ABSTRACT

EL-BESHTI, RASHA MARIAM. Adlerian Family Constellations and Adolescent Parenting: A Phenomenological Study. (Under the direction of Dr. Kimberly Allen, Dr. Michael Shulman, and Dr. Nichole Huff).

The risk and protective factors of adolescent childbearing are associated with social, familial, and individual level perspectives. The disconnect between the perception of family constellation and adolescent childbearing can be better understood with a conceptual Adlerian framework to understand the individual and familial factors that influence adolescent childbearing including race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and support networks. The purpose of this phenomenological research is to study and better understand the experience of family constellation and adolescent parenting by analyzing the lived experiences of adolescent mothers’ perceptions of family constellation. Specifically, this research seeks to identify the quality of adolescents’ relationships with parent/guardian(s), as well as siblings, to better understand how families influence childbearing decisions. The research is seeking to identify the quality of adolescents’ relationships with parents, as well as siblings. For participants in this study, results indicate that the existence of relational qualities (e.g., support, communication) enhances the structural constellation of family. While these perceptions appear to have affected feelings of support and belonging within the family, they were not perceived as direct contributors to adolescent childbearing decisions for the participants included in this research study. However, for the participants included in this study, the quality of relationships with parent/guardians and siblings, specifically the presence of frequent support and communication, were the essence of adolescents’ adjustment to pregnancy and parenting.
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Adlerian Family Constellations and Adolescent Parenting: A Phenomenological Study

by

Rasha Mariam El-Beshti

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APPROVED BY:

Nichole Huff

Michael Schulman

Kimberly Allen
Committee Chair
DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my late father, who always supported and encouraged me throughout my adolescence and instilled me with an amazing amount of resiliency. Thank you for always allowing me to feel a sense of belonging and importance; I aspire to become even half of the scholar you were.
BIOGRAPHY

Rasha Mariam El-Beshti was born December 5th, 1988 in San Francisco, California and relocated to Winston-Salem, North Carolina in 1991. She attended Appalachian State University in 2006, and graduated in 2009 with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology and a Bachelor of Science in Child Development. Throughout her undergraduate education, Rasha worked with various community youth development programs. Knowing that she wanted to spend her life serving disadvantaged populations, she decided to get her Masters Degree. Continuing her desire to work with youth and families, she enrolled at North Carolina State University in the Masters of Science in Family Life and Youth Development program.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Statistics show that despite recent declines in adolescent childbearing, the United States still has one of the highest rates of adolescent childbearing among nations with advanced economies (Santelli & Melnikas, 2010). Adolescence is a critical developmental period; adolescent parents are unique in that they are adolescents and parents. In the text *Adolescence*, Steinberg (2013) defines adolescence as a time of growing up, moving from the immaturity of childhood to the maturity of adulthood, and of preparation for the future. Substantial biological, psychological, social, and economic transitions exemplify adolescence making adolescence as stressful, if not more stressful, than major life events for adults (e.g. marriage, career change, childbirth) (Steinberg, 2013).

Although the duration and defining characteristics of adolescence vary across time, cultures, and socioeconomic situations, the World Health Organization (WHO) identifies adolescence as the period in human growth and development that occurs after childhood and before adulthood, from ages 10 to 19 (WHO, 2014). According to data from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (2013), in 2008, there were nearly 750,000 pregnancies to women younger than age 20 and the rate of pregnancy was 67.8 per 1000 women between the ages of 15 and 19 years. The same data show the overall teen childbirth rate in 2010 to be 34.2 per 1000, with 70 percent of births to teens occurring with teens between the ages of 18 and 19 years.
Adolescent childbearing disrupts the lives of young mothers, although not nearly as much as most people believe (Furstenberg, 2003). According to the research by Furstenberg (2003), the singularity of the issue has more to do with how our political culture has responded to the ancillary problems of poverty, sexuality, gender relations, and the like, than with the threat posed by teenagers having babies before they want to, their families want them to, or before society thinks is good for their welfare and that of their offspring. Most teen pregnancies are unplanned and unintended. Teen childbearing is associated with adverse health and social outcomes, although these outcomes often reflect preexisting social deficits (Santelli & Melnikas, 2010). Meaning that teens that become pregnant often come from disadvantaged backgrounds and are exposed to a variety of risk factors prior to adolescent childbearing. Teens who become pregnant are less likely than older parents to have the life skills necessary to make the healthy transition from adolescence into adulthood (Boyd, Herring, & Briers, 1992). Research reveals that adolescent mothers are less likely than their peers to complete high school and go on for postsecondary education; other correlates include a lack of economic self-sufficiency (e.g., welfare dependency), poorer employment prospects, rapid repeat pregnancy, single motherhood, and increased likelihood to experience divorce if they marry (Emihovich & Fromme, 1998; Hayes, 1987; Santelli & Melnikas, 2010; Woods et al., 2003). The combination of these risk factors places these adolescent parents and their children at a significant long-term disadvantage.

Some of the risks associated with adolescent childbearing amplifies and exacerbates preexisting risk factors (Logan et al., 2007). The differences in adolescent mothers before
pregnancy appears to be equally, if not more problematic, than after adolescent childbearing: teen mothers were more likely to come from disadvantaged households, have experienced trouble in school, and have lower expectations of going to college than their peers (Abrahamse et al., 1988; Moore et al., 1986). Risk and protective factors associated with adolescent childbearing operate at the social and community level (e.g. supportive families) and at the level of the individual adolescent (e.g. educational achievement) (Santelli & Melnikas, 2010). The disconnect between the perception of family constellation and adolescent childbearing is more easily understood with a conceptual Adlerian framework to understand the individual and social factors that influence adolescent childbearing, including race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and support networks.

1.2 Adlerian Theory and Family Constellation

Adlerian Theory (also known as individual psychology) views individuals in a holistic and phenomenological framework. According to Adler (1956), people are not pushed by causes (i.e., they are not determined by heredity and environment). Individuals are social, purposeful, subjective, and interpretive in their approach to life (Sweeney, 1998). Within the family, children quickly become active agents, defining and redefining the family constellation or system; striving for growth, significance, and meaning; and acting in line with their subjective, and too often mistaken, interpretations of life (Bitter et al., 2002).

Adler (1937) described the family constellation as the composition of a family and one’s position within that system. Every individual either consciously or subconsciously engages in creative and subjective interpretations of one’s place within their family system.
Reiterating Adler’s concept that an individual’s world is created by one’s own perceptions, an individual’s biology (e.g., what they are) does not determine behavior; rather an individual’s thoughts (e.g., what they think) substantiate impact. Therefore, individual’s beliefs about themselves and about other people are how expectations that eventually become self-fulfilling prophecies are developed.

In dealing with inferiority feelings, the influences of the family (both parents and siblings) as well as external social influences may be critical. Adler (1938) discussed the influence of family constellation on the functioning of families. The family constellation refers to the composition of a family and one’s position within that system. Adler (1930, 1931, 1938) often noted that the family system or constellation consisted of the parents, children, and even extended family members. Similarly, Gilliland and James (1998) discuss the family constellation as a collection of relationships within a particular family unit stating:

The family constellation mediates the genetic and constitution factors the child brings into it and the cultural factors the child learns from it. The personality characteristics of each family member, the sex of the siblings, family size, and the birth order of the children all influence how individual find their niche in life (p. 49).

The family constellation consists of three primary concepts: (1) sibling position (numerical and psychosocial); (2) parental attitudes; and (3) family atmosphere.

1.3 Recent and Historic Trends in Adolescent Childbearing

Researchers Santelli and Melnikas (2010) explore the historical changes in fertility, trends in sexual behaviors, social forces, and public policies that may influence adolescent
fertility to better understand recent trends in adolescent birth and pregnancy rates. Santelli and Melnikas discuss adolescent childbearing on two levels: (1) behavioral and (2) social. They attribute adolescent childbearing as a direct result of specific sexual behaviors (e.g., poverty and educational opportunity). Although adolescent childbearing is associated with adverse health and social outcomes for adolescent mothers and their offspring, these social deficits are typically preexisting deficits for these individuals.

Several authors place emphasis on the differences between childbearing and older mothers (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1994; Hoffman, 2006; Santelli & Melnikas, 2010). Compared with women who delay childbearing until their 20s, teen mothers are more likely to drop out of school and have low educational attainment; to face unemployment, poverty, and welfare dependency; to experience more rapid repeat pregnancy; to become single mothers; and to experience divorce if they do marry (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1994; Hoffman, 2006). Similarly, it appears that children of adolescent mothers are also placed at a disadvantage developmentally, scoring significantly lower on health and social well-being indicators than children of older mothers (Hoffman, 2006; Santelli & Melnikas, 2010).

In describing trends in adolescent fertility, authors Santelli and Melnikas (2010) discuss factors that influence adolescent fertility in a conceptualized framework that discusses both distal and proximate variables. Distal variables include biopsychosocial factors (e.g., age at puberty, poverty, and race/ethnicity), as well as socioeconomic status, parental educational attainment, family structure and functioning, community and peer influences, access to education and success in school, pubertal timing, resiliency and
connectedness to family and community, engagement in risk-taking behaviors, and having experienced sexual coercion and abuse (Blum & Mmari, 2006; Kirby, Laris, & Rolleri, 2006).

Santelli and Melnikas (2010) advise researchers to grasp more refined understanding of the changing adolescent fertility rates, stating the influence of factors as not always consistent or obvious. Conversely, social factors appear to be critical influences to the historical declines in teen and adult fertility. The social antecedents of adolescent childbearing is a contentious debate suggesting that adolescent mothers are simply mothers afflicted by poverty or adolescents making logical choices in resource-constrained environments. In contrast to this is the concept that adolescent fertility is also an important contributor to poverty and the perpetuation of intergenerational cycles of poverty (Santelli & Melnikas, 2010).

The majority of this study discusses adolescent childbearing from an Adlerian framework. However, additional theoretical foundations and resources from models of youth and family development should be considered with specific emphasis on adolescents and their family systems. Adolescent parents are unique; therefore it is essential that practitioners and program developers understand the need for additional theoretical content, including family constellation and Ecological theory. Effective intervention and prevention approaches to youth and family programs must consider the multi-facets of individual development.

The influence of specific factors to adolescent childbearing is not always obvious. The gap in research on the influences of the experience of adolescent childbearing and family
constellation places a need for further exploration. Therefore, a more refined understanding of how adolescent mothers perceive their family constellation is necessary in the comprehension of critical influences to adolescent childbearing. The purpose of this research is to study and gain a greater understanding of the lived experiences of adolescent mothers’ perceptions of family constellation. That is, this research is seeking to identify the quality of adolescents’ relationships with parent/guardian(s), as well as siblings to better understand how families influence childbearing decisions.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

By age 19, 70% of adolescents have become sexually experienced (Guttmacher Institute, 2011). Investigation into the factors associated with adolescent sexual risk taking is needed to help reduce and prevent negative consequences of this behavior (Kohler, Manhart, & Lafferty, 2008). The social antecedents that place at risk of poverty and disadvantage are only further perpetuated with adolescent childbearing. Adolescent childbearing is defined socially and behaviorally, thus in order to understand the problem(s) one must look at the individual circumstances of adolescent mothers. The following literature review highlights research and literature on the subsequent topics to examine the influences that perceptions of the family constellation may have on adolescent parents sense of belonging and experience/decision to have a child during adolescence. These include: (1) Adlerian theory and perceptions of the family constellation; (2) perceptions of birth order and sibling influences; (3) perceptions of parental relationships and attitudes; (4) perceptions of family atmosphere, and (5) individual and familial demographic factors.

2.2 Adler’s Perception of Family Constellation

Adler’s (1931) phenomenological assessment was discussed as five birth positions: only, oldest, second of only two, middle, and youngest.
Sibling Position (Numerical and Psychosocial)

The sibling position, both numerical and psychosocial, is influenced by birth-order (including behaviors and attitudes of the siblings among each other); comparisons with sibling, which parent the child most or least favors or resembles; and the child’s sex (including traditional parental preferences). Adler (1931) emphasized the lived experience or essence of interpretation of family position (or perceived place within the family), as the lens from which children view the world. Similarly, Bitter et al. state the following: “It is the actions and interactions within the family and the interpretations that each person assigns to these that give initial meaning to children’s lives and to the family as a whole” (Bitter, Roberts, & Sonstegard, 2002, p.46).

Parental Attitudes

Adler (1956) introduced the idea that individual attitudes and behaviors are learned within the family, which is the child’s first experience with society. The healthiest power one can have is influence, especially in families (Adler, 1956). It is through influence and interconnectedness that parents guide, model, and encourage appropriate behaviors, as well as appropriate relationships. Encouragement, as described by Dreikurs and Soltz (1964), “is more important than any other aspect of child-raising;” further, “it is so important that the lack of it can be considered the basic cause for misbehavior…a misbehaving child is a discouraged child” (p. 36). Parental modeling is important as children seek to understand adult roles and social norms. This imitation in play and imagination become the foundation for later adult self-definitions and relationships. Reiterating Adler’s (1956) assertions that
how a child perceives parental behavior in adult roles is the foremost authority on how the eventual adult will adopt, adapt, accept, or reject those same roles for the self. Therefore, what is learned in the family (i.e., the child’s first experience with community) is central to one’s later self-image, relationships, work, marital choices, parenting, moral behavior, and how one pursues personal goals.

*Family Atmosphere*

Adler (1964) enumerates cooperation, empathy, the feeling of belonging, contribution to the common welfare, understanding others, and the use of reason or common sense. Social interest involves an “evaluative attitude” which determines choice, influences individual dynamics, and reflects on the direction of the individual’s life-style:

By social interest or social feeling, we understand something different from that which other authors understand. When we say it is a feeling, we are certainly justified in doing so. But it is more than a feeling; it is an evaluative attitude toward life.

(Adler, 1964, p.135)

Social interest is created through an individual’s social context and is fostered and developed in early childhood as well as through later life experiences. Feelings of belonging, or social interest, take place in the psyche of individuals. Therefore an individual’s development is permeated by the relationships of society to him (Adler, 1964). It is these relationships that foster the development of social interest and determine the degree of positive development.

Sherman and Dinkmeyer (1987) describe the family atmosphere as the conjunction of all the family force and the climate of relationships that exist between people:
An essential ingredient in family atmosphere is the manner in which the members communicate. Who speaks to whom? Do they tend to be hostile, critical, commanding, direct, indirect, attentive, preoccupied, active, passive, cooperative, competitive? Are they warm, caring, and able to negotiate differences? Do they utilize double messages, create openness or rigidity, fear or seriousness? Is there a sense of tension, challenge, or ease? (p. 10)

Family atmosphere includes several interrelated components including, but not limited to, the family’s social statues, the views and definitions of itself, the homes emotional climate, daily life in the home, and family ideas about correct behavior.

*Perceptions of Family Constellation*

Very few research studies explore the conceptual framework of family constellation holistically. Of those few studies, Baxter et al. (2009) reproduce and extend two classic studies of the lay perception of “family,” from Trost’s (1990) survey of Swedish asolescents and Ford’s (1994) replication of this study in the United States. To better understand the conceptual framework of “family,” and in order to adapt the aforementioned studies and rule out previous bias, the study by Baxter et al. made four distinct changes: (1) Swedish names in surveys were changed to names more recognizable to Americans; (2) seven additional family compositions were added to the sixteen specific scenarios to best encompass current demographics and the changing diversity of family; (3) questionnaire statements were changed from dichotomous answer choices (e.g., yes or no) to a Likert-type scale (e.g., 7-point scale indicating the extent); and (4) communication-related variables were included to
understand the interrelated structural/functional features and communication in family (e.g., “a family” vs. “family”).

Perceptual data was collected and analyzed from 181 university students on the family status of 23 structural constellations. Similar to previous studies, results suggested the presence of children, marriage, intact family structures (including shared co-residence), heterosexuality (only if children were not present), and non-fictive unions increased family status perceptions. Most importantly, all structural constellations displayed increased perception of family status when frequent communication was present. Emphasizing the importance of regular communication as part of family identity (Baxter et al., 2009).

2.3 Ecological Theory and Adolescent Childbearing

Like Adlerian theory, Urie Bronfenbrenner’s theory of ecology (1979) states that humans, especially youth, are part of multiple systems: family, community, and society. These systems are interconnected and interact with individuals to affect their growth and development. Taking an ecological perspective to adolescent pregnancy means understanding individuals are part of a system. Five systems make up the ecological framework: (1) Microsystem, or the unit of analysis (e.g., individual/family); (2) Mesosystem, which connects the Microsystems and Exosystems (e.g., work and family or school and family); (3) Exosystem, which are larger systems (e.g., school, work, and sometimes family); (4) Macrosystem, the forces that predominate society (e.g., cultural, political, and historical); and (5) Chronosystem, the development of continual changes over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).
The underlying assumption of ecological theory is interaction: when one part of an ecosystem changes it inevitably influences another.

Bronfenbrenner’s work emphasized the importance of families being connected with multiple systems in their environment. Adolescents, as well as families are highly influenced by familial, political, cultural, and societal systems and norms. In family life and youth development, it is imperative to apply ecological theory to understand the environmental and social trajectories within the family that lead to adolescent childbearing. Adolescent parents are unique; therefore it is essential that practitioners and program developers understand the need for additional theoretical content, including family constellation and ecological theory. Effective intervention and prevention approaches to youth and family programs must consider the multi-facets of individual development.

2.4 Perceptions of Birth Order and Sibling Influences

Although limited research has been conducted on sibling relationships when compared to other familial relationships, the research that has been conducted shows that siblings are central in the lives of individuals and families across the life span (Whiteman, McHale, & Soli, 2011). Research by Whiteman et al. (2011) shows that siblings serve as companions, confidants, and role models, as well as sources of support. Their research supports that teens exposed to siblings who have become parents as teenagers are at an increased risk of teenage childbearing.

