can work with the girls to identify the educational and career goals and help them set small goals to achieve their ultimate goal. This study will impact how educators view pregnant and parenting students. One participant mentioned how this study gave her a platform to share

her story by stating, “Well, actually in my opinion, I actually feel good now that I’m opening up. I feel better to be able to tell my story” (Participant 4 , personal communications, May 2012).

### Recommendations for Further Research

The findings in this study suggest a need for further research. Further study in this topic could include tracing the participants’ several years later and determine whether societal forces surrounding them prevented them from pursuing and meeting their desired educational and career goals. Secondly, researchers could broaden the sample and to confirm whether what happened to the sample of the current study will happen with a larger sample. Thirdly, the ideas the girls shared can be claimed with a larger sample. Finally, the context in this study could be used to confirm or generalized the findings in other programs, states or countries. Mixed methods can be adopted look at where the girls in their plans.

### Recommendations for the Cal-SAFE Program

The schools should recognize the liminal process of transition and provide clear orientation, guidance, and ongoing process with the girls to help them set practical and realistic educational and career goals. The teachers need also to recognize the developmental and identity needs of the girls besides their educational needs.



My aim in this study was to give these young women a voice. Teachers and counselors need also to give them a voice too. If they are given a voice, their agency is increased, they are empowered, and their sense of responsibility is grown. Therefore, they need teachers and counselors who help them to continue to develop these voices.

School administrators are central to any implementation of school policies, programs, and services. They are held responsible for what teachers and students do. Therefore, it is important for school leaders to take necessary steps to ensure teachers and school counselors understand the liminal process. They should set aside time for teachers and counselors to meet with the students at a regular basis.

### Researcher's Experience

I began this research with a preconceived belief that the participants had negative experiences with the program. The expectations were based on my personal experience as a teacher in programs for two years. But I found positive student experiences with the program and the personnel who work at the school site. My beliefs changed as I listened to the participants' stories. I realized how much each participant appreciated the program and how it gave them a sense of belonging.

I was surprised how each participant welcomed me and appreciated that I had given them an opportunity to tell their stories. Giving participants a platform

where they could tell their stories for the first time and have their voices count appeared to be therapeutic. I started connecting the stories of the participants' experience as teen mothers and as students who have educational and career goals. I could sense how important education was to these young women and how determined they were to accomplish their goals.

One of the challenges I faced as I was analyzing the data was identifying the emerging themes, although not as much in first interview transcripts as in the transcripts from the second and third interviews. I tried to read over and over again to find themes on educational and career goals but finally I had to let the data speak. One difficult was that the themes, which emerged were not consistent for all participants. It was also tempting to read into their statements what I hoped they were saying, which often went further than they did. In the end I have concluded a range of perspectives. Some of which are not consistently presented in all the interviews. In small intense study like this, however, it is less important for themes to be representative of all participants than it is not to ignore a possible important message.

The stories of participants showed me how important it is for the educators to hear these stories. The stories might change the image society, schools and other interested agencies have about pregnant and parenting students. My goal is to continue to share the findings of this study with other educators and school districts to ensure the voices of these participants are heard.

## Limitations

A research design that values phenomenological perspective helps us appreciate the lived experiences of participants. This research did not aim to provide a confirmation of a hypothesis but rather it explored and described experiences as narrated by the participants. The scope of this study was limited to educational experiences, and therefore I did not consider other experiences which could have had impact on the overall experiences of the pregnant and parenting students', for example, their delivery experiences or their relationships with the fathers of their babies. Secondly, I had limited access to the students outside the interview setting and therefore I did not interact or observe them in other settings. This limited the information about their experiences other than what they told in their stories. Thirdly, all participants were from Southern California. It may be that other pregnant and parenting students in other parts of the country have had different experiences. Finally, there was limited information about educational experiences of pregnant and parenting adolescents'. In many ways this is a preliminary descriptive study. A more robust analysis could have been done on the findings if there were more pieces of literature focused on the topic. It is also possible that different picture might emerge if the study were to focus on the participants' actual educational performance, rather than on their comments about this performance.

