

**Comparison of Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Academic
Performance and Opportunities: A Focus on Pregnant and Parenting
Students**

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Abstract

This article is a comparison study that investigates how teachers view the academic performance of and the future opportunities available to pregnant and parenting students, while also analyzing how these teenagers perceive their own abilities and opportunities. Responses given by teachers at a school with a high rate of students who are pregnant and parenting in surveys were compared to the artwork of the students they teach. Art was created by both pregnant/parenting teens and non-pregnant/parenting teens to determine the difference in perception these two groups of teens have of themselves. The purpose of this investigation is to show that even with programs available to pregnant and parenting adolescents, the perceptions these students have of their opportunities neither coincide with the perceptions other students their age have of their own opportunities nor the perceptions the teachers have of these pregnant and parenting students. Adolescent pregnancy remains the number one cause for adolescent females to drop out of school, and an investigation of the perceptions they have of themselves and of their futures may help schools understand how to change this phenomenon and how to improve programs offered to this population.

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Introduction and Literature Review

Research has indicated that adolescent pregnancy greatly decreases the likelihood of graduating from high school (Rothenberg & Weissman, 2002). Although rates of pregnancy among teenagers have decreased in the last decade, adolescent pregnancy remains a significant social and economic problem in this nation (Coughlin, 2005). Multiple problems usually accompany teenage pregnancy, such as poverty, lack of child care services, weak family support, problems with the baby's father, the stress of parenthood, medical issues, etc, and each or all of these problems can lead a pregnant teenager or a young mother to leave high school. Other problems, such as poor self-esteem and an unsupportive school system, can also lead to dropping out. Schools have a responsibility to society to reduce drop out rates and to assist *all* students in reaching graduation, yet school programs for pregnant and parenting teenagers have not shown overwhelming success in improving the graduation rates among these students. In this study, perceptions of teachers are compared to the perceptions pregnant and parenting teens have of their academic performances and their future opportunities to determine if a disparity in these perceptions may impact the drop out rates schools are facing among pregnant and parenting students.

Psychosocial problems generally arise with adolescent pregnancy, such as interruption of school, persistent poverty, limited vocational opportunities,

separation from the child's father, divorce, and repeat pregnancy (Coughlin, 2005). Schools are the first place to where society turns to prevent these problems from occurring. In response, schools have created a number of programs for pregnant and parenting teenagers to assist them with school, raising a child, and dealing with emotional issues. The specific goals of these school programs include reducing drop out rates, increasing graduation rates, and improving parenting skills (Texas Education Agency, 2004). Programs offer a multitude of services to try to reach these goals.

Brindis and Philliber reviewed the success of sixteen different programs for pregnant and parenting teens, with success being based on graduation, employment, and ability to financially support oneself and family without public assistance. The programs reviewed targeted teens of multiple ethnic groups and from all over the nation. The programs varied in nature and in number of services provided. Some provided as few as two services to the teens, and some provided as many as nine. These services might include: academic enhancements, case management, job-training and job-related counseling, child care, transportation, special sanctions and incentives, parenting training, sex education, and access to contraceptive services. Brindis and Philliber found that programs that were the most comprehensive, including the most services, were most successful, although the success is marginal. They also concluded that not enough research has been done to determine the long-term effects these programs have on teen parents and

their children (Brindis & Philliber, 1998). A similar study was done in New Mexico that also concluded that the more services available to pregnant and parenting teenagers increases their likelihood to graduate high school (Philliber, Brooks, Lehrer, Oakley, & Waggoner, 2003). Most schools, however, are not able to provide a large variety of services, and schools rarely report successes of the programs they are able to offer.

Often, hospitals and other social institutions offer services to pregnant and parenting teenagers to assist them with childbirth and parenting. Such programs can improve the lives of these teenagers and offer them a support system that may not be available in the school programs. Group and individual therapy, classes on parenting, and medical assistance can all be offered all at the same time in a hospital or clinical program. These programs have shown to help teenagers adjust to pregnancy and/or parenthood a little better. Unfortunately, many do not offer academic help or work with schools directly (Rothenberg & Weissman, 2002). The studies conducted by hospital programs can, however, become helpful to schools. One study performed by nurses at a hospital that serves pregnant adolescents found that most teenagers demonstrate an optimistic attitude when facing parenthood. This optimistic attitude, though, may suggest a lack of knowledge on the challenges that parenthood will place upon them. This reaction is consistent with their young age and developmental stage (Myors, Johnson, & Langdon, 2001). Because teenage mothers foresee primarily positive

consequences to pregnancy, teenagers may not be able to assess the full reality of parenthood. Also, adolescents may not have a complete appreciation for the effects risky behavior can have on them. Therefore, pregnant teenagers may not be able to understand all of the consequences, negative and positive, that pregnancy and parenthood may bring (Johnson, McCaul, & Klein, 2002). Many of their responses to becoming pregnant or having a child can come across as optimistic, while ignoring the potential negative consequences that come with childbirth and raising a child at a young age. Many hospitals have neither the resources to teach these teenagers what life after a child may bring nor the staff to teach them the skills needed to provide for their children. The schools still hold that responsibility, but the research on school programs for pregnant and parenting teenagers is limited and seldom offers a conclusion that suggests how to best assist this population academically. Also, reliable research that investigates how these teenagers view their own academic abilities or how they view their opportunities in school and beyond has not been found. This type of research may help schools determine how to implement the best program to meet the goals of this population and to assist them with their academic needs. The studies that have been done on pregnant and parenting teens' perceptions of school and their futures have been very small case-studies and have not offered conclusions that are transferable to multiple populations.