McHale, Updegraff, and Whiteman (2012) discuss the influences of sibling relationships in childhood and adolescence. Siblings are building blocks of family structure
and play a central role in family dynamics. Therefore, the interpretation of sibling influences must be studied from an interdisciplinary approach that integrates conceptual methodology in research. McHale et al. (2012) discuss five interdisciplinary approaches that are key to understanding siblings centrality in family life, sources of variation, and the significance of siblings for child and adolescent development: (1) sociological and social psychological approaches; (2) psychoanalytic and ethological groundings of a developmental perspective; (3) learning and social learning perspectives; (4) contributions from behavior genetics; and (5) cross-cultural perspectives (McHale et al., 2012). McHale et al. (2012) conclude that individual, family, and extra familial forces shape sibling relationships. In relation to adolescent parenting, siblings of adolescent parents may be at an increased risk of having children at an early age because of the exposure of childbearing and the confounding family variables that influenced adolescent childbearing.

2.5 Perceptions of Parental Relationships and Attitudes

Previous research indicates that both parenting and psychological variables influence adolescents’ romantic relationships and sexual behavior (Zimmer-Gembeck & Hefland, 2008). In a study by Kerpelman et al. (2013), associations between adolescents’ perceptions of parenting practices, adolescents’ self-perceptions (i.e., the psychological variables of self-esteem and dating identity exploration), and risky sexual behaviors were explored. Data was collected using a sample of 680 African American and European American sexually active adolescents from public high schools in the southeast. Results indicated risky sexual behavior was associated positively with parental psychological control, and negatively with self-
esteem and dating identity exploration. Furthermore, parental support was shown to be a positive predictor of self-esteem and dating identity exploration. In addition, psychological control was also positively correlated with dating identity exploration. Kerpelman et al. (2013) also found that dating identity exploration may serve as a protective factor for high-risk youth (e.g., males, African Americans), and psychological control was detrimental for older adolescents. Interestingly, Kerpelman et al. (2013) also noted that youth varied depending on their family variables (e.g., youth living in single-parent and two-parent biological/adoptive families differed from youth living with stepfamilies).

According to Hofferth and Goldscheider (2010), an increased amount of children have been exposed to a variety of new family structures due to an increase in out-of-wedlock childbearing and rise in divorce rates. However, little research has investigated the consequences of childhood family structure and family process on the likelihood of adolescent men and women becoming first-time unmarried parents, also known as “fragile families.” Given this critical need for research, Hofferth and Goldscheider (2010) explored these confounding variables.

Using data on children of women from a longitudinal sample of the 1979 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79), information from birth to adolescence was collected and analyzed. Research by Hofferth and Goldscheider (2010) identified several factors with early parenthood for both adolescent men and women specifically relating family structure to socioeconomic status, family processes, and problematic adolescent behaviors. In both cases, intergenerational factors appeared as a critical element to
transitioning to early parenthood, especially in men. For example, boys who experienced instability, multiple transitions, and/or had a single parent household tended to replicate this pattern as they entered adulthood and became parents (e.g., they were less likely to marry and more likely to become nonresidential fathers). Similar results were found for females who lacked a father figure during childhood or who experienced multiple father figures. These women were more likely to transition to single and/or married motherhood early. However, these women were not likely to transition to cohabiting motherhood (Hofferth & Goldscheider, 2010). Most importantly, this research placed emphasis on the effects of instability and social learning in family structure on the transition to early parenthood.

According to Hillis et al. (2010) family strengths during childhood and adolescence may protect teens from getting pregnant, having risky sexual behaviors, as well as dealing with a wide variety of psychosocial problems. Family strengths include, but are not limited to, closeness, support, loyalty, love, protection, and responsiveness to healthcare needs.

In order to examine these correlations, Hillis et al. (2010) surveyed approximately 4648 women age 19 and older to assess family strengths, family closeness, support, loyalty, protection, affection (e.g., feelings of being loved and important), and responsiveness to healthcare needs during childhood (e.g., the first 18 years of their life). Through their research, Hillis et al. (2010) found significant correlations between positive childhood experiences and resilience to a variety of risk factors suggesting strengths during childhood and adolescence are associated with teens positive health related choices. Specifically, the
authors linked supportive and communicative families with teen girls’ delayed initiation of sex, reduced amount of sex partners, and increased use of condoms when compared to peers.

The research by Hillis et al. (2010) supports the concept of individual/family strengths serving as preventative factors to adolescent pregnancy and psychosocial problems. Most importantly, their research advocates for adolescent participation in youth development programs that promote positive youth development as a way to attain family/individual strengths (e.g., characterized by support and closeness through quality relationships with peers and mentors). Emphasizing the preventative role these relationships may fulfill as a need for closeness otherwise sought through sex (Hillis et al., 2010).

Centrally important in shaping adolescents’ sexual activity are family relationships and parenting behaviors. Relationships within a family are bidirectional and mutually influential, suggesting that family context may affect adolescent sexual behaviors in several ways. Parents provide children with their primary source of socialization through emotional connectedness, behavioral constraints, and modeling—all of which affect children’s development of self-regulation, emotional expression, and expectations regarding behaviors and relationships (Gray & Steinberg, 1999; Hawkins & Weis, 1985). As children transition into adolescence, distal monitoring facilitates healthy decision-making and shelters adolescents from risky situations (Gray & Steinberg, 1999).

When analyzing teens’ engagement in risky sexual activity, Coley et al. (2009) discuss the complexity of family relations and separate dyads within the family system. Monitoring, parent-child warmth, and joint activities descriptive of positive communicative
relationships may serve as conduits influencing adolescent sexual risk behaviors. Extending upon previous research, Coley et al. (2009) seek to assess whether parenting practices predict changes in adolescent sexual risk behaviors and whether adolescent sexual risk behaviors predict changes in parenting.

Using a sample from 3,206 adolescents aged 13-18 and their residential parents, Coley et al. (2009) access the bidirectional links to adolescent engagement in risky sexual activity and multiple aspects of parenting, including maternal and paternal knowledge of adolescents’ friends and activities, as well as the frequency of family activities. Within individuals, they found that increases in regular family activities predicted declines in adolescents’ risky sexual activities. Furthermore, increases in risky sexual activity correlated with increased father knowledge. Between-subjects analysis showed bidirectional correlates between decreased adolescent risky sexual activity and increased parental involvement (i.e., family activities and father knowledge). More significantly, these correlations between parenting and adolescent sexual risk behaviors continued to be prevalent in a controlled longitudinal design. Results implied gender differences between parents and children, indicating two primary concepts: (1) male and female children may respond differently to parental engagement across families; and (2) fathers and mothers may respond differently to within individual shifts in adolescent sexual risk behavior (Coley et al., 2009).

Manlove et al. (2012) examined how the family environment is associated with the relationship context of first sex, an important indicator of reproductive health risk. Using data from the 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Manlove et al. (2012) sought to
evaluate the correlations between the family environment, parent-parent relationships, parent-adolescent relationships, and family structures influence on the relationship context of first heterosexual sexual intercourse, distinguishing between the transition to first sex in serious and casual relationships.

Manlove et al. (2012) identified aspects of the family environment linked to the relationship context of first sex with 25% of females and 43% of males having sex in a casual relationship by age 18. Interestingly, for both males and females, increased parental monitoring and greater family routines were associated with reduced risk of transitioning to first sex in a casual relationship versus having no sex. However, some influential variables differed for males and females: (1) in two-parent families, for females having a strong father-adolescent relationship correlated with a reduced risk of transitioning to casual sex; and (2) for males only, the presence of a strong maternal-adolescent relationship correlated to a reduced risk of first sex in a casual relationship.

2.6 Perceptions of Family Atmosphere

According to Haldre, Rahu, Rahu, and Karro (2009) the determinants of teenage sexual health, including pregnancies, can be addressed from social, familial, and individual level perspectives. Morals and values in context of societal norms, as well as social systems are influential to individual’s lives. These familial and individual determinants are specifically influential to individual’s sexual health, thus reinforcing the importance of examining the socio-ecological contexts in which adolescents engage including individual
relationships (e.g., parents, partners), social groups (e.g., peers), and individual characteristics (e.g., knowledge, self-esteem, age at first intercourse).

The study by Haldre et al. (2009) served to examine the impact of the individual, family and family functioning on adolescent pregnancy among females 18 and younger. Using a sample of approximately 600 adolescent females, data was collected through questionnaires. Analyses concluded that the risk factors that appear to be related with adolescent pregnancy are characteristic of a lack of sexual health knowledge, dislike of school, and/or alcohol abuse by family members (Haldre et al., 2009).

Health behavior theorists posit that an individual’s perceptions and internalization of perceived social norms have proximal effects on health behaviors (Montano & Kasprzyk, 2002). Akers et al. (2011) sought to describe how personal, perceived peer, and perceived family attitudes toward adolescent sexual activity influence sexual behaviors of adolescent females’ over time. In a longitudinal study between 1999 and 2006, data was collected using quarterly and annual questionnaires from 358 English-speaking female adolescents, aged 14-17 years. Results suggested that participants perceived friends as having a greater acceptance toward adolescent sexual activity when compared with personal or perceived family attitudes. Furthermore, family attitudes were found to be less accepting than their own or their peers. Similar to previous research, an increase in sexual behavior correlated with increased age. Although, this correlation decreased as less positive personal or perceived family attitudes were discovered. Akers et al. (2011) conclude that adolescents’ personal
attitudes toward sex, particularly perceived importance of abstinence, may be the strongest predictor of reported sexual behaviors.

The reviewed literature each concludes different things as the strongest predictor of adolescent sexual activity. Demonstrating that the difficulty with identifying causality for adolescent sexual behaviors is that the association between specific factors and adolescent sexual behaviors is spurious rather than causal. Overall, studies that attempt to control for selection generally find that the causal effects are intertwined.

2.7 Individual and Familial Demographic Factors

Race/Ethnicity

When discussing the increased risk of adverse health outcomes for teen mothers, Casares, Lahiff, Eskenaze, and Halpern-Felsher (2010) hypothesize an increased risk for pregnant adolescents from disadvantaged racial/ethnic groups. In order to test this relationship, the researchers compared the effects of pregnancy for racial/ethnic minorities to that of white adolescents. They found that black and American Indian adolescent women had significantly higher rates of receiving public assistance, which increased if adolescent pregnancy occurred. Furthermore, the researchers also found that the chances of educational attainment decreased for white adolescents if they gave birth to a child. Most importantly, this study documents the increased risk of public assistance and low educational attainment for childbearing adolescents regardless of race. However, adolescent childbearing can affect groups differently. With regard to educational attainment, white adolescents who become pregnant are more disadvantaged than their white peers, whereas black adolescents in the
same situation may not be at an increased disadvantage (Casares et al., 2010). The findings from this study may be attributed to the lack of resources readily available to disadvantaged racial/ethnic groups.

The influence of specific factors to teenage childbearing is not always consistent or obvious. The gap in research on the influences of the experience of adolescent childbearing and family constellation places a need for further exploration. Therefore, a more refined understanding of how adolescent mothers perceive their family constellation is necessary in the comprehension of critical influences to teenage childbearing. Given that risk and protective factors associated with teen childbearing operate at the social and community level and at the level of the individual adolescent, it is important to look at how the choices and decisions to have a child during adolescence are influenced by the experience of family constellation. The disconnect between the perception of family constellation and teenage childbearing are better understood with a conceptual Adlerian framework to examine the behavioral and social factors that influence teenage childbearing. This study primarily uses an Adlerian framework to explore adolescent childbearing; however, the multi-facets of youth development make it imperative that ecological theory is also a notable consideration to individual experiences.

2.8 Research Questions

In order to better understand the experience of family constellation and adolescent childbearing, this study will analyze the lived experiences of adolescent mothers’ perceptions of their family constellation. Specifically, this research seeks identify the quality of
adolescents’ relationships with parent/guardian(s), as well as siblings, to better understand how families influence childbearing decisions through the following research questions:

1. How does the experience of family constellation affect the choices and decisions [that result in adolescent childbearing] to have a child during adolescence?

2. How does the quality of adolescents’ relationships with parent/guardian(s) affect the choices and decisions [that result in adolescent childbearing] to be an adolescent parent?

3. How does the quality of adolescents’ relationships with sibling(s) affect the choices and decisions [that result in teen parenting] to be an adolescent parent?
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This phenomenological study utilized a qualitative research methodology to investigate the lived experiences of adolescent mothers’ family constellation. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to explore and analyze how the experience of adolescent mothers’ perceptions of her family constellation influenced her adolescent childbearing. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meanings people construct and how they make sense of their world and their experiences (Merriam, 2009). Through a phenomenological approach, the present study seeks to identify the quality of adolescents relationships with parents and siblings.

Phenomenology is a research method, as well as a philosophical approach (Connel, 2003; Van Manen, 1990; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) define phenomenology as “a philosophical approach to the study of experience…[that] shares a particular interest in thinking about what the experience of being human is like, in all of its various aspects, but especially in terms of the things that matter to us, and which constitute our lived world” (p. 11). Further, as a research method, phenomenology is “…the rigorous and unbiased study of things as they appear so that one might come to an essential understanding of human consciousness and experience” (Valle et al., 1989, p. 6). Giorgi (1997) deliniates five rudimentary steps to conducting qualitative research: (1) collection of verbal data; (2) reading of the data; (3) breaking of the data into parts; (4) organization and
expression of the data from a disciplinary perspective; and (5) synthesis or summary of the data for purposes of communication to the scholarly community. In this research study, this methodology was followed.

3.2 Methods and Participants

Methods for this study were reviewed and approved by the North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board (IRB#: 3684). Former adolescent parents in the community were recruited using a convenience, snowball sampling technique in central North Carolina through. Snowball sampling is a technique where the researcher recruits a small group of participants that relate to the research question (Bryman, 2012). Participants were recruited through word of mouth with colleagues and family members via participation requests and contact information announcements sent out by the researcher (Appendix A). Participants who received the recruitment notification were allowed to suggest other potential participants who related to this study.

Of the 14 individuals contacted, 10 individuals signed up to be contacted with further information about the study. Those participants who completed and returned the participant request form were contacted via telephone (Appendix B), in which the researcher provided detailed information on the purpose of the study, the manner in which interviews would be conducted, the dates, times, and locations of where the interviews would take place (Appendix C), and the signing of consent forms (Appendix D). Of the 10 individuals contacted via phone, eight individuals signed up as participants for this study; six participants were actually interviewed for this study.
The study consisted of six females between the ages of 18 and 25 who became pregnant or had their first child between the ages of 14 and 19. The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder. Participants were asked to answer questions from a guided questionnaire (Appendix E). During the face-to-face interview process participants were asked a series of open-ended questions pertaining to their experiences with their family relationships.

Participants shared perceived experiences of their sibling and parental relationships within their family constellation. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour. Participants had the right to reject any question that they were not comfortable with answering. In addition, participants were informed on their consent form, as well as verbally, that they had the right to end the interview at any point in time if they felt the need to do so. Interviews took place in an area of the participant’s home where there was no audience or individuals who could interrupt the interview. At the conclusion of each interview, the researcher allowed participants to share any additional information they felt was relevant and ask any questions they may have. Furthermore, the participants were informed that they may be contacted further for clarification of information. Table 3.1 illustrates participant demographics for all six individuals that participated in the study.
Table 3.1

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current Age</strong></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parenting Structure in Family of Origin</strong></td>
<td>Experienced 1 parental marriage dissolution and remarriage.</td>
<td>Experienced 1 parental marriage dissolution and single parenthood.</td>
<td>Experienced 1 parental marriage dissolution and remarriage.</td>
<td>Experienced 2 parental marriage dissolutions and 3 remigrations.</td>
<td>Experienced 3 parental marriage dissolutions and 4 remigrations.</td>
<td>Experienced 2 parental marriage dissolutions and 3 remigrations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age During First Pregnancy/Childbearing Age</strong></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Children</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 (Pregnant with 2nd child)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 (Pregnant with 2nd child)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td>College Graduate</td>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>Expected College Graduate 2014</td>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current Socioeconomic Status (S.E.S)</strong></td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>Lower Class (Gov’t Support)</td>
<td>Lower Middle Class</td>
<td>Lower Class (Gov’t Support)</td>
<td>Upper Class</td>
<td>Lower Middle Class (Some Gov’t Support)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Status</strong></td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Single (Cohabiting)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 Data Collection

The current qualitative study used phenomenological inquiry through in-depth interviews to understand the lived experiences of six adolescent mothers. Scheduled interview dates took place throughout the months of December 2013 and January 2014. In phenomenological studies, collection of verbal data may be collected by straightforward
description, interview, or a combination of the two (Giorgi, 1997). Participants were given a choice of time and date to have their interview conducted face-to-face at the home of the subject. The researcher travelled to various areas of central North Carolina to interview participants.

Interviews were conducted in a private location of the participants’ households in order to ensure the confidentiality of participating subjects. The researcher conducted interviews with willing participants in order to identify if family relationships appear to influence the choices and decisions to have had a baby during adolescence. The duration of interviews were 45 minutes to an hour. All participants were required to sign an informed consent form to participate in the study, which ultimately allowed the researcher to use the individual as a willing participant. The completion of an informed consent form immediately after establishing the research procedures, but before data collection begins is recommended by researchers (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). A brief overview of the study, including expectations was given prior to the interview commencement. Interviews only began once the consent form was signed and the participants finished asking any questions they may have pertaining to the study. The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder; the recording was started immediately once the interview commenced.

3.4 Interview Instrument

A series of unstructured interview questions were asked (Appendix E) to measure the participant’s perception of the family constellation, as well as the participant’s perception of the quality of their adolescent relationships with parent/guardian(s) and the quality of
sibling(s) relationships. Questions used to collect data were guided interview questions formed by the researcher to provoke participants to open up about their parent/guardian(s), and sibling(s) relationships. Although the interview questions were scripted, conversations were phrased in a general and nondirective manner, which allows conversations to be flexible and adaptable to each participant’s unique experience. Interview questions are generally formed to be broad and open-ended, giving the subject opportunity to express their viewpoint extensively (Giorgi, 1997).