## Conclusion

The findings in this study can potentially benefit educators, curriculum designers, policy makers, and stakeholder who have an interest in the education of pregnant and parenting adolescents. The data provided in this study consists of a series of three interviews with six pregnant and parenting adolescents enrolled in a pregnant minor education program. The aim of the study was to explore and gain an in-depth understanding of the educational experience of pregnant and parenting adolescents. Understanding the needs and listening to the voices of these students can help improve the services provided at the pregnant minor education programs by including their educational and career goals when designing the programs. It can also help provide guidance and support to the student to achieve their educational and career goals. The finding indicated that participants were determined to take on their responsibilities and work hard to achieve their goals. This is not to ignore the challenges, which face them as they pursue their goals.

The literature reviewed in this study laid down a foundation for the topic, and critically analyzed the gaps in the literature. The literature extensively explored the issue of pregnancy and the social welfare of the teen mothers and their babies but there was limited information on their educational experiences. This study adds to the missing link between the social welfare programs and the educational experiences of pregnant and parenting adolescents.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM



College of Education  
Office of Doctoral Studies

**Appendix A**

**PARENT/Guardian CONSENT FOR STUDENT'S PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH STUDY**

**Research Title:** Educational experiences of pregnant and parenting adolescents in a pregnant minor program

I would like to ask for your permission for your daughter to participate in a research study. The investigator of this study is Tabitha Muteti, a teacher for Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE) and a doctoral student at California State University, San Bernardino.

The study will look at the educational experiences of pregnant and parenting teenagers in their new school setting. Participation will help educators develop programs which will consider students' perspectives and needs to succeed in school.

If you allow your daughter to participate, she will be asked to complete three interviews, the first one taking place after April 16<sup>th</sup> 2012. Each interview will take 45 minutes in a safe and comfortable place where your daughter's comments will not be overheard by other students or teachers. The interviews will also include audio recording and will be conducted one-on-one with the researcher. The interviews will be conducted over a course of six months. The interviews and the audio recording will be conducted at the Cal Safe program. All interviews will be conducted during passing time so that no-class time will be lost. The data might be used for articles and presentations but audio recording will not be used for these purposes

I don't expect there to be any substantial risk to students from participating in this study. However, counseling will be available onsite by an experienced counselor (call: Tel. 951-826-4230) if any students are distressed after the interview.

The name of your daughter will not appear in any data collected or in the final write up of study. You can withdraw your daughter without loss of services from Cal-Safe at any time if she no longer wants to be involved in the study. I will not share your daughter's information with anyone else but her. But you should also be aware that the completed report will be placed in the university library for others to read.

The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the California State University, San Bernardino. If you need any more information about the study feel free to contact Tabitha Muteti at (858) 722-3558, Dr. John Winslade at (909)537-5688 or Dr. Randall Wright (909) 537-5626.

I consent for my daughter \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in the study

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD COMMITTEE  
APPROVED: 04/16/12 - VOID AFTER 04/30/12  
TRUTH: Noble CHAIR, Tabitha Muteti, Ph.D.

909.537.5688 • fax: 909.537.9036 • http://edd.csusb.edu

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College of Education  
Office of Doctoral Studies

Signature of Parent/ Guardian

Date

I understand the research will include Audio- Recording.  
Signature of Parent/Guardian \_\_\_\_\_

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD COMMITTEE

APPROVED 06/10/13 VOTED AFTER 04/19/13

IRB# 11006 CHAIR Shawna D. Ward, Ph.D.

909.337.6661 • fax: 909.337.7056 • <http://edid.csusb.edu>

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APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL





Academic Affairs  
Office of Academic Research • Institutional Review Board

April 06, 2012

Ms. Tabitha Mutefi  
c/o: Prof. John Winslade and Prof. Randall Wright  
Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling  
California State University  
5500 University Parkway  
San Bernardino, California 92407

**CSUSB  
INSTITUTIONAL  
REVIEW BOARD**  
Full Board Review  
IRB# 11066  
Status  
**APPROVED**

Dear Ms. Mutefi:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Educational Experiences of Pregnant and Parenting Adolescents in a Pregnant Minor Program" has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The attached informed consent document has been stamped and signed by the IRB chairperson. All subsequent copies used must be this officially approved version. A change in your informed consent (no matter how minor the change) requires resubmission of your protocol as amended. **Your application is approved for one year from April 06, 2012 through April 05, 2013. One month prior to the approval end date you need to file for a renewal if you have not completed your research. See additional requirements (Items 1 - 4) of your approval below.**

Your responsibilities as the researcher/investigator reporting to the IRB Committee include the following 4 requirements as mandated by the Code of Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46 listed below. Please note that the protocol change form and renewal form are located on the IRB website under the forms menu. Failure to notify the IRB of the above may result in disciplinary action. You are required to keep copies of the informed consent forms and data for at least three years.