In 2001, Schultz conducted a study of African-American females, assessing their goals and their views on having children. The pregnant students in her study expressed a renewed motivation to do well in school and to continue on to college, but many of the young women who were not pregnant foresaw a better future for themselves without children. A paradox emerged in that young women wanted to avoid becoming pregnant to ensure greater opportunities, but the ones that did become pregnant in high school had similar drives to succeed as the non-pregnant students. This study only observed ten subjects, and with such a small number of participants in a single demographic, it is difficult to draw conclusions that transfer to all students who become pregnant or parents (Schultz, 2001).

Another study has drawn similar conclusions to Schultz's research. Zachry, through interviews, questionnaires, and observations, examined how nine pregnant teenagers experienced school and how their pregnancies and experiences as mothers affected their views toward school. This study showed that teen mothers' tendency to drop out of school is probably based more on their views of school prior to becoming pregnant. The adolescents expressed that their babies were motivators to stay in school, whereas if they hadn't become mothers, they would not have continued to attend school. This study contradicts the common belief that adolescent pregnancy is actually what causes these teenagers to want to leave school as opposed to staying in (Zachry, 2005). As with the study

conducted by Schultz, Zachry's study only investigated the views of nine teenagers, and little other research has been found on this topic.

Understanding the way pregnant and parenting adolescents think can be advantageous in helping to plan programs that will assist these students and improve their chances of graduating from high school. With little to no recent literature relating to the topic of perceptions teachers have of pregnant and parenting students' abilities and opportunities or of student perceptions of their own abilities and opportunities, the purpose of the study done for this article is to identify these perceptions to potentially offer a new way of researching adolescent pregnancy and its effects on the potential of these adolescents. The problem is that we don't know how teacher perceptions of academic achievement and opportunities of pregnant and parenting students compare to the perceptions these students have of their own achievements and opportunities.

Methodology

This article attempts to answer the following three questions. First, how do teachers of pregnant and parenting teenagers view the academic performance and opportunities of these students? Second, how do pregnant and parenting teenagers view their own performances at school and their opportunities in the future? Third, how do the perceptions of pregnant and parenting teens on academic achievement and opportunities compare to the perceptions of non-pregnant and parenting teenagers?

The research conducted for this article included survey research and content analysis. Survey research involves obtaining information by asking questions of a group of people and then tabulating their answers. Content analysis is a detailed examination of the parts of a body of material (in this article, interviews and artwork) in order to determine patterns, themes, and/or biases in the material (Leedy & Ormond, 2005).

Key words used in this article are defined specifically for the purposes of this study. Operational definitions:

Academic achievement: How well a student has performed in school, based mostly on classroom grades.

Art: Illustrative material. The art created for this study by students consisted of drawings done on plain white paper, 8 ½” by 11”, with pencil, pen, and/or colored pencils. The art created by the researcher was done with acrylic paint on canvas.

At-risk youth: Children who have already dropped out of school or who are at risk of dropping out of school.

Charter school: A public school funded by the state that operates independently of the local school board. The charter school identified in this study is located in Central Texas in a neighborhood that is identified as having a high percentage of people living below the poverty line. Also, the school has approximately 300 students, mostly Hispanic and African- American, and approximately 25% of the students have been identified as pregnant and parenting.

Pregnant and Parenting students: Adolescents, male and female, enrolled in high school, grades 9 through 12, who are currently pregnant and/or who are parents, actively involved in raising their own children.

Program for pregnant and parenting teenagers: Services offered to specifically assist pregnant and parenting students with academics, as well as issues related to child birth and raising a child. The program attended by the student participants in this study involves Compensatory Education Home Instruction (CEHI), which helps students stay current with school work while living at home, tending to a baby or dealing with medical problems related to the pregnancy. The CEHI program offered at the school the participants attend provides a non-certified counselor who brings assignments from the students' regular teachers to their homes and assists them with the assignments. The counselor visits each student once a week and reports back to the teachers on progress and with completed assignments. The students return to their regular classes after six weeks, as long as there is no medical reason to stay at home.

Both faculty and students at a particular charter school participated in this study. Sixteen high school teachers of various subjects, three administrators, two counselors, and two instructional aides participated in the study. Only the teachers' and administrators' responses are used in the data due to the purpose of this study. The teachers range in experience, from seven months to eighteen years of teaching experience; in age, from 24 to 53 years old; and in education levels,

from bachelor's degree to PhD. The administrators are two assistant principals and one principal, each with a master's degree, and ranging in age from 27 to 55. A total of 89 high school students, from grades 9 to 12, participated in the study. 70 students are not pregnant or parenting, and 19 of the participants are pregnant or parenting students.