Questions such as “Tell me about your relationship with your parent/guardian(s)” and “How would you describe the quality of your relationships with your siblings?” aimed to provide insight on the participant’s experience of belonging within their family constellation. Participants were then asked to describe their concept of family and their family environment/atmosphere (e.g., strict, permissive, etc.). In order to reveal perceptions of the participant’s parental and sibling relationships, subjects were asked questions such as “Tell me about your sibling(s)” and “Talk to me about the quality of your relationships with your parent/guardian(s).” Participants were encouraged to answer questions with honesty and a thorough response in hopes that subjects would provide insight on their lived experiences within their family constellation. Thus, enabling the researcher to reveal similarities among relationships with their parent/guardian(s) and their sibling(s) relationships.

3.5 Methodology Analysis

The qualitative methodological approach used for this study was Moustakas’ adaptation of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen phenomenological analysis for qualitative studies,
which is comprised of four interconnecting steps: (1) the epoche; (2) phenomenological reduction; (3) imaginative variation; and (4) synthesis (Moustakas, 1994). Data for individual participants and the group were analyzed using textural themes. The following section describes the research process and the researcher.

*Phenomenology*

In the phenomenological approach, the first step is the *epoche*, a Greek work meaning to avoid, during which the researcher makes systematic efforts exclude one’s biases about the phenomenon being investigated (Moustakas, 1994). The epoche allows the researcher to be cognizant of the actual occurrences of the phenomenon by setting aside the predispositions and prejudices, which allows things, events, and people to be seen again, just like the first time (Moustakas, 1994). This reflective-meditative procedure allows preconceptions to enter and exit the researchers consciousness freely and, once ready, the prejudgments are written down, or bracketed (Moustakas, 1994). The subsequent section, methodology, describes the researchers application of the epoche process in this research study.

The second step, *phenomenological reduction*, is used to bring precision to the research findings (Giorgi, 1997). In order to understand each experience for what is, the researcher observes what is there with a conscious openness to understand how things come to be and use textural language to describe the external qualities of what they see, as well as the internal consciousness, through an “interweaving of person, conscious experience, and phenomenon… description leads to deeper layers of meaning” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 96). Giorgi (1997) discusses language as a medium providing the ability to communicate to others
“the objects of consciousness to which one is present, precisely as they are presented” (p. 241). In the subsequent section, methodology, the researcher describes the application of phenomenological reduction for this research study.

The steps of phenomenological reduction start with the researchers setting aside all preconceived notions, therefore allowing the focus to remain solely on the research. The condition of the phenomenon that provides character is determined by researchers being receptive and giving each statement equal value, also known as horizontalization of data (Moustakas, 1994). Irrelevant and/or repetitive statements are discarded, which allows the remaining horizons to be grouped into themes. Subsequent themes become the basis for a textural description of the phenomenon. Textural descriptions are formed through the repetition of observation and description of a pattern. Textural qualities (i.e., descriptions that illustrate a range of intensities, sizes, shapes, and colors within an experiential background) eventually allow themes or layers to emerge that may not have been previously observed (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological research continues with step three, imaginative variation, which is used to construct structural themes from textural meanings (Moustakas, 1994). In describing this phenomenon, researchers state: “It is articulation, based on intuition, a fundamental meaning without which a phenomenon could not present itself as it is” (Giorgi, 1997, p. 242). Finally, the fundamental descriptions are combined into a statement of the essences derived from the experiences of the entire phenomenon through step four, the synthesis of meanings
and essences (Giorgi, 1997). In the subsequent section, methodology, the researchers application of imaginative variation is discussed.

The Researcher

In the epoche process of the phenomenological approach, the researcher remains free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon obtained from prior experiences or studies. Personal experiences commonly influence researchers topics of qualitative research. In data analysis, self-disclosure has helped researchers validate participants’ stories, while also maintaining a sense of respect for participants and their lived experiences. The subsequent section will discuss the researcher’s association with the topic under study and her use of the epoche process.

The researcher has had not had personal experiences with adolescent childbearing in her own family constellation, although she did work in collaboration with co-workers to develop an evidence-based teen parenting program initiative. The researcher’s interest in this study stems from her own lived experiences with perceiving her place of belonging within her family constellation. Frequently, researchers seek to find clarity on sensitive topics that have taken place in their lives (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2007).

The researcher had the unique opportunity to be a part of two completely different family systems. This shifting and sometimes unstable environment conveyed varying levels of functionality throughout the researcher’s life. With her family constellation changing dramatically at such a young age, the researcher was unable to develop a sustainable sense of belonging within her family system. In the researcher’s opinion, the absence of regular, close
parent-child communication impeded her ability to create critical familial connections, resulting in a perceived lack of support and sense of belonging within her family constellation.

Now that she is an emerging adult, the researcher has worked to mend her relationships with her guardians and siblings. In spite of her experiences from past relationships and other unsuccessful encounters, the researcher has been able to learn from her lived experiences and use these lessons to maintain a positive perception of family constellation, as she believes with continual work that she will be able to develop healthy familial relationships.

Despite the lived experiences of the researcher, it was important that she remained open to the experiences of the participants in the study. In order to remain unbiased and objective, the researcher practiced the epoche process by identifying and listing preconceived ideas of developing and maintaining relationships within adolescents’ family constellation. To ensure the focus remained on the experiences of the participants during data collection and analysis, the researcher recorded notes and important points during and after each interview.

*Phenomenological Methodology*

This study sought to bring insight to how adolescent mothers’ perceptions of their family constellation influence the choices and decisions [that result in teen parenting] to have had a baby during adolescence. The researcher used Moustakas’s model of phenomenological studies, as well as Moustakas’s (1994) version of Stevick-Colaiassi-Keen’s
model of phenomenological analysis for qualitative studies to complete the data collection and analysis process.

As described in the previous section, Moustakas (1994) model uses textural descriptions to analyze data. Textural descriptions are those that are apparent and include verbatim examples from the participant. The researcher recorded verbatim transcripts for each participant and then coded the transcripts and reviewed them for accuracy and themes. Many of the participant’s data included similar codes and themes; only a few themes were specific to individual participants. The following section contains descriptions of each individual participant, along with textural descriptions, including verbatim examples pulled from each participant’s interview.

Table 3.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terminology</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Textural Description</td>
<td>Description of the lived experiences of the participant from the verbatim transcribed interview. Lived experiences of the participant are described for each textural theme identified.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Definition adapted from Moustakas (1994)*

*Data Analysis*

The data analysis process began with the researcher listening to the interviews verbatim, while recording her reaction to the expressed experiences of the participants. The
researcher reviewed the notes written for each interview, in which noticeable themes began to emerge. The researcher then listened to the verbatim transcripts again, while reviewing her documented notes to confirm and further identify themes in the data. The recorded sessions were then transcribed and reviewed by the researcher to ensure validity. A North Carolina State University graduate student, and peer to the researcher, reviewed the transcribed interviews over a two-week process to check for accuracy. Textural themes were then identified from the data for individual participants and the group. The following section introduces the six participants of this study.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS & DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The present phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of adolescent mothers within their family constellation. In the subsequent chapter, the data collection and analysis methodology is presented. The findings in this chapter represent the data acquired through guided interviews that were conducted with six adolescent mothers.

4.2 Composite Description of the Sample

The sample for this study consisted of six adolescent mothers between the ages of 18 and 25, all of whom had a child between the ages of 14 and 19. Participants were located in rural and suburban areas of central North Carolina. Participants’ socioeconomic statuses (SES) were defined through observation, as well as self-defined through participants’ description of upbringing. Four of the participants were from a lower SES, with three of them on government support; one participant self-identified as upper class, and one as middle class. The sample did consist of one married participant, while the other five participants were single, with one participant cohabiting with the father of her child. Of the six participants, three participants finished and graduated high school, one participant received their GED, and two participants completed college (undergraduate education).

The six participants lived experiences consisted of obstacles from their family constellation and suffered instability from financial, parental transitions, and fatherlessness. All six participants experienced familial commonalities of parental marriage dissolution
during early childhood. Five of the participants grew up in blended two-parent families, as a result of parental dissolution and remarriage. One participant was raised in a single-parent household after the occurrence of parental dissolution during early childhood. Three of the six participants experienced parental dissolution and remarriage two or more times during childhood (i.e., the dissolution of their biological parents’ marriage, as well as dissolution of one of more step-parent marriage).

In the following section, the descriptions and themes for each of the six participants in this study are discussed. In order to more fully appreciate each participant’s lived experiences from a holistic perspective, textural descriptions were constructed from transcribed interviews using Moustakas (1994) approach to data analysis. The following table includes repetition some repetition from Table 3.1, while also including brief descriptions of the findings, quotes for the textural themes found in the research, as well as which participants identify with what themes are displayed in Table 4.1.
### Table 4.1

**Textural Themes Identified in the Data For Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textural Themes</th>
<th>Participant 1</th>
<th>Participant 2</th>
<th>Participant 3</th>
<th>Participant 4</th>
<th>Participant 5</th>
<th>Participant 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perception of Upbringing (e.g., Household Demographics)</strong></td>
<td>Grew up in a middle class household in rural North Carolina. Experienced 1 parental marriage dissolution and remarriage. Is the oldest of 4 children, with 2 younger half sisters and a younger half brother.</td>
<td>Grew up in a lower class household in rural North Carolina. Experienced 1 parental marriage dissolution and remained in a single-parent household with her twin brother and mother. Has an older sister that remained with her father after parental marriage dissolution.</td>
<td>Grew up in a lower middle class household in rural North Carolina. Experienced 1 parental marriage dissolution and remarriage. Is the oldest of 3 children, with a younger half-sister and younger stepbrother.</td>
<td>Grew up in a middle class household, experiencing instability throughout her early childhood and adolescence. Instability was attributed to several relocation/moves (Kentucky, Alabama, Georgia, Alabama, Georgia, and North Carolina) and parental transitions. Experienced 2 parental marriage dissolutions and 3 remarriages. Is one of 5 children, with 2 older biological sisters, a younger half-sister, a younger half brother, and a stepsister.</td>
<td>Grew up in lower middle class household in rural North Carolina and relocated to a nearby upper class suburban area during early childhood. Experienced 3 parental marriage dissolutions and 4 remarriages. With the 4th marriage (3rd stepdad) ending when he passed away from a chronic illness. Is the youngest of two children with an older brother.</td>
<td>Grew up in a lower middle class suburban area of North Carolina. Experienced 2 parental marriage dissolutions and 3 remarriages. Has an identical twin sister and a younger half-sister. Upbringing marked by instability and feelings of insecurity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Emotional Climate</td>
<td>Strict household; Stepdad enforced rules and discipline/punishment.</td>
<td>Strict household; Mother enforced the rules and discipline/punishment.</td>
<td>Strict household; Stepfather enforced the rules and discipline/punishment.</td>
<td>Calm/Permissive; Mother enforced household rules and decisions.</td>
<td>Mixed with permissive and strict; Rules, discipline/punishment enforced by whichever parent was present.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Family is very very important. Whenever you don’t have anyone else to rely on, you can rely on family; it is a give and take thing. You support one another as they support you. I think family is the foundation for success in life, or your outcome in life…so if your family unit is broken, you’re going to have some issues growing up”.</td>
<td>“Family is having traditions, rituals, and planning future events together, similar to what you would see in a picture family”.</td>
<td>“Family…it is somebody that is there…friends can also be considered as family if you have been through a lot with each other”.</td>
<td>“Family is just an environment where you feel safe, loved, cared about. It doesn’t matter who its made up of or how many people there are. As long as you have support and stability”.</td>
<td>“Family is people that you can always count on, trust, and know that they are there for you no matter what…they support you”.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of Individual Role in Family</td>
<td>Played a caregiving role for her siblings.</td>
<td>Role was to help her mom out by cooking, cleaning, and general household tasks.</td>
<td>Percieved role was to set a positive “good” example for her younger siblings.</td>
<td>Percieved as the “blacksheep” and troublemaker, causing her mother the most stress out of all her siblings.</td>
<td>Percieved as the oldest in the family, despite having an older brother and being the peacemaker.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of Quality of Relationships with Sibling(s)</td>
<td>Oldest of 4 children (12 years senior) with twin half sisters and a half brother. Closer with her twin sisters than with her brother.</td>
<td>Percieved to have a strong relationship with siblings despite not being raised with her older sister. Closest with twin brother.</td>
<td>Percieved to have a positive relationship with siblings. Closer with her younger half-sister. Although positive with her stepbrother she percieved the relationship as slower to develop due to the age difference, almost 7 years senior when he emerged in her life, causing a transitional time period for the relationship to develop and adjust to the changes of having a stepbrother.</td>
<td>Percieved to have decent relationships with all of her siblings. However there were discrepancies. She was closer with her two older biological sisters, as they shared similar interests and personalities. Percieved the relationship with them as supportive with trust and frequent positive communication. Relationship with younger half-sister and younger-half brother were marked by feelings of differential treatment. The relationship with her youngest sibling, her half-brother was distant because of the 10 year age difference. The relationship with her younger half-sister was distant and hostile with feelings of resentment.</td>
<td>Percieved her relationship as positive with her identical twin sister as “an inseperable bond”; feelings of warmth, frequent communication, and support. Her relationship with her younger half-sister is positive. With a 13 year age difference (sibling is 13 years younger), the relationship is characterized as being more of an aunt with her younger sister than a sibling role.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.1 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental Expectations and Values</th>
<th>Academic success (grades, school) and religion (having a close relationship with God).</th>
<th>Respecting her mother, helping out around the house, and academic (school) success.</th>
<th>Importance placed on doing the best she could with her education.</th>
<th>Demonstrating respect for parental and adult authority figures, manners, completing household chores and tasks.</th>
<th>Education, good grades, and participants overall well-being (being fulfilled and happy).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception of Quality of Relationship with Parent and/or Guardian(s)</td>
<td>Felt distant from biological father and stepfather (emotionally cold). Admired stepfathers work ethic and intelligence. Positive relationship with her mother; feelings of support, communication, and emotional warmth.</td>
<td>Negative relationship with father due to absence in her life (emotional and physical distance). Positive close relationship with mother; feelings of support, communication, trust and emotional warmth.</td>
<td>No relationship with biological father. Relationship with 2nd father figure (stepfather that adopted her) was influenced by the relationship with younger half-sister (his daughter). Perceived as positive until half-sister was born, then changed to distant; feelings of differential treatment, emotional distance, lack of support. Relationship with 2nd stepfather is positive; feelings of support, open communication, and warmth. Relationship with mother is very close and positive; feelings of warmth, support, trust, mutual respect and open communication.</td>
<td>No relationship with biological father or the 3 stepfathers; perceived as distant, lacking emotional warmth and communication. Relationship with mother is very close and positive; feelings of warmth, support, trust, mutual respect and open communication.</td>
<td>Although she had no relationship with her biological father during childhood, she has now developed a strong relationship with him. Relationship with her stepfather was positive and close, as he raised them and shared custody after the marriage dissolution. Relationship with her second stepfather was perceived as distant because she never spent time with him or developed a relationship with him. She had the closest relationship with her mother, describing her as a friend; feelings of support, warmth, and communication.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.1 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception of Family Contribution to Adolescent Childbearing Decision</th>
<th>Perception of support from family that contributes to adjustment and success.</th>
<th>Did not perceive family as a contribution, but did believe they have helped with adjustment and have played a supportive role throughout her pregnancies.</th>
<th>Did not perceive her family as a contributing factor to her childbearing. <em>Note on family contribution: “I don’t think anything contributed…because I didn’t plan on being a parent”.</em></th>
<th>Perceived her family as supportive, which contributed to her having children during adolescence. Her experiences with family in the context of multiple parental transitions, specifically father figures, influenced her decision to maintain a relationship with her childrens father.</th>
<th>Did not perceive her family as a contribution, but did not that her mother had children young. She also perceived her family as a source of support throughout childbearing.</th>
<th>Did not perceive her family as a contribution, but did note that her mother had children young. She also perceived her family as a source of support throughout childbearing.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception of Sibling Contribution to Adolescent Childbearing Decision</td>
<td>Did not perceive siblings as contributing to childbearing decisions, but did believe they helped her prepare for motherhood because she cared for them regularly.</td>
<td>Did not perceive siblings contributed to childbearing decisions, but did believe they played a supportive role before and after childbearing.</td>
<td>Did not perceive siblings as a contributing factor to childbearing.</td>
<td>Did not perceive siblings as contributing to childbearing decisions, but did believe (with the exception of her younger-half-sister) that they played a supportive role before and after childbearing.</td>
<td>Did not perceive sibling as a contributing factor, but did feel that he has played a supportive role before and after childbearing.</td>
<td>Did not perceive her siblings as contributing to childbearing, but did believe that her twin sister played a supportive role throughout childbearing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.1 Continued

| Perceived Relationship with Parent/Guardian(s) Contribution to Adolescent Childbearing Decision | Did not think parents contributed to her decision to have or keep her child, but did think they contributed to her becoming pregnant. Perceived her parents as overbearing and strict, so she engaged in a lot of risky behavior. | Did not perceive her relationship with her parents to have contributed to her adolescent childbearing decisions. However, she believes her mother modeled positive parenting and would like to do the same for her children. | Did not perceive her relationship with parent/guardian(s) as a contributing factor. But did perceive them as sources of support and security. | Did not perceive her relationship with parent/guardian(s) as being a contributing factor because she didn’t think adolescent childbearing was a decision. “I mean it just happened and I went with it, I mean I decided not to abort”. However, she did perceive her mother as a source of support and security. | Did not perceive her relationship with parent/guardians as being a contributing factor to becoming an adolescent parent, but did believe they played a major role in the process with maintaining a positive, supportive environment. | Did not perceive her relationship with her parent/guardians as contributing, but did perceive her mother and biological father as sources of support. |

Note: Textural descriptions were derived from the lived experiences of participants. Not all participants shared experiences that were identified with each theme.
4.3 Participant Descriptions

Textural Description for Participant One (P1)

Participant One (P1) is 24 year old, single African American female from a rural area of North Carolina. Although she had her first child at the age of 19, she was still able to graduate college. She currently lives with her mother, stepfather, and her three younger half-siblings (2 twin sisters; 1 brother) and son in a middle class household. P1 grew up in a two-parent home for the first few years of her life, but quickly found herself transitioning into a single-parent home upon the dissolution of her mothers marriage and departure of her father. She remained in a single-parent home until the age of 10, when her mother ultimately was remarried, and remained married for the remainder of her adolescence.