- 1) **Submit a protocol change form if any changes (no matter how minor) are made in your research prospectus/protocol for review and approval of the IRB before implemented in your research.**
- 2) **If any unanticipated/adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research.**
- 3) **Too renew your protocol one month prior to the protocols end date,**
- 4) **When your project has ended by emailing the IRB Coordinator/Compliance Analyst.**

The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional approvals which may be required.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, IRB Compliance Coordinator. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at [mgillesp@csusb.edu](mailto:mgillesp@csusb.edu). Please include your application approval identification number (listed at the top) in all correspondence.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

*Sharon Ward, Ph.D.*  
Sharon Ward, Ph.D., Chair  
Institutional Review Board

SW/mg.

cc: Prof. John Winslade and Prof. Randall Wright, Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling.

909.537.7588 • fax: 909.537.7028 • <http://irb.csusb.edu/>

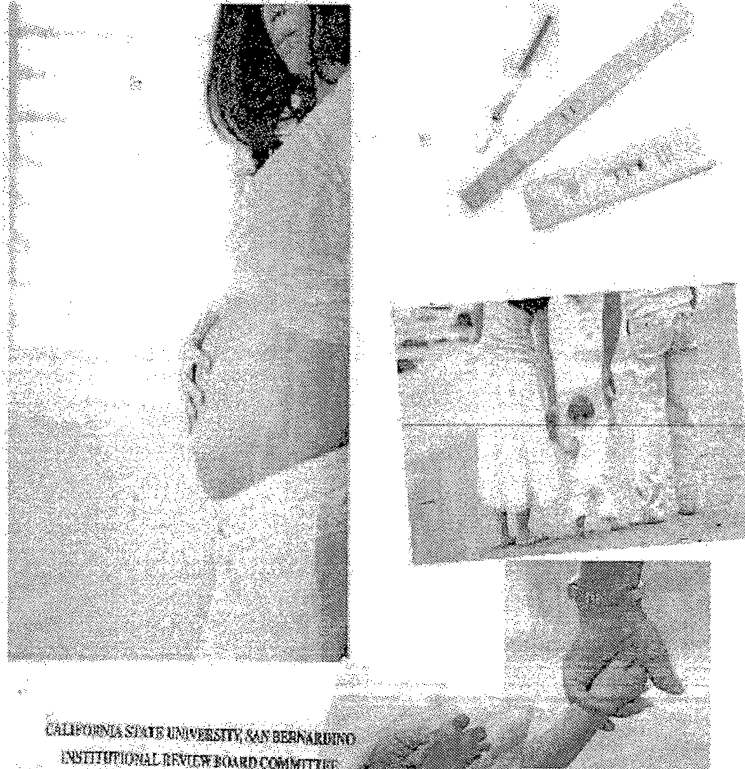
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APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT FLYER

# You're invited to participate in a research study



CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD COMMITTEE  
APPROVED 08/04/12 VOID AFTER 04/05/13  
IRB# 11066 CHAIR Sharon A. Wood, PhD

Seeking Pregnant Adolescents'  
ages 14 - 17

- April 10 - December 01, 2012

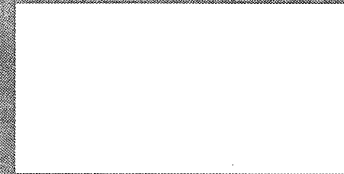
Study is looking at:

- Educational Experience of pregnant and parenting adolescents in Cal-SAFE

**LET YOUR VOICE COUNT!**

For More Information Contact:

Tabitha Muteti



APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## Interview Protocol\*

### First interview

1. Tell me your story of what happened when you found out you were pregnant.
2. Tell me the story of how getting pregnant changed or did not change your schooling experience.
3. Tell me the story of your experience in your new school.
4. Tell me how your educational future has changed as a result of becoming pregnant.

### Second interview

1. You said (tell the student what they said in the first interview). Has anything change since then?
2. Has anything changed about your educational goals?
3. Has anything changed about the way you feel about yourself?

### Third interview

1. Tell me your story about your future now that you have a child?
2. Is there anything else you would like to say about your educational experience in this program?
3. How can this program help improve your educational experience?

\*Researcher developed interview questions.

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