From the transcribed interview with P1, 10 textural themes were identified: (1) perception of upbringing (household demographics), (2) household emotional climate, (3) concept of family, (4) perception of individual role in family, (5) perception of quality of relationships with sibling(s), (6) parental expectations and values, (7) perception of quality of relationships with parent and/or guardian(s), (8) perception of family contribution to adolescent childbearing decision, (9) perception of sibling(s) contribution to adolescent childbearing decision, and (10) perception of relationship with parent/guardian(s) contribution to adolescent childbearing decision.

The first theme that emerged with participant one was her perception of her upbringing. “I had a really happy childhood, but things started to change when my mom remarried and we moved (to a new city) to live with my stepdad.” As she continued she
stated “I had a hard time adjusting to living with a stepparent...because even though he was a good provider, he was not emotionally supportive, ever.” The participant described her family as being normal middle class, very supportive, providing her with a positive set example and a stable upbringing (they lived in the same house for over 16 years).

Although she states her parents were strict, she also believed it was good for her. This is where the second theme began to emerge from the participant’s family emotional climate. The participant stated her family was “definitely strict...more so my stepfather, he made the decisions in the family.” When discussing discipline and punishment, the participant believed that “kids are kind of seen not heard.” She continued with “there wasn’t a lot of physical punishment” although there were “a lot of privileges taken away, definitely a lot of yelling.”

The next theme was identified when discussing her concept of family and her description of her family. “Family is very very important. Whenever you don’t have anyone else to rely on, you can rely on family. You should be able to trust family; it is a give and take thing. You support one another as they support you. I think family is the foundation for success in life, or your outcome in life...so if your family unit is broken, you’re going to have some issues growing up.”

P1 was the oldest of 4 children with a 12 year difference between herself and three younger half-siblings. Since she was 12 years senior, she believed to have played a caregiving role in the family and had a hand in raising her siblings; theme four.
In the fifth theme, perception of quality of relationship with siblings, the participant described her experiences with her siblings. “It was fun to take care of them and I always liked kids.” With the significant age gap between her siblings and herself, the participant stated being closer with her twin sisters than with her brother “they were like my baby before I had my baby.” In theme six, the P1 elaborated with her perception of whether her siblings influenced her adolescent childbearing decisions. “I do not think my siblings contributed to my decision to be a parent, but I think they helped me prepare for it because I took care of them.”

The seventh theme emerged when P1 discussed what her parental expectations were and what she perceived her parents held to be most important. She received praise anytime her grades were good, in terms of expectations “they cared about grades the most.” She then added the importance of religion to her parents “I had to watch Christian programming every night, they really wanted me to have a close relationship with God and do really well academically.”

The eighth was identified was the discussion of perceptions of quality of relationships parent/guardian(s). Growing up, P1 felt distant from both her biological father and her stepfather. Her biological father left when she was two years old and she believed he was absent for an extended period of time. “I do not include him as a parent or in that role because he wasn’t there. We probably talked a few times a year for several years, but I want nothing to do with him because he is an alcoholic and needs help first.” Although her stepfather was present for the majority of her childhood and adolescence, she felt distant
from him due to a lack of communication, “I can’t talk to him, he doesn’t listen to me.” As she continued talking about her stepfather, the participant began to appear overwhelmed, taking a deep breath she stated, “I want to keep the list of dislikes short.” She continued with listing her dislikes as “he is strict, he is a hypocrite, he’s mean…. he is one dimensional, not good at perspective taking.” However despite the negative qualities, she did note several qualities that she admired and respected in her stepfather. “I like that he is very smart, very hardworking, and doesn’t care what anyone thinks of him—he does what he wants to do.”

Similar to the description of her stepfather, the participant was able to note both positive and negative qualities of her relationship with her mother. Although she believed her mother was sensitive and at times displaced frustration on her, she also stated she was closest to her mother. When asked the reasoning she stated, “she is the only person who loves me unconditionally and I trust her completely.” She then added, “I love my mom, she is my best friend, we are very close. I like that se can get a long with anyone, she is positive and very well liked.”

When discussing whether her relationship with her parents contributed to her becoming an adolescent parent, the participant was eager to elaborate. Although she did not think they contributed to her decision to have or keep her child, she did feel very strongly that they contributed to her becoming pregnant. “When I went to college I engaged in a lot of risky behavior because I finally did not have my overbearing parents…because I did not have their strict rules anymore. They never trusted me or gave me a lot of my own responsibilities in high school so I didn’t know how to handle that freedom when I got to college.”
The final theme from P1 was the perception of family contribution to adolescent childbearing decision. Despite attributing some of her adolescent decisions to her relationship with her parents, the participant expressed gratitude for the support her family has provided to her throughout her transition. “I do think I have more support than the average adolescent parent, and I do believe that is why I’m successful...I am very lucky.”

Textural Description for Participant Two (P2)

Participant Two (P2) is a 23-year-old, single African American female that grew up in a rural area of North Carolina. Despite giving birth to her first son at the age of 18 and her second son (from a different father) 11 months later, she was still able to graduate high school. Although P2 has an older sister, she has never lived with her since her parents’ marriage dissolution during infancy. After the experience of her parental marriage dissolution, P2 remained in a single parent, lower class household, with her mother and twin brother. Unable to attain a job, she currently lives on government support in a trailer with her sons.

The transcribed interview with P2, resulted in identification of 10 textural themes: (1) perception of upbringing (household demographics), (2) household emotional climate, (3) concept of family, (4) perception of individual role in family, (5) perception of quality of relationships with sibling(s), (6) parental expectations and values, (7) perception of quality of relationships with parent and/or guardian(s), (8) perception of family contribution to adolescent childbearing decision, (9) perception of sibling(s) contribution to adolescent
childbearing decision, and (10) perception of relationship with parent/guardian(s) contribution to adolescent childbearing decision.

The first theme, perception of upbringing and household demographics, she described as bring raised in a lower class household and stayed in the same house her entire life. At a very young age her father left and took her older sister with him. “I hardly have any memories of him because we were so young when he left.” This left participant 2 to be raised by her mother, in a single-parent household with her twin brother.

Given that her mother was a single parent, participant 2 stated that her mom made the decisions in the family and she would assist her mother in any way possible; theme two. “My role in the family was to help my mom out—cleaning, helping her cook dinner. I would get home from school, clean up a little and get dinner started for my mom so it would be about ready when she got home.” The emotional climate, theme three, emerged when she discussed how discipline was handled in her household. Although participant 2 believed her mother was strict, she also believed “there wasn’t much punishment or discipline because there was not a lot of rebelling or bad behavior from my brother and I.” This is also where the fourth theme emerged, parental expectations and values. “My mom was strict, but that was mainly with school, as long as I got good grades, I could go out or do things.”

The concept of family was the fifth theme identified for participant 2. “Family is having traditions, rituals, and planning future events together, similar to what you would see in a picture family.” Perception of quality of relationships with siblings was the sixth theme identified. Though she did not spend much time-sharing her relationship with her siblings,
she did acknowledge that she had a strong relationship with them. Participant 2 stated to have a sister that was 6 years older, and a twin brother. Although she did not grow up with her older sister, she still believed that they were able to maintain a close relationship. “My older sister has always lived with my dad and his family...we stayed with our mom. My siblings and I have great relationships. Of course since my brother and I are twins so we are always together doing everything together.” Although the participant stated to be very similar to her brother, she did note one major difference. “I am totally opposite than my twin brother, he didn’t finish high school and I did.” When discussing if her siblings contributed to her adolescent parenting experience, theme seven, the participant did not feel they had. However, she did feel they have played a more important role after the birth. “They both have been very supportive of my decisions and of my children. They are nice, care about my kids, and help if they can—like what an aunt or uncle should usually do.”

In the next theme, perception of quality of relationships with parents, the participant provided thorough descriptions of her relationship with her mother. However, when asked about her father, she was unable to give much detail due to the lack of his presence in her life. “Well I don’t know my dad. I get a long with him, we just aren’t close...I don’t really know anything about him, I just know he wasn’t ever there. But I love my mom, I am definitely a mamas girl.” She then reiterated “I have always felt distant from my dad...we get a long, we just aren’t close and he was never there.” She then compared her relationship with her father to that of her children’s father. “My pregnancies were not typical, we didn’t plan them, we didn’t have dates. The only reason I ever hear from my kids’ fathers is because
of them, that’s the only reason we deal with each other.” When discussing her relationship with her mother, the participant spoke in an excited and positive tone. “I am closest to my mom, we talk about things... everything.” She described how open her relationship was with her mother. “Even when it is something I know I will be punished for, I would still be able to talk to my mom about it. My mom would still listen and support me and I could just talk to her. Of course even if it was bad, I would get punished, but that never stopped me from sharing things with her.” Though the participant did not perceive her relationship with her parents as a contributing factor to her adolescent childbearing, theme nine, she did express how her mother and family has influenced her in the final, tenth theme. “My mom worked hard to support us and I want to do the same for my kids. I love my kids, I wouldn’t change anything...they are the best feeling ever.”

Textural Description for Participant 3 (P3)

Participant three (P3) is a 22 year old, single African American female that grew up in a lower middle class household in rural North Carolina. Despite giving birth to her first son at the age of 17, she was still able to graduate high school. P3 experienced her parents’ marriage dissolution at an early age and subsequently her mothers remarriage. P3 is the oldest child in her family, with a younger half-sister and younger half brother. P3 is currently pregnant with her second child (from a different father) and lives at home with her mother, step-father, and younger half-siblings. Although P3 had a hard time opening up and providing details about her upbringing and family, several themes emerged from her interview.
P3 identified with 10 textural themes once the interview was transcribed: (1) perception of upbringing (household demographics), (2) household emotional climate, (3) concept of family, (4) perception of individual role in family, (5) perception of quality of relationships with sibling(s), (6) parental expectations and values, (7) perception of quality of relationships with parent and/or guardian(s), (8) perception of family contribution to adolescent childbearing decision, (9) perception of sibling(s) contribution to adolescent childbearing decision, and (10) perception of relationship with parent/guardian(s) contribution to adolescent childbearing decision.

In the first theme, perception of upbringing (household demographics) the participant described her childhood as a typical upbringing in a lower middle class family that lived in the same area for her entire life. P3 grew up with her mother, stepfather, sister, and stepbrother. When describing her concept of family, theme two, the participant was brief and spoke in an uneasy tone. “Family…it is somebody that is there…friends can also be considered as family if you have been through a lot with each other.” In the third theme, household emotional climate, the participant described her stepfather as strict and the individual to make the family decisions. “My family is crazy—not crazy in a bad way, but crazy in like a fun type way.”

The fourth theme identified was the perception of individual role in the family. Being the oldest child in the family, she stated that she had to set a good example for her siblings. “My role… since I was the oldest was to do my best so my sister and brother could try and come up the way I did…but you know that never happens.” Stemming from this role was
P3’s perception of quality of relationships with siblings, theme five. She continued by describing her sibling relationships as positive. P3 believed to have been closer to her younger half-sister “I was young when she was born, but at the same time since I was older, I was there with her all the time.” When describing her relationship with her younger stepbrother, participant 3 believed he was the most different and provided her reasoning. “When he came along I was about 6 or 7 years old and he was young, so I didn’t take on to him like that, not until we got older.”

The subsequent themes, parental expectations and perception of relationships with parents/guardians emerged in the same context. Although participant 3 had a hard time elaborating on parental expectations and values, she did state that her parents place importance on education, and expected her to do the best she could. Participant 3 began by noting some of her parents likes and dislikes, which had her realize how agreeable they both are. “There isn’t too much that they don’t like...I can’t really say.” She continued by describing her relationship with her parents as positive and honest. “My relationships with my parents are good, they are like my best friends. I am closer to my stepdad, because he is the most strict. So I know if it is anything that’s gonna be told from him, its gonna be told like it is and ain't nothing wrong.”

For the final themes dealing with perception of sibling(s) contribution to adolescent childbearing, perception of family contribution to adolescent childbearing, and perception of relationship with parent/guardian(s) contribution to adolescent childbearing, the participant did not feel that any of the factors play a contributing role. P3 provided a simple explanation
for her perceptions of contribution: “I don’t think anything contributed…because I didn’t plan on being a parent.”

Textural Description for Participant 4 (P4)

Participant four (P4) is a 24-year-old single Caucasian female that frequently relocated during her childhood. P4 transitioned from a middle class household in a suburban area of Kentucky to Alabama, Georgia, back to Alabama, Georgia, and finally North Carolina. Despite giving birth to her twin sons at the age of 18, she was still able to complete high school. P4 comes from a blended family with five siblings; two older biological sisters, a younger half-sister, a younger half-brother, and a stepsister from her mother’s most recent (third) marriage. P4 experienced two parental marriage dissolutions and three remarriages throughout her early childhood and adolescence. P4 currently lives on government support with her twin sons in section 8 housing in a suburban area of North Carolina.

P4’s transcribed interview resulted in the identification of 10 textural themes: (1) perception of upbringing (household demographics), (2) household emotional climate, (3) concept of family, (4) perception of individual role in family, (5) perception of quality of relationships with sibling(s), (6) parental expectations and values, (7) perception of quality of relationships with parent and/or guardian(s), (8) perception of family contribution to adolescent childbearing decision, (9) perception of sibling(s) contribution to adolescent childbearing decision, and (10) perception of relationship with parent/guardian(s) contribution to adolescent childbearing decision.
P4 was extremely honest and very open when discussing her early family situation. Theme one emerged from P4’s perception of her upbringing. She experienced instability throughout her childhood and adolescence. Raised in a middle class household, P4 had several sudden transitions throughout her childhood and adolescence. “We moved around a lot. We moved from Kentucky to Alabama to Georgia, back to Alabama, back to Georgia, and then North Carolina.” She continued describing her early family situation by describing a significant experience in her childhood. “When I was less than 3 months old, my dad signed his rights over to me and within the first year my mom remarried and her new husband adopted me. And that was pretty much who I was raised by, who I call my dad, and who I lived with...up until I was 13 when they divorced and he left.”

The second theme emerged as the participant began to recall her household emotional climate. “When I was younger and my mom and legal dad (father who adopted her) were together things were really strict. They made us mind, we had chores, we had curfews... it was a whole different household.” As she continued discussing the emotional climate, she compared it to what it was later in her adolescence. “I guess my mom was afraid of what his reaction would be, so she was really hard on us to make sure everything was done the right way. But when they split up when I was 13 it turned into I did whatever, we all did whatever, we were out of control.” Although participant four’s behavior during adolescence was somewhat rebellious, she did note her parents had instilled values that she still holds today; theme three. “I mean to this day, though, I would know better when it comes to certain things. Like, I was raised with a certain level of respect you don’t do this and you don’t do
that and that stuff still sits with me. When I am around people and they don’t raise their kids that way, it messes with me.”

As she continued describing the household decisions and discipline, the third theme, household emotional climate began to re-emerge. P4 stated that decisions and punishment were made by her father when he was around, “We mostly got grounded, that meant that the day we got in trouble, we would have to clean with my mom standing over us and yelling. Make us do crazy chores, wipe down baseboards, wipe down walls—like crazy stuff that really wasn’t necessary.” As she continued, she described a different level of punishment if something more serious occurred. “For certain things we would get the belt from my dad—that would be for something serious—like max five licks, usually three. But it was very few things like lying or stealing that we got spankings for, we mostly got grounded.”

Participant four continued by describing theme four, her concept of family. “Family is just an environment where you feel safe, loved, cared about. It doesn’t matter who it’s made up of or how many people there are. As long as you have support and stability.” The fifth and sixth theme emerged as participant four hesitantly described her role in the family and her family contribution to her decision to have children during adolescence. “Well I am the black sheep—I was more so the trouble maker, I think I caused my mom the most stress of all of my siblings. Just because I was one of the main ones that had daddy issues, and I was the middle child, and it was just a lot of things compiled and I was just a pain in the butt, really—I mean I was the one that was always in trouble, always grounded, always sneaking
out, the phone was always ringing in the night for me—\(\text{I mean I was just bad...I was just bad.}\)\

Though participant four expressed feelings of being the odd one out in her family, she also expressed feelings of support from her family, which she attributed as contributing to her adolescent childbearing decisions. \(\text{“Well I guess I wasn’t completely distraught when I got pregnant—I know some people get pregnant young and their life was over, but for me I knew we were gonna be fine, my mom knew that we were gonna be just fine.”}\) Reflecting on this sense of support from her adolescent childbearing decisions, she describes how her decision may be different if she was to have another child. \(\text{“It was never something that was talked about, no one ever suggested it, it never crossed my mind...but now I feel differently about that. If I was to get pregnant again, I might not have the baby—because the two I have cause a lot of stress—at this point I don’t want anymore kids—but then I was fine with it.”}\)

Participant four described her family as being large and blended. She has four siblings; two older biological sisters, a younger half-sister, a younger half-brother, and a stepsister from her mothers most recent (third) marriage. Theme seven and eight surfaced as participant four began to discuss the quality of relationships with her siblings and her perception of their contribution to her childbearing decisions. Though she felt she had a decent relationship with all five of her siblings, P4 did make the discrepancy of being closer with her two older biological sisters and distant from her younger half sister. Although her biological father signed over his parental rights to her at a young age, he did not sign over the rights of her two older sisters. Rather, he had full custody of them and made the decision to
raise them on his own while participant four, being 6 years younger, was raised with her mother. Despite the physical distance of her older sisters, participant four felt closest to her older siblings. “We are like best friends, we are so similar...we like the same boys, and are most alike...we have the same sense of humor and same personality—we even have the same flaws, the same downfalls...when we are together we stay up all night laughing and talking.” Although these feelings of connectedness and support did not contribute to her childbearing decisions, they did play a supportive role before and after childbearing.

Unfortunately, participant four did not feel the same about her younger siblings. Though her relationship was positive with her younger half brother, she felt the ten-year age difference prevented them from being close. As for her younger half sister, she felt extremely distant and described their relationship as hostile. “I don’t have a relationship with my half sister, she is spoiled, spiteful, and hateful towards my children. We don’t even have each others contact information.” The relationship at times is so negative that P4’s mother has commented on the behavior. “My mom has mentioned it on occasion and said she cannot believe that my sister has been so hateful and childish.”

Theme nine involves the relationship with P4’s parents and guardians. Given that participant four has no memories of her biological father, she did not have any comments as to her relationship with him. However, her feelings of distance with her 2nd father (the father that raised and adopted her) stems from the relationship with P4’s younger sister. Once participant four’s younger half sister was born, she felt that her entire relationship changed with her father. “I mean he loved her more, everything bad that happened was my fault,
nothing was ever her fault…even my mom would say stuff to him about it and he would deny it…I would still feel it and she could see it. I mean he clearly felt more strongly about her than he did me.” These feelings were affirmed from the lack of contact from her father once her mother and father divorced when she was 13 years old. In less than a year, participant four’s mother was remarried and for the past 11 years, her new stepfather and mother have been in her life as parents. “That is kind of who I turn to at this point, because I don’t talk to either one of my dads…both very seldom I talk to either of them. I like the fact that it is so open, I can hang out with them (my mom and stepdad), I can ask them for anything and never have to worry about it. I know they are not ever going to turn their back on me.”

Theme nine continues as participant four discussed her relationship with her mother and stepfather. “I work with my stepdad, we don’t have a father daughter relationship but we don’t argue and we get along. There is no awkwardness, so if I need something that is who I go to.” Participant four’s relationship with her mother is very open. “My mom and I talk everyday, usually at least 45minutes…she lives 15 minutes up the road and I can tell her everything.” Continuing with the relationship with her mother participant four adds: “I have always been closest to my mom, she was always there, she has never left, that hasn’t changed…like my dads have changed multiple times, but my mom has always remained the same.” Although participant four discussed her mother and stepfather as a support system, she also feels they find her a burden at times. “I feel some disappointment come from my mom, like she has less respect for me than my other siblings, which I have talked to her about
it and she says it is not true but I just feel it. When everyone is together and around she treats me like a dog and treats everyone else just better.”

The final theme that came from participant four was parent and guardian contribution to P4’s adolescent childbearing. Participant four revealed that she didn’t think adolescent childbearing was a decision. “I mean it just happened and I went with it, I mean I did decide not to abort.” Participant four then added that where her parents contributed to her adolescent childbearing was when it came to staying with her twin sons’ father. “I didn’t want to separate them from their dad because that’s what kept happening to me and I feel like it screwed me up. But at the end of the day I just did what made me happy, which in the end enabled me to make them happier.”

Textural Description for Participant 5 (P5)

Participant five (P5) is a 23-year-old married Caucasian female that grew up in small rural in North Carolina until early adolescence when she relocated to a larger nearby suburban area in North Carolina. P5 has experienced three parental marriage dissolutions and 4 remarriages. With one older brother, P5 is the youngest of two children. Shortly after completing high school, she became pregnant with her first son and a week before giving birth to him at age 19 was married. P5 now lives in an upper class household with her husband and son. She is expecting her second son fall 2014 and anticipants graduating from college may 2014.

From the transcribed interview with P5, 10 textural themes were identified: (1) perception of upbringing (household demographics), (2) household emotional climate, (3)
concept of family, (4) perception of individual role in family, (5) perception of quality of relationships with sibling(s), (6) parental expectations and values, (7) perception of quality of relationships with parent and/or guardian(s), (8) perception of family contribution to adolescent childbearing decision, (9) perception of sibling(s) contribution to adolescent childbearing decision, and (10) perception of relationship with parent/guardian(s) contribution to adolescent childbearing decision.

Theme one, perception of upbringing was a reoccurring theme throughout the interview with P5. When first discussing her upbringing, P5 began with describing her biological father, stating that he was not a present figure in her childhood. The participant elaborates on theme one as she discussed living with her mom and grandmother for the majority of her childhood. Although now living in an upper class household, P5 recalls it being dramatically different as a child. “We were always at my grandmas or my moms apartment, especially at night because my mom worked as a nurse. So it was just me, my mom and my brother with my grandparents around all the time.” She describes her family as being extremely close, which reflects theme two, concept of family. “Family is people that you can always count on, trust, and know that they are there for you no matter what...they support you.”

The participant remembers her mother being her best friend and the emotional climate being calm; theme three. “My mom is not strict, communication has always been open and we can talk to each other. There is a mutual respect, so she never had to be strict because I respect her.” The fourth theme emerged from theme three as the participant recalled
punishment and her role in the family. “My mom made all the decisions, but I have always been a pleaser, so I don’t remember being punished...she never beat my ass, never spanked...I mean we may have gotten sent to our room or something I guess.” P5 recalled feeling like she was the oldest child in the family. “Everybody always thought I was the older sister, when I have an older brother. Maybe because I always just try to keep the peace and keep everyone happy.”

In the fifth theme, perception of family contribution to childbearing decisions, P5 did not directly perceive her family constellation as a contribution to her adolescent childbearing experience. “I don’t necessarily think my family contributed, I mean my mom had kids young but that doesn’t mean...ya know, it just happens. I mean being a young parent obviously she was very supportive, because she went through the same thing.”

Continuing with the participant’s sibling relationship, theme six, P5 discussed growing up with an older brother. “We are 2.5 years apart, he has always been the more rebellious. He was having fun, going out, and getting in trouble in school.” Although the participant’s older brother had different behaviors, their relationship was very close. “We are really close, especially over the past few years...we are like two peas in a pod.” Although she felt that he was not a contributing factor to her adolescent childbearing, she did feel that he has been very supportive. “As far as support, he was very supportive which helped and that was nice. But as far as him being influential to why I had a baby, no. I mean he didn’t have any kids of his own or anything.”
Though the participant discussed growing up in a single-parent household, her mother was remarried and subsequently divorced twice since her mother and father’s marriage dissolution, the fourth marriage ended when P5’s 3rd stepfather passed away from a chronic illness. P5 revealed that her mother has recently been engaged to her fifth husband, which will be the participant’s fourth stepfather. In the next theme of quality of relationship with parent/guardians, the participant discussed her biological parents’ divorce having occurred when she was still in preschool and remembers her father never being apart of her life. Her relationship with her mother was very strong. Having shared a mutual respect for one another, which enabled frequent communication, which was described as honest and open.

When discussing the feelings of distance in the relationship with her biological father, the participant was agitated and hostile. “My dad hasn’t been apart of my life ever. He is a piece of shit, he obviously never wanted to be apart of our lives.” The relationship with participant five's stepparents was also described as distant. “I hardly remember the first…the second one (stepdad) we didn’t really get along but I mean I was still really young to realize what was going on. The third one that passed away, we got along but he was always working all the time so it wasn’t really much of a relationship. There was no warmth and we hardly talked.”

The ninth theme of parental expectations and values emerged as the participant continued to describe her parental relationships. “My mom just wanted us to make good grades, do as she asked, and help around the house.” The participant described education as being of primary importance to her mother. “Definitely my education, and just overall like me being happy and partaking in the activities that I wanted to and just like being fulfilled in
my childhood.” Though the participant did not perceive her relationship with her parents/guardians as being a contributing factor to becoming an adolescent parent, she did believe they played a major role in the process. “I mean yeah, either way I would never consider an abortion…but my mom obviously made it a lot easier to be raised in a positive environment by supporting us 100%.” The participant also added that after her first child she promised her mother she would wait until she graduated college to have additional children. Now at age 23 and finishing her undergraduate degree this spring semester, the participant just discovered that she is expecting her second child.

Textural Description for Participant 6 (P6)

Participant six (P6) is a 25-year-old Caucasian female that was raised in a suburban, lower middle class area of North Carolina. Despite giving birth to her daughter at the age of 16, P6 was still able to complete high school. During her early childhood and adolescence P6 and her identical twin sister experienced two parental marriage dissolutions and three remarriages. From her mothers’ third marriage, she has a half sister that is almost 13 years younger. P6 gave birth to her second child (a son from a different father) at age 23 and is now cohabiting in a suburban, lower middle class household with the father of her second child, daughter and son.

The transcribed interview with P6 identified 7 textural themes: (1) perception of upbringing (household demographics), (2) household emotional climate, (3) perception of quality of relationships with sibling(s), (4) perception of quality of relationships with parent and/or guardian(s), (5) perception of family contribution to adolescent childbearing decision,
(6) perception of sibling(s) contribution to adolescent childbearing decision, and (7) perception of relationship with parent/guardian(s) contribution to adolescent childbearing decision.

The participant shares her experiences of her upbringing in the first textural theme. Growing up, P6 had an identical twin sister, and experienced her parent’s marriage dissolution at a young age. She recalls her household emotional climate, the second textural theme, as being full of ups and downs. “It always depended on what had happened that day, like if my mom and dad had been fighting it could go either way of them not caring what we did to them taking their anger out and yelling at us.” As the participant discussed her family as complicated and expressed how hard it was to make sense of her family. “It’s really confusing…my mom and dad divorced and for a long time my dad wasn’t in our lives. Then my mom remarried, and that’s also who we call dad because he was the one that helped raise us, in elementary school when they divorced they shared custody of us.” The participant’s mother ultimately remarried and had another child. “My half-sisters dad is my mom’s third marriage…you wouldn’t think she was related because she has such different features than us and we are almost 13 years older than her.”

In the third theme, quality of relationship with siblings, the participant perceives her relationship with her twin sister as an inseparable bond. “We are identical twins, for the longest time ever we were almost the same person and did everything together...we literally had the same friends, did the same activities.” This relationship maintained until the participant was a teenager, and they started to want their own relationships. “In middle
school we just finally got tired of it and we were starting to argue a lot...we just became our own person and had opposite groups of friends.” The relationship with the participants’ half-sister has very different dynamics. “She is so much younger that I am more of an aunt to her than an older sister.” In theme four, P6 perceived her relationship with her siblings as having an influence on her adolescent childbearing experience. “I was 16 when I found out I was pregnant and the first person I had told was my twin sister. She helped me process it and was supportive throughout my entire pregnancy and still is.”

The participant throughout the interview discussed the final theme of quality of relationship with parent and guardians. Though she now has a strong relationship with her biological father, the participant admitted he was absent for the majority of her childhood. “My other dad (2nd dad) raised us...no one ever knew he wasn’t our real dad, I mean we spent more time at his house even after my mom and him were divorced.” The participant revealed that she felt distant from her second stepfather because she never developed a relationship with him. Having the same feelings of distance to her biological father, the participant made a conscious effort to reconnect and build a relationship with him. “It wasn’t until after my daughter was born that my dad started to come around and I tried really hard to keep him around and in my life...in my daughters life.” Participant six believed she had the closest relationship with her mother. “My mom and I are close, but she’s more of a friend than a mom.” The participant revealed qualities of instability when discussing her relationship with her mother. “I love my mom, but she was really young and she was a model...so I mean think of what happens in movies and that was pretty much how it went.”
The participant reluctantly shared memories of an unstable caregiver, as her mother frequently had friends over (large parties), smoked in the house, and showed signs of drug and alcohol abuse. “I think that’s why we stayed with our dad (2nd dad) a lot, because she just couldn’t get us to school all the time and didn’t have a regular schedule.”

Composite Textural Description of all Participants

Once epoche and bracketing were employed, the transcripts were analyzed and the data was separated according to meaning. In the end, the combined elements from each participant’s transcripts resulted in textural descriptions of participants’ shared experiences. Textural descriptions for participants included: (1) perception of upbringing (household demographics), (2) household emotional climate, (3) concept of family, (4) perception of individual role in family, (5) perception of quality of relationships with siblings, (6) parental expectations and values, (7) perception of quality of relationships with parent/guardian(s), (8) perception of family contribution to adolescent childbearing decision, (9) perception of siblings contribution to adolescent childbearing decision, and (10) perception of relationship with parent/guardian(s) contribution to adolescent childbearing decision.

All of the participants experienced the dissolution of a parental marriage at a young age, and as adolescents, experienced similar transitions. These various experiences seemed to shape the adolescents’ views of their family constellation, including the quality of relationships with their siblings and parent/guardian(s), and their individual roles within the family. Not all participants’ transitional experiences growing up were perceived as negative lived experiences. However, those who did perceive these experiences more negatively
reported their perceptions of the contributions to the decision of becoming an adolescent parent more strongly than those who did not perceive their experiences negatively. All participants seemed to have a negative or non-existent relationship with their father and a mixed relationship with their mother.

In the first textual theme, *Perception Of Upbringing (Household Demographics)*, participants shared how they perceived their family situation during their upbringing (i.e., SES, family structure, presence of any significant events including transitions). Though all the participant’s parents divorced and most remarried over time, all participants were initially born into a two-parent home. Participant 2 was the only participant who did not experience the remarriage of her mother during her childhood or adolescence and remained in a single-parent household after her parents marriage dissolution. All participants experienced fatherlessness at some point in their early childhood and adolescence after their parents marriage dissolution, and remained distant in their relationships with their biological fathers throughout their childhood and adolescence.

The second theme, *Household Emotional Climate*, was commonly described as strict and confounded with discipline and punishment. Four of the participants described their households as having a strict emotional climate, while participant 5 described her household as permissive and participant 6 described her as mixed (strict and permissive). Of the four households that were described as strict, only one (P2) had the punishment and discipline enforced by a mother figure. Whereas the other households had the atmosphere and discipline enforced by a step-father. Participant 4 and participant 6 expressed shifts in
emotional climate and disciple during parental transitions. Participant 4 described the differences in her household emotional climate: “When I was younger and my mom and legal dad were together things were really strict...when they split up when I was 13 it turned into I did whatever, we all did whatever, we were out of control.” Participant 6 described the ups and downs in her household emotional climate as contingent upon her parents relationship: “It always depended on what had happened that day, like if my mom and dad had been fighting it could go either way of them not caring what we did to them taking their anger out and yelling at us.”

The third theme found in the data was Concept of Family. Participant 6 was the only participant that did not have this theme present and did not share a concept of family. For all other participants, concept of family was characterized by frequent and regular physical time spent together, close communication, support, trust, and reliability. Participant one described family reliability, trust and support: “Whenever you don’t have anyone else to rely on, you can rely on family. You should be able to trust family; it’s a give and take thing. You support one another as they support you.” Participant 2 included themes of physical time and communication: “Family is having traditions, rituals, and planning future events together.” Participant 3 included both concepts: “Family...it is somebody that is there...friends can also be considered as family if you have been through a lot with each other.” Building upon feelings of support and belonging, participant 4 described family as: “Family is just an environment where you feel safe, loved, cared about. It doesn’t matter who its made up of or how many people there are. As long as you have support and stability.” Reiterating support
and trust, participant 5 described her concept of family as: “People that you can always count on, trust, and know that they are there for you no matter what…they support you.”

The next theme, Individual Roles in Family was prominent for participants, 1-5; Only one of the participants perceived her role negatively (P4), whereas the other roles were determinant upon family structure and sibling relationships. This was even more prominent for siblings with large age gaps, where the participant took on a caregiver role. Participant 1 and 3 described their role as being influenced by their siblings. Common characteristics included setting positive examples and caregiving. For example, participant 3 stated: “My role, since I was the oldest, was to do my best so that my sister and brother could try and come up the way I did.” Participant 2 was the only individual to have a clearly defined role that was not part of a sibling relationship. This participant was raised in a single-parent household with her twin brother and would assist her mother in any way possible. “My role in the family was to help my mom out—cleaning, helping her cook dinner.” This participant described taking on adult roles very early in her adolescence, in order to accommodate the needs of her family from fatherlessness. Participant 4 was the only participant that described her individual role in the family as negative: “Well I am the black sheep—I was more so the trouble maker, I think I caused my mom the most stress of all my siblings.” However, she did provide a direct explanation of her perceptions to why this was her role: “I was one of the main ones that had daddy issues, and I was the middle child, and it was just a lot of things compiled...”
The *Perception of Quality of Relationships with Siblings*, theme five, was present for all participants. All participants discussed having a strong and positive relationship with at least one sibling. Participant 1 and 3 discussed their relationship as a caregiver role since they were the oldest in the family and had significant age gaps with siblings. Participant 1 stated: “*they were like my baby before I had my baby.*” Participant 2, 4, 5 and 6 expressed having close relationships with their siblings and shared several aspects of their life with their siblings due to the close age range (two years or less; Participant 2 and 6 had an identical or fraternal twin. The only participants that expressed negative relationships with siblings (P3 and P4) had significantly large age gaps in sibling age, as well as that sibling having a different biological parent. These factors contributed to feelings of resentment from the sibling being “*spoiled*” and/or participants’ feeling they were treated in a different (less affectionate) way. Participant 3 stated, “*When he came along I was about 6 or 7 years old and he was young, so I didn’t take on to him like that.*” While participant 4 stated: “*I don’t have a relationship with my half sister, she is spoiled, spiteful, and hateful towards my children.*”

All participants shared a commonality in theme six, *Parental Expectations and Values*. Participants believed their parents placed the most importance on education and proper behavior. In addition to education, only one participant (P1) also believed her parents valued and placed importance on religion. All participants completed high school, despite becoming an adolescent parent. One of the six participants (P1) completed an undergraduate
(college) education, while another one of the six participants (P5) was expected to complete her undergraduate degree.

The *Perception of Quality of Relationship with Parent/Guardians* was a very prominent theme for all participants. All participants expressed a positive perception of relationship with at least one parental figure, typically their mother. Negative perceptions of relationships came from participants relationships with biological fathers and stepfathers. Every participant experienced fatherlessness during their childhood or adolescence. Furthermore, all participants perceived the relationship with their biological father as being non-existent due to the lack of presence in their upbringing. Only one of the six participants (P6) maintains contact with her biological father, and has worked to foster a relationship that was non-existent as a child. Participants 1, 4, and 5 expressed negative perceptions of their relationship with their stepfather. Common attributes included a lack of communication, lack of warmth, feelings of resentment, and lack of support.

All of the participant’s fathers and/or stepfathers moved on quickly after their marriage dissolution and began another life that did not include the participant. The absence of a father allowed participants to develop a stronger relationship with their mothers. For most participants, mothers were described as “*best friends*” and individuals the participants could confide in and share their life experiences with. For most, these relationships did exclude some details that may have implicated the participant and caused disciplinary action. The participant that had the closest bond with her mother, participant 2, was also the only individual that remained in a single-parent household. Her relationship was so close she
expressed being able to share life experiences, regardless of later disciplinary action. “Even when it is something I know I will be punished for, I would still be able to talk to my mom about it. My mom would still listen and support me and I could just talk to her. Of course even if it was bad, I would get punished, but that never stopped me from sharing things with her.” For participants that experienced multiple transitions in their life, their mothers provided more than support, but a sense of familiarity and stability amongst the other chaos surrounding them. Participant 4 described her relationship with her mother as stable and supportive. “I have always been closest to my mom, she was always there, she has never left, that hasn’t changed...like my dads have changed multiple times, but my mom has always remained the same.”

The last three themes involved the perception of contribution to participants adolescent childbearing decisions: (1) Perception of Family Contribution to Adolescent Childbearing Decision, (2) Perception of Sibling Contribution to Adolescent Childbearing Decision, and (3) Perception of Relationship with Parent/Guardian(s) Contribution to Adolescent Childbearing Decision. Although none of the participants felt their family holistically influenced their choices and decisions to become an adolescent parent, all of the participants made statements that their families played an important supportive role during the transitional process from adolescent pregnancy to adolescent parenthood. When discussing the perceptions of siblings’ contribution to participants’ adolescent childbearing, the same themes emerged. None of the participants perceived their siblings as a direct contribution to adolescent childbearing. However, all participants shared feelings of support
from their siblings. For participants that had significant age gaps from sibling birth order, perceptions of preparation were shared from sibling caregiving experiences.

When discussing the *Perception of Relationship with Parent/Guardian(s)* 

*Contribution to Adolescent Childbearing*, only one participant felt their parent/guardian(s) had a direct influence to her becoming pregnant (P1). “*When I went to college I engaged in a lot of risky behavior because I finally did not have my overbearing parents...because I did not have their strict rules anymore. They never trusted me or gave me a lot of my own responsibilities in high school so I dint know how to handle that freedom when I got to college.*” Despite participants’ lack of perception of parental influences to childbearing decisions, all participants shared their lived experiences of support from their parents. Although some also had negative feelings about their parents, feelings of support were a source of ease and allowed participants to successfully transition into adolescent parenthood.

Participant six was the only participant that shared experiences of a traumatic childhood and had difficulty opening up with details to her lived experiences. Participant six experienced several parental transitions and was the only participant that shared an unstable relationship with her mother (parental figure), whereas all the other participants had strong relationships with their mothers. At sixteen years old, participant six was also the youngest participant during her first pregnancy.

Three of the participants had only one child (P1, P3, P5), with two participants currently pregnant with their second child at the time of their interview (P3, P5). Participant 2, participant 4, and participant 6 all had 2 children. P2 had her children 11 months apart
from one another, both with different fathers. Participant 4 had two children as a result of her first pregnancy being with identical twins, and participant 6 had two children six years apart, also from different fathers. All participants had completed high school, one had graduated college (P1), and one was anticipating graduating college at the end of the semester in which she was currently enrolled (P5). Of the six participants, only participant 5 was married.

Participant class systems were defined through observation, as well as self-defined through participants’ description of upbringing. Participant 5 was also the only participant that was perceived as having an upper class social economic status (SES). Participant 1 was the only individual to perceive her SES as middle class. Whereas the other participants all shared their experiences in a lower SES (P2, P3, P4, P6), with three of the participants currently receiving government aid (P2, P4, P6). Overall, all participants’ lived experiences consisted of obstacles from their family constellation and suffered instability in various ways (i.e., financial, marriage dissolution, fatherlessness).

**Credibility**

Triangulation, checking, peer review, and external audits are the most common recommendations for demonstrating credibility of work (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). For this study, one former Masters of Science student at North Carolina State University in the Family Life and Youth Development Program, and a Doctoral student at University of Texas El Paso in the Neuropsychology program, aided in peer review to check for grammatical errors. To further ensure credibility, the researcher used Moustakas epoche approach to fully explore the participants’ lived experiences. As phenomenology strives to understand the lived
experiences of others, the researcher recorded notes during and after each interview.
Furthermore, open-ended and informal questions allowed participant to talk about their experiences on their own terms and in their own words, thus ensuring the focus remained on the participants throughout the process of data collection and analysis.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

Phenomenology provides an opportunity for individuals to share their life experiences in order to illuminate the previously misunderstood, unknown, or discounted (Bogdan & Biklen, 1993). Information presented in this section is derived from the six participant interviews with mothers who became pregnant or had their first child between the ages of 14 and 19, but who are now between the ages of 18 and 25. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour and gave insight on the lived experiences of how adolescent mother’s perceptions of their family constellation influenced the choices and decisions to have had a baby during adolescence. The research sought to identify the quality of adolescent’s relationships with parents, as well as siblings to better understand how families influence childbearing decisions. Much of the discussion has been written in the composite descriptions above. Accordingly, the subsequent section provides a discussion of the findings in this study that answers both the research questions and links findings back to the literature.

The literature on adolescent parenting shows that teen childbearing is associated with adverse health and social outcomes, although the majority of these outcomes often reflect preexisting social deficits (Santelli & Melnikas, 2010). Adolescent mothers are less likely
than their peers to complete high school and go on for postsecondary education; other correlates include a lack of economic self-sufficiency (welfare dependency), poorer employment prospects, to experience more rapid repeat pregnancy, to become single mothers, and to experience divorce, if they marry (Emihovich & Fromme, 1998; Hayes, 1987; Santelli & Melnikas, 2010; Woods et al., 2003). For the participants in this study, this was found to be true as several of the participants were on government support, had more than one child, and are single mothers.

Although adolescent childbearing is associated with adverse health and social outcomes for adolescent mothers and their offspring, these social deficits are typically preexisting deficits for these individuals (Santelli & Melnikas, 2010). Adolescent mothers are more likely to come from disadvantaged households, have experienced trouble in school, and have lower expectations of going to college than their peers (Abrahamse et al., 1988; Moore et al., 1986). For the participants in this study, this was also found to be true as the participants came from disadvantaged households and had lower academic expectations.

Perception of Family Constellation and Adolescent Mothers Childbearing Decisions

Adler (1956) asserted that individual attitudes and behaviors are learned within the family, the child’s first experience with society. The family constellation refers to the composition of a family and one’s position within that system and consists of thee primary concepts: (1) sibling position (numerical and psychosocial), (2) parental attitudes, and (3) family atmosphere (Adler, 1937). Within the family, children quickly become active agents, defining and redefining the family constellation; striving for growth, significance, and
meaning; and acting in line with their subjective, and too often mistaken interpretations of life (Bitter et al., 2002). Research has demonstrated that adolescent pregnancy rates are higher among families with socioeconomic problems, a non-nuclear, single parent or reconstructed structure, low educational levels, and a history of alcohol abuse or adolescent parenthood (Pedrosa et al., 2011). This was found to be evident in the present study: all of the adolescent mothers who participated experienced many of the aforementioned risk factors associated with early childbearing, and had developed perceptions of their family constellation based on their lived experience within their family. Moreover, this study highlights the importance of siblings and family dynamics.

Family processes, and socioeconomic status have been identified and linked to early parenthood (Hofferth & Goldscheider, 2010). Every participant expressed the perception of upbringing as having multiple transitions, relocations, reconstructed family structures, and socioeconomic problems. All six participants experienced parental dissolution during early childhood; only one participant did not experience the remarriage of her mother during childhood or adolescence and remained in a single-parent household after her parental marriage dissolution. Reviewed literature indicates that that living with a single parent or divorced parent places adolescents at an increased risk of pregnancy (Hofferth & Goldscheider, 2010). The data from this study supported the literature, as all participants lived with a single and/or divorced parent at various times during their childhood.

Moreover, literature indicates the number of teenagers who become mothers as adolescents of young adults is higher for those raised in single parent families than those
raised in two parent families, suggesting that intergenerational factors are critical elements in the transition to early parenthood and emphasizing the effects of instability and social learning in ones family on the transition to early parenthood (Hetherington, 2006; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Hofferth & Goldscheider, 2010; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Reinforcing the role family plays in the etiology of adolescent pregnancy, every participant in this study mentioned their mothers being more supportive given their own young childbearing age.

The family has an internal function of protection and promotion of the development of its members and an external function of socialization and transmission of a particular culture (Pedrosa et al., 2011). Some studies have suggested that the family system is an indispensable resource in the primary prevention of adolescent pregnancy (Baxter et al., 2009; Hillis et al., 2010; Hofferth & Goldscheider, 2010; Pedrosa et al., 2011). In order to examine the concept of family, Baxter et al. (2009) examined the family status of 23 structural constellations. Similar to this research study, structural constellations increased perception of family status when frequent communication was present. Emphasizing the importance of regular communication as part of family identity. Participants in this study defined their concept of family in relation to contact, warmth, support, and bidirectional influences.
Perceived Quality of Relationships with Parent/Guardian(s) and Adolescent Mothers

Childbearing Decisions

Research indicates that both parenting and psychological variables influence adolescents’ romantic relationships and sexual behavior (Zimmer-Gembeck & Hefland, 2008). Family relationships and parenting behaviors are centrally important in shaping adolescents’ sexual activity. Parents provide children with their primary source of socialization through emotional connectedness, behavioral constraints, and modeling; all of which affect children’s development of self-regulation, emotional expression, and expectations regarding behaviors and relationships (Gray & Steinberg, 1999; Hawkins & Weis, 1985). In this study, all participants developed perceptions of the quality of relationships with their parent/guardian(s) through the aforementioned perceptions of lived experiences with their parent/guardian(s).

All six participants were able to identify a parent/guardian with whom they felt close, as well as a parent/guardian with whom they felt distant. Growing research has focused on the influence of relational factors on the short- and long-term well-being of adolescent mothers. Similar to this study, factors such as early familial experiences characterized by negativity or ambivalence, low supervision, high rejection, and low emotional support from the mother in particular, less social support, and poor quality of current relationships, influence the adjustment of adolescents who become pregnant (Pedrosa et al., 2011). Research by Markham et al. (2010) examined the influence of connectedness, including sense of belonging, on adolescent sexual reproductive health outcomes (ASRH). They found
that connectedness serves as a protective factor for responsible ASRH outcomes. Feelings of connectedness and distance were mediated by frequent contact and communication, as well as feelings of support (understanding) and warmth. The reviewed literature on relationship quality for adolescent mothers reports that parental support (connectedness), control (regulation), and parent/child communication influences adolescent sexual and reproductive health outcomes (Manlove et al., 2012).

The results in this study are consistent with prior reviewed work. That is, relationships viewed as negative with parent/guardians lacked the factors of closeness, support, involvement, and communication that are associated with adolescents’ positive related health choices (Hillis et al., 2010). These results also corroborate findings by Pedrosa et al. (2011), who highlight the influences of relational contexts and quality of interactions associated with adolescent pregnancy. In their research, adolescent risk is associated with family environments characterized by poor quality in parent-daughter relationships, a lack of communication and/or family instability, and inadequacy or lack of family supervision, support, affection and involvement (Pedrosa et al, 2011). This was shown in this research study as demonstrated by the data on relationship quality; differences in quality related to differences in communication, involvement, and support.

Children may also feel less nurtured in single or blended parent homes due to a lack of father-child relationships. When compared to fathers in married-couple or cohabitating homes, fathers of marital dissolutions or relationship separation are less likely to invest quality time with children (Waldfogel et al., 2010; Mather, 2010). The data from this
research study also supports past findings in this area of research. None of the participants in the study reported having strong relationships with their biological fathers. All participants expressed limited interactions with their fathers; most classified themselves as “fatherless.” Participants limited parent-child interaction with their father, may have contributed to feelings or distance. Research implies that the younger an adolescent when divorce occurs, the more likely the adolescent will experience the divorce as a personal abandonment and loss of love (Hodges, 1986). For the majority of participants in this study, fatherlessness occurred directly after parental dissolution.

Despite the positive and negative perceived quality of relationships with parent/guardians, participants did not perceive their parental relationship quality as having a direct influence on their childbearing decisions. This finding is perhaps due to the nature of unplanned pregnancies and family instability; specifically, the duration of instability in family structures. However, factors of relationship quality appeared as a critical element to the adjustment and transitioning to motherhood during and after adolescent childbearing. Past research interprets this overall positive adjustment as an indicator of unproblematic acceptance of early pregnancy, both by adolescents and by their familiar and relational contexts (Pedrosa et al., 2011).

Perceived Quality of Relationships with Sibling(s) and Adolescent Mothers Childbearing Decisions

Despite the fact that most individuals in the United States grow up with at least one sibling and that sibling relationships are often the longest-lasting relationship in individuals’
lives, research on sibling relationships lags behind that of other family relationships (Whiteman, McHale, & Soli, 2011). The research that has been conducted shows that siblings are central in the lives of individuals and families across the life span: siblings serve as companions, confidants, and role models in childhood and adolescence, as well as sources of support throughout adulthood (Whiteman, McHale, & Soli, 2011). In this research study, this was found to be evident. Participants in this study identified at least one sibling as a support system before and after childbearing. Acting as a role model and setting an example for siblings was apparent for those participants with significantly younger siblings.

Participants who had more than one sibling and identified negative qualities of relationships reflect Adler’s (1956) concept of inferiority complex. Adler believed that family dynamics are central to an individual’s sense of self. Social comparisons and power dynamics with siblings stem from the inferiority complex; specifically siblings’ rivalry around parents’ attention, time, and family resources, which Adler (1956) believed had implications for individuals’ style of life and management of self-esteem. Therefore in family systems, egalitarianism—including sibling’s equal treatment—is especially important. For participants in this research study, negative relationships with siblings reflected differential treatment from parent/guardians. Likewise, participants perceived experiences of differential treatment influenced their familial roles and expectations from parent/guardians. Research on sibling relationships also shows that exposure to siblings who have become parents, as teenagers are also associated with increased risk of teenage childbearing. In this research study, this did not appear to be a contributing factor to childbearing choices or decisions for
adolescent mothers, as they did not experience siblings’ childbearing. However, participants in this research study identified as being the oldest child either numerically and/or psychosocially with significantly large age gaps between themselves and the their younger siblings. Moreover, many of the participants with significant age gaps expressed taking on a caregiving role for their younger siblings, preparing them for their own child during adolescence.

The findings of the themes from the data collected are consistent with research on family and relational associations to adolescent childbearing risks; that is, the findings from this study indicate that family and relational variables play a central role in the comprehension of themes discovered in the data. In this study, adolescent childbearing was related to the multi-dimensional influences of family and relational contexts. However, it is important to note that this research did not look at the interdependent influences (i.e., external/social-ecological) influences of adolescent childbearing. Empirical research using Bronfrenbrenner’s (1979) bioecological model has portrayed adolescent pregnancy as a complex and multidimensional process where individual, sociodemographic, familial, and relational variables interact on ecological levels. For example, the research by Santelli and Melnikas (2010) shows that young women growing up in poor families are more likely to become teen mothers because poverty is associated with earlier initiation of intercourse, lower use of contraception, and lower recourse to abortion. Moreover, they note that both causes and consequences are frequently confounded. While adolescent childbearing is an important contributor to poverty and the perpetuation of intergenerational cycles of poverty,
Santelli and Melnikas (2010) suggest that the social antecedents of adolescent mothers is bidirectional. In essence, adolescent mothers may simply be mothers afflicted by poverty or adolescents making logical choices in resource-constrained environments. Similarly, Rogers and McGuire (2012) research found that experiences of interpersonal violence, parenting, and community poverty independently and collectively influence adolescent behaviors that contribute to adolescent pregnancy risk. Although in support of the focus on families (e.g., parenting) in this research study, they also found that violence and parenting experiences are more important predictors of sexual risk taking over community poverty.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore and analyze how adolescent mothers’ perceptions of the family constellation influence the choices and decisions to have had a baby during adolescence. Through a phenomenological study, the research seeks to identify the perceived quality of adolescent relationships with parents, as well as siblings. As aforementioned, individual attitudes and behaviors are learned within the family, which is a child’s first experience with society (Adler, 1956). Therefore, it is important to understand the familial context and life experiences that influence an individual’s lifestyle. Chapter five provides the conclusions of the findings, limitations, and implications of the study.

5.2 Conclusions

Consistent with prior studies, the findings of this study indicate that adolescent childbearing is influenced by risk factors from a variety of familial and relational contexts within the family constellation. From the perspective of Adler’s (1956) family constellation and Bronfenbrenner’s theory of ecology (1979), this study explored adolescent mothers perceptions of family constellation, including perceptions of quality of adolescents relationships with parent/guardians and siblings. In accordance with an Adlerian perspective, one could conclude that the feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, and instability from multiple transitions during childhood contribute to adolescent childbearing choices and decisions. Similar to an Adlerian perspective, an ecological perspective to adolescent pregnancy means
understanding individuals are part of a multiple systems; family, community, and society. These interconnected systems interact to influence individuals growth and development; when one part of an ecosystem changes, it inevitably influences another. Bronfenbrenner’s work emphasizes the importance of families being connected with multiple systems in their environment to promote healthy development. Family and relational variables, either connected to the structure, socioeconomic status, parenting style, or with adolescents’ perception of relationship quality and social emotional support provided by parents and siblings, play a central role in the comprehension of patterns found.

Perhaps the most significant contribution to the field is that of the importance of siblings and family dynamics. In this study, participants indicated that the existence of relational qualities (e.g., support, communication) enhances the structural constellation of family. While these perceptions affected feelings of support and belonging within the family, they were not perceived as direct contributors to adolescent childbearing decisions. Rather, the quality of relationships with parent/guardians and siblings, specifically the presence of frequent support and communication, was indicative of adolescent adjustment to pregnancy and parenting (life transitions). As discussed by Pedrosa et al., family members influence and interact with one another in a circular and multidimensional process; families serve as an internal function of protection, promote development of one another, and have an external function of socialization and transmission of a particular culture (Pedrosa et al., 2011). Though at the time of data collection participants’ revealed positive adjustment and perceptions of support; longitudinal studies should follow up with this research to clarify if
this is a sustainable pattern over time. Regardless of perceptions of family constellation, adolescent childbearing is associated with poorer outcomes for adolescent mothers and their children, placing adolescent mothers and their children are still at an increase risk of disadvantage. Despite the decrease in the rates of adolescent pregnancy and childbearing, the United States still has one of the highest rates of adolescent childbearing among nations with advanced economies (Santelli & Melnikas, 2010). Given the importance of the family system relative to adolescent pregnancy occurrence and outcomes, its crucial to understand the risk factors arising from the family context and how to provide prevention and intervention to families. Pedrosa et al. (2011) suggest that the family system is an indispensable resource in the primary prevention of adolescent pregnancy. The findings discussed above are consistent with the need for multilevel intervention approaches that elicit holistic behavioral change in the life context of the individual and family.

Research on sibling relationships and blended families has been mixed with respect to which types of relationships and instability are most important and under what circumstances they matter most. In this research study, unlike previous studies, significant age gaps with siblings appeared to play a role in preparing participants for adolescent childbearing. Moreover, differences in fathers’ involvement with siblings appeared to lead to jealousy and mistrust in siblings relationships. This appeared even more relevant for participants with younger half-siblings and non-biological fathers. In order for researchers to fully understand these issues, much more research is needed to understand family complexity on adolescent sexual reproductive health outcomes but also insights into family functioning and union
stability. Hence, the multiple ecological levels that interact and affect different areas of the occurrence of adolescent childbearing reinforce the importance of theory-based research to capture the maximum variability in the variables studied. The following section discusses limitations found when conducting this study.

5.3 Limitations to Study

Several limitations of the study should be noted. First, the findings of this study are limited to a small qualitative sample. Although small numbers alone is not a limitation and is the essence of phenomenology; it is the fact that small numbers are not generalizable. Therefore, caution should be taken when attempting to generalize the findings, as this sample is not representative of all adolescent mothers.

A second limitation is from participant bias. Building upon the methodological limitations of the study, Willig (2008) states that phenomenological research methods are not suitable for the study of the experiences of participants who may not be able to communicate the rich texture of their experiences to the researcher. However, the qualitative methodology in this study allowed participants to present their own perspective upon the phenomenon being studied, which acted as a buffer against potential participant bias.

A third limitation is the potential for researcher bias. Verbatim extract provided a “grounding in examples,” which allowed the reader to make his or her own assessment of the interpretations presented, it is acknowledged that phenomenology is inevitably subjective so the results are not given the status of facts (Elliot et al, 1999; Reid et al., 2005). Although the
process of epoche was used to limit researcher bias, the potential for subjectivity during the process of analysis is present.

Finally, it is important to consider that participants retrospectively reflected upon their lived experiences. One can assume that in many ways, both memories and the significance of certain life experiences can fade. While reflection is an essential way to analyze the past, as well as compare various life experiences, it does not always provide complete accuracy. Therefore, perceptions of experiences may not be a completely accurate representation of what participants experienced.

5.4 Implications

This study provided direct insight on the lived experiences of adolescent mothers’ perception of their family constellations and on the influence of family on the choices and decisions to have had a baby during adolescence. This study also explored influences of the quality of relationships with parents, as well as siblings. Research findings from this study may be useful in future scholarly research, as well as for families (parents and adolescent mothers). The following section includes implications for future research, professionals, and families.

Implications for Future Research

When studying possible risk or protective factors in the occurrence of early pregnancy, the results from this study suggested that several contexts of adolescents’ familial relationships and ecologies may influence the factors that predict adolescent childbearing. That is, adolescents are also influenced by a variety of social and institutional organizations;
peers, school/education, religious affiliations, community organizations, etc. From this study, differences in adjustment were predicted mostly by relational variables; once again, familial and relational aspects were important to the quality of adjustment shown by adolescent mothers. For example, mothers appeared as fundamental support figures. The role of fathering, connectedness, half-siblings, multiple transitions/instability, and parental support are of particular relevance for future research. Since this study only considered the adolescent mothers’ perception of family constellation in relation to adolescent childbearing, emphasis on the relevance of also studying the actual family constellation from other family members perspectives may be important to consider in the future. Additional research efforts are warranted to examine the usefulness of adopting a systemic perspective and an ecological multilevel approach when considering preventive intervention with adolescent mothers and their families. The limited amount of research on sibling relationships also points to a need for future research to examine its longitudinal influences. A longitudinal design would more thoroughly clarify the complex interactions between adolescent mothers and their family constellation, as well as elucidate potential developmental paths and their outcomes before and/or after childbearing.

As support and adolescent adjustment to pregnancy and childbearing emerged themes in the research, it may also be useful to investigate those factors that are associated with healthy adaptation to change. Finally, researchers should also explore the support networks adolescents are part of, as well as the sources from which they get their information.
Implications for Practice

Despite the limitations mentioned above that imply caution when generalizing results, the findings of this study corroborate the shared perspectives of adolescent mothers’ lived experiences. The results of this study have meaningful implications for practitioners. Although family constellation remains an important explanation for influences to adolescent pregnancy, this research demonstrated that the family or family constellation are not elements that predominate over any others. However, they [family/family constellation] stand out given their potential to be worked with, transformed, and adjusted (Afonso, 2009).

As evident in most of the studies in this area, intergenerational factors, poverty, parental support, and unhealthy parental modeling of relationships represent a risk not only for the occurrence of adolescent pregnancy, but also for poorer outcomes in terms of adjustment. Policy makers and program developers may benefit from defining families more broadly to include non-biological or cohabitating support networks. Moreover, data supports the idea that despite the risk factors from negative family experiences, resiliency and positive development may be fostered through external sources of support. For example: Community youth programming, peer networks, school activities, etc. Therefore, practitioners should promote multidisciplinary efforts of strength-based activities and family-centered interventions at the individual, family, and community levels.

Motivating families to preventative efforts may be problematic, as this study supported a non-problematic acceptance of adolescent pregnancy since perceived quality of relationships and satisfaction with social support received from both parents and siblings
remained the same and/or increased. Therefore, a probable implication is the need to work to modify parental values and attitudes, while working with families to maximize and adequately mobilize resources that may be needed to provide necessary support to adolescents and their families. Notably, economic resources may be an environmental issue, defined by several disadvantages. Thus, multidisciplinary efforts should have a broader focus and direct attention towards promoting individual and familial skills, as well as comprehensive relationship education promoting cohesion. Given the intergenerational cycles of adolescent pregnancy, all preventative intervention programs should be implemented in a systematic and longitudinal fashion; starting prior to factors that increase pregnancy risk; before an active sex life is initiated, and persisting beyond the birth of the child to reduce rapid repeat pregnancy.

**Implications for Families**

Families and adolescent mothers especially need to focus on building resiliency factors to enhance the prevention of adolescent pregnancy. Specifically, families need to work to modify values and attitudes characterized by low academic recognition and parental styles marked by low involvement in their daughters’ lives, either in terms of emotional proximity or supervision. Families may benefit from spending more meaningful time together and develop special interest groupsthat incorporate skill building activities for increasing family strengths.

This is even more relevant for fathers, as fatherlessness appeared to be a contributing factor in the data. As families become more aware of their influences on one another,
especially parental influences, they can utilize strategies and resources that promote the healthy development of adolescents while improving family relationships, stability, and family-strengths. Parents should consider the commitment they make to children in families when they divorce and remarry. Specifically, step-fathers need to understand the importance of their role in children’s upbringing. In this research complex family structures related to lower levels of father involvement. Because family structure and instability are intertwined, families should build relationship skills to limit the number of transitions children experience children experience from parental dissolutions and remarriages.

In conclusion, the results of this study suggest the existence of a social context within the family constellation that influences adolescent childbearing choices and decisions. Family models, adverse socioeconomic conditions, and high levels of instability are some of the factors that maximize the probability of adolescent pregnancy and motherhood. Although in general the participants revealed positive adjustment indicators (e.g., support) at the time the interviews took place, longitudinal studies are necessary to clarify whether this pattern is sustainable over time. Sustainability could be achieved by providing youth with community programs that promote their positive development long before the occurrence of puberty and sexual behavior occurs. Indeed, fostering youth with life skills and future goals may play a preventative role in adolescent childbearing. Programs that intervene during adolescent pregnancy should provide support for adolescent mothers, as well as support the development of their children over a substantial period of time to aid in the prevention of intergenerational risks associated with adolescent childbearing. Preventative intervention
should take place at the individual level, as well as the relational and social contexts, since results are consistent with others that point to a systemic perspective and multidimensional contexts in the etiology of adolescent childbearing decisions. Findings from this study suggest that family and relational variables, from adolescents’ perception of relationship quality and social support provided by parents and siblings, play a central role in the comprehension of themes discovered.
REFERENCES


personal, perceived peer, and perceived family attitudes. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 48*, 87-93.


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Request for Participants Form

You have been invited to participate in Rasha El-Beshti’s thesis research for her Masters of Science in Family Life and Youth Development at North Carolina State University! Please read the message below for more information about the study.

What is the purpose of this study?
You are being asked to participate in this study to learn more about how families influence childbearing decisions. The research is seeking to identify the quality of adolescent relationships with parents, as well as siblings.

How do I sign up?
To sign up to be contacted about more information on this study please fill out the contact information sheet and return to the researcher (Rasha El-Beshti) using any of the contact information listed below. Once you sign up, you will be contacted within 1 to 2 business days.

Do I qualify to participate?
All participants must be mothers who became pregnant or had their first child between the ages of 14-19 but who are now between the ages of 28-25 are eligible for participation.

*Name (First, Last)

*Phone (xxx/xxx-xxxx)

*Email (name@network.com)

Best time to be contacted (if any)

Thank you for your interest in this study, I look forward to speaking with you soon!

Rasha El-Beshti
Master's Student, Family Life and Youth Development
North Carolina State University
Dept. 4-H Youth Development and Family & Consumer Sciences
512 Duckbasen Drive, Campus Box 7606; Raleigh, NC 27695-7606
Phone:(919) 515-1992
Email: rmelbesh@ncsu.edu.
APPENDIX B

Telephone Contact Script

The following is the telephone script that I will be using as a guide when I contact potential participants who signed up for more information about the study and/or to participate in the study.

“Hello may I speak with (subject's name)? Hi, this is Rasha El-Beshti calling on behalf of the request for information you signed up for in regards to my study about adolescent parenting. Let me start out by telling you a little bit about myself. I am a Masters of Science student at North Carolina State University in the Family Life and Youth Development Program. I am currently working on my thesis in which I am studying how family relationships affect the choices, decisions, and feelings of belonging among adolescent parents. You recently received an email about a request for participants to participate in my study. I am looking for mothers who became pregnant or had their first child between the ages of 14-19 but who are now between the ages of 18-25 to participate in my study.”

“For this study I will be conducting interviews with willing participants in order to identify if family relationships influence the choices and decisions to have had a baby during adolescence. Let me explain how the study would work. Interviews are expected to last at least 45 minutes. Please note that this interview may cause any negative feelings/experiences that you had in your family system to resurface. Therefore, in addition to being properly informed about the purpose of the study, all participants are required to sign an informed consent form to participate in this study, which ultimately allows me to use you as a willing participant. Are there any questions so far?”

(Answer questions if questions do exist)

“During the face-to-face interview process you will be asked a series of open-ended questions pertaining to your experiences with your family relationships. Please note that you have the right to reject any question that you are not comfortable with answering. In addition, you also have the right to end the interview at any point in time if you feel the need to do so. If you agree to participate in the study, I do ask that the interview take place in an area in your home where there is no audience or anyone who can interrupt the interview. Are there any questions so far?”

(Answer questions if questions exist)

“I will be using a digital voice recorder to record the interviews. No video cameras will be used so you will not be on film. Some of the information from your interview may be quoted anonymously in the study. If you agree to participate in this study you will be given a participant number. For example: Participant One or Participant Two. This is how I will refer to you in the study to ensure that your personal information, like your name or physical description will not be used in this study. All information taken from your interview will be quoted using your participant number to keep your legal name and information private and confidential. Do you have any questions?”

(Answer questions if questions exist)

“All of your information including your name, contact information, interview, and participant number will be stored on a private, secure hard drive. This is to protect your personal information and privacy. Do you have any questions about that?”
“Now that I’ve described the research process, I would like to extend to you the invitation to participate in this study. Is this something that you would be interested in?” (If subject says no, then I will thank them for their time. If participant says yes, I will then confirm a date, location, and time for their interview. See script below).

“What would be the best time to conduct your interview? (Asks for address) May I use the contact information that you submitted as the best ways to contact you? Once again, a signed consent form will be needed from you to participate in this study. You will be handed a consent form to sign on the day and time of your interview to turn in to me before we get started. Your consent form must be filled out and turned in to me before we can do your interview. Do you have any final questions?”

(Answer questions if questions exist)

“Thank you so much for deciding to participate in this study, I will be sending you a confirmation email within the next 15 minutes to confirm your interview date, location and time. This email will also include my best contact information if any questions or concern arise before your scheduled interview. Please pay attention to the information on cancelling or rescheduling your interview. Thank you once again for your time and interest in this study.”

ENDS PHONE CALL
Participant Confirmation Form

Hello (participant name),

This is your interview confirmation for the participation in the following study:

Adlerian Family Constellations and Adolescent Parenting: A Phenomenological Study

Type of Interview: (face-to-face)

Location:

Date:

Time:

If you need to cancel or reschedule your meeting, please email me at rmelbesh@ncsu.edu or call at (919) 515-1992. We understand that sometimes scheduling conflicts may come up last minute. Ideally, cancellations should be made at least two (2) days before your scheduled interview. If you would like to reschedule, please contact me within seven (7) days of your scheduled interview.

For any questions, concerns, or more information feel free to contact me at rmelbesh@ncsu.edu or (919) 515-1992.

Thank you for your interest in this study!

Rasha El-Beshi
Master’s Student, Family Life and Youth Development
North Carolina State University
Dept. 4-H Youth Development and Family & Consumer Sciences
512 Brickhaven Drive, Campus Box 7606; Raleigh, NC 27695-7606
APPENDIX D

Participant Consent Form

North Carolina State University

INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study: Adlerian Family Constellations and Adolescent Parenting: A Phenomenological Study

Principal Investigator: Rasha El-Beshti

Faculty Sponsor: Kimberly Allen, PhD

What is the purpose of this study?
Thank you for taking the time to consider being a part of our research study. Hello, my name is Rasha El-Beshti. The proposed use of this research project is to aid in the completion of a Master’s of Science degree in Family Life and Youth Development at North Carolina State University. You are being asked to participate in this study to learn more about how families influence childbearing decisions. The research is seeking to identify the quality of relationships of adolescents with their parents, as well as siblings. This interview is voluntary and all participants have the option of skipping any question or choosing to end the interview at any point. Should you agree, it will take approximately 45 minutes to complete.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to answer questions about your family constellation: birth order, siblings, family structure, parenting/parents, and relationships.

Risks
There are limited possible risks associated with this research project. Possible risks may include emotions associated with individual family experiences. You may choose to skip any question or end the interview at any point, if you wish.

Benefits
You will not receive a tangible compensation for participating, however your feedback will help researchers gain a greater understanding to the influences of adolescent childbearing. Specifically, looking at the concept of support and belonging through the perceptions of family relationships.

Confidentiality
The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data will be recorded using a digital voice recorder, transcribed, and stored securely in a password protected data file for a period of three years. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study (i.e., legal name or other identifying information). You will NOT be asked to write your name on any study materials so that no one can match your identity to the answers that you provide.

What if you have questions about this study or your rights as a research participant?
If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, NCSU Campus Box 7514, (919/515-4514).

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher:
Rasha El-Beshti
North Carolina State University
Dept. 4-H Youth Development and Family & Consumer Sciences
512 Brickhaven Drive, Campus Box 7606; Raleigh, NC 27695-7606
Phone: (919) 515-1992
Email: rmelbesh@ncsu.edu

You may also contact the faculty sponsor/advisor:
Dr. Kimberly Allen
North Carolina State University
512 Brickhaven Drive, Box 7606; Raleigh, NC 27695
Phone: (919)/515-9139
Email: Kimberly_allen@ncsu.edu

Consent To Participate
“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

Subject’s signature ___________________________ Date ______________

Investigator’s signature ___________________________ Date ______________
APPENDIX E

Guided Family Constellation Questionnaire

Interview Questions for Understanding the Influences of Family Constellation on Adolescent Childbearing

Title of Study: Adlerian Family Constellations and Adolescent Parenting: A Phenomenological Study

Principal Investigator: Rasha El-Beshti

Faculty Sponsor: Kimberly Allen, PhD

Interviewer Instructions: After consent form is collected, begin a conversation with the participant, saying something like “I would like to ask you some questions about your relationships in your family. The answers you provide will be used to help better understand how families influence childbearing decisions.” The researcher will take notes as they answer. These are guiding questions; the participant will guide the conversation.

1. Could you start by helping me get oriented to your early family situation, and where you lived and so on? If you could tell me where you grew up, who you lived with, and/or any experiences you may have had that were significant (e.g., loss of a parent, sibling, etc.).

(A) Participants Perceived Family Atmosphere

*Goal is to get the participant to open up about the climate of relationships that exist between people in the family (including emotional climate).

1) How would you define your concept of “family”?
2) Tell me about your family? (How would you describe your family?)
3) What kind of upbringing did you have (e.g., Did you move around a lot)?
4) How would you describe your family in terms of emotional climate (e.g., strict, permissive, etc.)?
5) Who made the decisions in the family?
6) Tell me about punishment or discipline in your family? (What did it look like?)
7) Tell me about your role in the family?
8) Do you think your family contributed to your decision to be an adolescent parent? If so, in what way?

(B) Participants Birth Order (Numerical and Psychosocial) & Perceived Quality of Sibling Relationship(s)

*Goal is to get the participant to open up about their perceived quality of relationship(s) with siblings.

1) Do you have any siblings? If so, tell me about your sibling(s)? (Interviewer note: participant birth order (oldest/firstborn, second born, middle, youngest, only child))
2) How would you describe the quality of your relationship(s) with your siblings?
3) Which siblings were you closest to? Why?
4) Which siblings were most different from you? How so?
5) Do you think your siblings contributed to your decision to be an adolescent parent? If so, in what way?

(C) Participants Perceived Quality of Parental Relationships & Parental Attitudes

*Goal is to get participants to open up about the quality of their parental relationship(s) and relate it to parental attitudes.

1) Tell me about your parent/guardian(s)? (e.g., likes/dislikes/similarities)
2) Tell me about your relationship with your parent/guardian(s)? (e.g., likes/dislikes/similarities)
3) Which parent/guardian(s) were you closest to? Why?
4) Was there a parent/guardian(s) that you ever felt distant from? How so?
5) What attitude or behavior brought praise from your parents? (expectations)
6) What do you think was most important to your parent/guardian(s)? (e.g., religion, education, sports, etc.)
7) Do you think your relationship with your parent/guardian(s) contributed to your decision to be an adolescent parent?

Is there anything else you would like to share with me?
APPENDIX F

Participant Textural Theme Quotes

Textural Themes for Participant 1(P1)

Perception of Upbringing:

(1) “I had a really happy childhood, but things started to change when my mom remarried and we moved (to a new city) to live with my stepdad.”

(2) “I had a hard time adjusting to living with a stepparent…because even though he was a good provider, he was not emotionally supportive, ever.”

Household Emotional Climate:

(3) “Definitely strict…more so my stepfather, he made the decisions in the family.”

(4) “Kids are kind of seen not heard.”

(5) “There wasn’t a lot of physical punishment” although there were “a lot of privileges taken away, definitely a lot of yelling.”

Concept of Family:

(6) “Family is very very important. Whenever you don’t have anyone else to rely on, you can rely on family. You should be able to trust family; it is a give and take thing. You support one another as they support you. I think family is the foundation for success in life, or your outcome in life…so if your family unit is broken, you’re going to have some issues growing up”.

Perception of Individual Role & Perception of Quality of Relationships with Siblings:

(7) “It was fun to take care of them and I always liked kids.”

(8) “They were like my baby before I had my baby.”

Perception of Sibling Contribution to Adolescent Childbearing:

(9) “I do not think my siblings contributed to my decision to be a parent, but I think they helped me prepare for it because I took care of them.”
Parental Expectations and Values:

(10) “They cared about grades the most.”

(11) “I had to watch Christian programming every night, they really wanted me to have a close relationship with God and do really well academically.”

Perception of Quality of Relationships with parent/guardians:

(12) “I do not include him as a parent or in that role because he wasn’t there. We probably talked a few times a year for several years, but I want nothing to do with him because he is an alcoholic and needs help first.”

(13) “I can’t talk to him, he doesn’t listen to me.”

(14) “I want to keep the list of dislikes short…he is strict, he is a hypocrite, he’s mean…. he is one dimensional, not good at perspective taking.”

(15) “I like that he is very smart, very hardworking, and doesn’t care what anyone thinks of him—he does what he wants to do.”

(16) “She is the only person who loves me unconditionally and I trust her completely.”

(17) “I love my mom, she is my best friend, we are very close. I like that she can get along with anyone, she is positive and very well liked.”

Perception of Relationship with Parent/Guardians Contribution to Adolescent Childbearing Decision:

(18) “When I went to college I engaged in a lot of risky behavior because I finally did not have my overbearing parents…because I did not have their strict rules anymore. They never trusted me or gave me a lot of my own responsibilities in high school so I didn’t know how to handle that freedom when I got to college.”

Perception of Family contribution to Adolescent Childbearing Decision:

(19) “I do think I have more support than the average adolescent parent, and I do believe that is why I’m successful…I am very lucky.”
Textural Themes for Participant 2 (P2)

Perception of Upbringing:

(1) “I hardly have any memories of him because we were so young when he left.”

Perception of Individual Role in the Family:

(2) “My role in the family was to help my mom out—cleaning, helping her cook dinner. I would get home from school, clean up a little and get dinner started for my mom so it would be about ready when she got home.”

Household Emotional Climate & Parental Expectations and Values:

(3) “There wasn’t much punishment or discipline because there was not a lot of rebelling or bad behavior from my brother and I.”

(4) “My mom was strict, but that was mainly with school, as long as I got good grades, I could go out or do things.”

Concept of Family:

(5) “Family is having traditions, rituals, and planning future events together, similar to what you would see in a picture family.”

Perception of Quality of Relationships with Siblings:

(6) “My older sister has always lived with my dad and his family…we stayed with our mom. My siblings and I have great relationships. Of course since my brother and I are twins so we are always together doing everything together.”

(7) “I am totally opposite than my twin brother, he didn’t finish high school and I did.”

Perception of Sibling Contribution to Adolescent Childbearing:

(8) “They both have been very supportive of my decisions and of my children. They are nice, care about my kids, and help if they can—like what an aunt or uncle should usually do.”
Perception of Quality of Relationships with parent/guardians & Perception of Relationship with Parent/Guardians Contribution to Adolescent Childbearing Decision:

9) “Well I don’t now my dad. I get a long with him, we just aren’t close…I don’t really know anything about him, I just know he wasn’t ever there. But I love my mom, I am definitely a mamas girl.”

10) “I have always felt distant from my dad…we get a long, we just aren’t close and he was never there.”

11) “My pregnancies were not typical, we didn’t plan them, we didn’t have dates. The only reason I ever hear from my kids’ fathers is because of them, that’s the only reason we deal with each other.”

12) “I am closest to my mom, we talk about things….. everything.”

13) “Even when it is something I know I will be punished for, I would still be able to talk to my mom about it. My mom would still listen and support me and I could just talk to her. Of course even if it was bad, I would get punished, but that never stopped me from sharing things with her.”

Perception of Family contribution to Adolescent Childbearing Decision:

14) “My mom worked hard to support us and I want to do the same for my kids. I love my kids, I wouldn’t change anything…they are the best feeling ever.”

Textural Themes for Participant 3 (P3)

Concept of Family:

1) “Family…it is somebody that is there…friends can also be considered as family if you have been through a lot with each other.”

2) “My family is crazy—not crazy in a bad way, but crazy in like a fun type way.”

Perception of Individual Role in Family:

3) “My role… since I was the oldest was to do my best so my sister and brother could try and come up the way I did…but you know that never happens.”


**Perception of Quality of Relationships with Siblings:**

(4) “I was young when she was born, but at the same time since I was older, I was there with her all the time.” When describing her relationship with her younger stepbrother, participant 3 believed he was the most different and provided her reasoning. “When he came along I was about 6 or 7 years old and he was young, so I didn’t take on to him like that, not until we got older.”

**Parental Expectations and Values & Quality of Relationships with Parent/Guardians:**

5) “There isn’t too much that they don’t like…I can’t really say.” She continued by describing her relationship with her parents as positive and honest. “My relationships with my parents are good, they are like my best friends. I am closer to my stepdad, because he is the most strict. So I know if it is anything that’s gonna be told from him, its gonna be told like it is and ain’t nothing wrong.”

**Perception of Sibling, Family, and Parent/Guardian Contribution to Adolescent Childbearing Decision:**

(6) “I don’t think anything contributed because I didn’t plan on being a parent.”

**Textural Themes for Participant 4 (P4)**

**Perception of Upbringing:**

(1) “We moved around a lot. We moved from Kentucky to Alabama to Georgia, back to Alabama, back to Georgia, and then North Carolina.”

(2) “When I was less than 3 months old, my dad signed his rights over to me and within the first year my mom remarried and her new husband adopted me. And that was pretty much who I was raised by, who I call my dad, and who I lived with…up until I was 13 when they divorced and he left.”

**Household Emotional Climate & Parental Expectations and Values:**

(3) “When I was younger and my mom and legal dad (father who adopted her) were together things were really strict. They made us mind, we had chores, we had curfews… it was a whole different household.”

4) “I guess my mom was afraid of what his reaction would be, so she was really hard on us to make sure everything was done the right way. But when they split up when I was 13 it turned into I did whatever, we all did whatever, we were out of control.”
5) “I mean to this day, though, I would know better when it comes to certain things. Like, I was raised with a certain level of respect you don’t do this and you don’t do that and that stuff still sits with me. When I am around people and they don’t raise their kids that way, it messes with me.”

6) “We mostly got grounded, that meant that the day we got in trouble, we would have to clean with my mom standing over us and yelling. Make us do crazy chores, wipe down baseboards, wipe down walls—like crazy stuff that really wasn’t necessary.”

7) “For certain things we would get the belt from my dad—that would be for something serious—like max five licks, usually three. But it was very few things like lying or stealing that we got spankings for, we mostly got grounded.”

Concept of Family:

(8) “Family is just an environment where you feel safe, loved, cared about. It doesn’t matter who it’s made up of or how many people there are. As long as you have support and stability.”

Perception of Individual Role in Family and Perception of Family Contribution to Adolescent Childbearing Decision:

9) “Well I am the black sheep—I was more so the trouble maker, I think I caused my mom the most stress of all of my siblings. Just because I was one of the main ones that had daddy issues, and I was the middle child, and it was just a lot of things compiled and I was just a pain in the butt, really—I mean I was the one that was always in trouble, always grounded, always sneaking out, the phone was always ringing in the night for me—I mean I was just bad…I was just bad.”

10) “Well I guess I wasn’t completely distraught when I got pregnant—I know some people get pregnant young and their life was over, but for me I knew we were gonna be fine, my mom knew that we were gonna be just fine.”

11) “It was never something that was talked about, no one ever suggested it, it never crossed my mind…but now I feel differently about that. If I was to get pregnant again, I might not have the baby—because the two I have cause a lot of stress—at this point I don’t want anymore kids—but then I was fine with it.”
Perception of Quality of Relationships with Siblings & Siblings Contribution to Adolescent Childbearing Decision:

(12) “We are like best friends, we are so similar…we like the same boys, and are most alike…we have the same sense of humor and same personality—we even have the same flaws, the same downfalls…when we are together we stay up all night laughing and talking.”

(13) “I don’t have a relationship with my half sister, she is spoiled, spiteful, and hateful towards my children. We don’t even have each others contact information.”

(14) “My mom has mentioned it on occasion and said she cannot believe that my sister has been so hateful and childish.”

Perception of Quality of Relationships with Parent/Guardians:

(15) “I mean he loved her more, everything bad that happened was my fault, nothing was ever her fault…even my mom would say stuff to him about it and he would deny it…I would still feel it and she could see it. I mean he clearly felt more strongly about her than he did me.”

(16) “That is kind of who I turn to at this point, because I don’t talk to either one of my dads…both very seldom I talk to either of them. I like the fact that it is so open, I can hang out with them (my mom and stepdad), I can ask them for anything and never have to worry about it. I know they are not ever going to turn their back on me.”

(17) “I work with my stepdad, we don’t have a father daughter relationship but we don’t argue and we get along. There is no awkwardness, so if I need something that is who I go to.”

(18) “My mom and I talk everyday, usually at least 45 minutes…she lives 15 minutes up the road and I can tell her everything.”

(19) “I have always been closest to my mom, she was always there, she has never left, that hasn’t changed…like my dads have changed multiple times, but my mom has always remained the same.”

(20) “I feel some disappointment come from my mom, like she has less respect for me than my other siblings, which I have talked to her about it and she says it is not true but I just feel it. When everyone is together and around she treats me like a dog and treats everyone else just better.”
Perception of Relationship with Parent/Guardians Contribution to Adolescent Childbearing:

(21) “I mean it just happened and I went with it, I mean I did decide not to abort.”

Perception of Family Contribution to Adolescent Childbearing Decision:

(22) “I didn’t want to separate them from their dad because that’s what kept happening to me and I feel like it screwed me up. But at the end of the day I just did what made me happy, which in the end enabled me to make them happier.”

Textural Themes for Participant 5 (P5)

Perception of Upbringing:

(1) “We were always at my grandmas or my moms apartment, especially at night because my mom worked as a nurse. So it was just me, my mom and my brother with my grandparents around all the time.”

Concept of Family:

(2) “Family is people that you can always count on, trust, and know that they are there for you no matter what…they support you.”

Household Emotional Climate and Individual Role in Family:

(3) “My mom is not strict, communication has always been open and we can talk to each other. There is a mutual respect, so she never had to be strict because I respect her.”

(4) “My mom made all the decisions, but I have always been a pleaser, so I don’t remember being punished…she never beat my ass, never spanked…I mean we may have gotten sent to our room or something I guess.”

(5) “Everybody always thought I was the older sister, when I have an older brother. Maybe because I always just try to keep the peace and keep everyone happy.”

Perception of Family Contribution to Adolescent Childbearing Decision:

(6) “I don’t necessarily think my family contributed, I mean my mom had kids young but that doesn’t mean…ya know, it just happens. I mean being a young parent obviously she was very supportive, because she went through the same thing.”
Perception of Quality of Relationship with Sibling:

(7) “We are 2.5 years apart, he has always been the more rebellious. He was having fun, going out, and getting in trouble in school.”
(8) “We are really close, especially over the past few years…we are like two peas in a pod.”

Perception of Sibling Contribution to Adolescent Childbearing:

(9) “As far as support, he was very supportive which helped and that was nice. But as far as him being influential to why I had a baby, no. I mean he didn’t have any kids of his own or anything.”

Perception of Quality of Relationships with Parent/Guardians:

(10) “My dad hasn’t been apart of my life ever. He is a piece of shit, he obviously never wanted to be apart of our lives.”
(11) “I hardly remember the first…the second one (stepdad) we didn’t really get along but I mean I was still really young to realize what was going on. The third one that passed away, we got along but he was always working all the time so it wasn’t really much of a relationship. There was no warmth and we hardly talked.”

Parental Expectations and Values:

(12) “My mom just wanted us to make good grades, do as she asked, and help around the house.” The participant described education as being of primary importance to her mother. “Definitely my education, and just overall like me being happy and partaking in the activities that I wanted to and just like being fulfilled in my childhood.”

Perception of Relationship with Parent/Guardians Contribution to Adolescent Childbearing Decision:

(13) “I mean yeah, either way I would never consider an abortion…but my mom obviously made it a lot easier to be raised in a positive environment by supporting us 100%.”
Textural Themes for Participant 6 (P6)

Household Emotional Climate:

(1) “It always depended on what had happened that day, like if my mom and dad had been fighting it could go either way of them not caring what we did to them taking their anger out and yelling at us.”

Perception of Upbringing:

(2) “It’s really confusing…my mom and dad divorced and for a long time my dad wasn’t in our lives. Then my mom remarried, and that’s also who we call dad because he was the one that helped raise us, in elementary school when they divorced they shared custody of us.”

Perception of Quality of Relationships with Siblings:

(3) “My half-sisters dad is my moms third marriage…you wouldn’t think she was related because she has such different features than us and we are almost 13 years older than her.”

(4) “We are identical twins, for the longest time ever we were almost the same person and did everything together…we literally had the same friends, did the same activities.”

(5) “In middle school we just finally got tired of it and we were starting to argue a lot…we just became our own person and had opposite groups of friends.”

(6) “She is so much younger that I am more of an aunt to her than an older sister.”

Perception of Sibling Contribution to Adolescent Childbearing Decision:

(7) “I was 16 when I found out I was pregnant and the first person I had told was my twin sister. She helped me process it and was supportive throughout my entire pregnancy and still is.”

Perception of Quality of Relationship with Parent/Guardians:

(8) “My other dad (2nd dad) raised us…no one ever knew he wasn’t our real dad, I mean we spent more time at his house even after my mom and him were divorced.”
(9) “It wasn’t until after my daughter was born that my dad started to come around and I tried really hard to keep him around and in my life…in my daughters life.”

(10) “My mom and I are close, but she’s more of a friend than a mom.”

(11) “I love my mom, but she was really young and she was a model…so I mean think of what happens in movies and that was pretty much how it went.”

(12) “I think that’s why we stayed with our dad (2nd dad) a lot, because she just couldn’t get us to school all the time and didn’t have a regular schedule.”