The school these students attend is a charter high school in Central Texas. It has been in operation for almost four full school years, and enrollment has increased from 69 students in its first year to approximately 300. The exact enrollment cannot be specified because the population at this charter school is very transient, and enrollment and withdrawal continues throughout the school year. The school serves mostly Hispanic and African-American students; approximately 10% of the students are of another ethnicity. The school targets at-risk youth and awards high school diplomas based on the standards set forth by the state of Texas. Graduation ceremonies are held twice a year, and the number of graduates for each ceremony varies from two to thirty. 65% of graduates of the school district go on to some form of higher education including four-year colleges, community colleges and technical or trade schools. Approximately 5% join the military while the remaining graduates enter the work force.

Procedures that were used in this research study included surveys, interviews, and drawings. First, permission from the principal and the school board were given verbally and via e-mail. Then, surveys were distributed via e-

mail to adults working at the school who agreed to participate. The surveys were returned via e-mail or were placed in the researcher's private mailbox at the school. Identification of the participants was kept confidential. Next, while in class, students were asked to draw one picture that represented how they have performed in school in the last year and then a second picture that represented their future opportunities. The pictures were labeled "1" and "2", respectively, and the students were asked not to put their names on the papers. The pregnant and parenting students were asked to place a P with a circle around it on the back of each drawing. Finally, the surveys were tabulated to find themes and to determine demographics of the participants.

The art created by the students included two drawings, using plain printer paper and pencil. Color was optional. The drawings were analyzed using content analysis. This analysis was done by looking for meanings in the symbols drawn. The number of specific symbols, i.e. question marks, happy faces, tears, etc., were tabulated to find themes among the drawings. The symbols were counted and organized into an Excel spreadsheet to create charts that would help to compare the results between the two groups of students, pregnant/parenting students and non-pregnant/parenting students.

The survey instrument used in the study was the "Pregnant/Parenting Questionnaire" (Addendum A), with ten questions about demographics, perceptions on the academic achievement of pregnant and parenting teens as

compared to non-pregnant/parenting teens, and views on opportunities to graduate for the pregnant and parenting population. Almost all of the survey questions were open-ended. Answers were tabulated to find themes among the responses. Another type of research performed in this mostly qualitative study is arts-based research. Two paintings were created by the researcher that shows her perceptions of the study. The paintings were done on 8" by 10" canvas with acrylic paint. The two paintings represent the two groups of students that created drawings for the study. The first painting is black and white showing the silhouette of a pregnant woman, and the symbols in the painting are symbols pulled from the drawings created by the pregnant and parenting students. The second painting is blue and yellow with an image of a non-pregnant/parenting student and some of the symbols found in the drawings done by this group of students (Addendum C). The art was created by the researcher to express her feelings toward the drawings that were created by the teenagers. Often in research, the feelings of the researcher are not explored, but understanding the emotions of the researcher can really help to understand the research.

The instrument designed for the qualitative aspect of this study is based on the "critical incident technique" developed by Flanagan (1954), and adapted by Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen (1993). Trustworthiness was established throughout the study with compliance to the components of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability inherent to Naturalistic studies.

Naturalistic techniques including persistent observations, triangulation, peer debriefing, thick description, participant review, and reflexive journals were initiated and maintained throughout the study (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen. 1993).

Display of Data

The survey data displayed here comes only from the responses of teachers and administrators because these faculty members have more daily contact with and more information on the students in this study than the other staff members at the school. The surveys were collected from 16 of the 18 teachers and 3 of the 4 administrators at the charter school. Of the 16 teachers, 12 are Caucasian (75%), 2 Hispanic, 1 Asian, and 1 African-American. They range in age from 24 to 53 with a mean age of about 37. The teachers have multiple educational backgrounds, from bachelor's degrees to a PhD. Twelve of the 16 teachers have at least taken some graduate courses; half of this group have earned a graduate degree. The subjects taught by these teachers range from core subjects, such as math, English, and social studies, to athletics and computer courses. The administrators who participated all have master's degrees, and 2 are Caucasian, while one is African-American. The demographic information came from questions 1 through 5 on the Pregnant and Parenting Questionnaire (Addendum A).

Responses to questions 9 and 10 on the survey were tabulated to determine themes among the answers. The teachers' and administrators' answers to question 9, regarding their opinions of the pregnant and parenting services available to their students, were categorized into "good", "need improvement", "not good", and "unknown". The services available to pregnant and parenting teens at this school are offered through the CEHI program, which was defined earlier. Six of the 16 teachers (almost 38%) considered the programs to be good; 4 expressed that the programs needed improvement; 3 stated that the services were not good or inadequate; and 3 did not know about the services available or did not have an opinion regarding the program (Figure 1, Addendum C1). Two of the three administrators who participated felt that the services were good, while the third said they needed improvement.

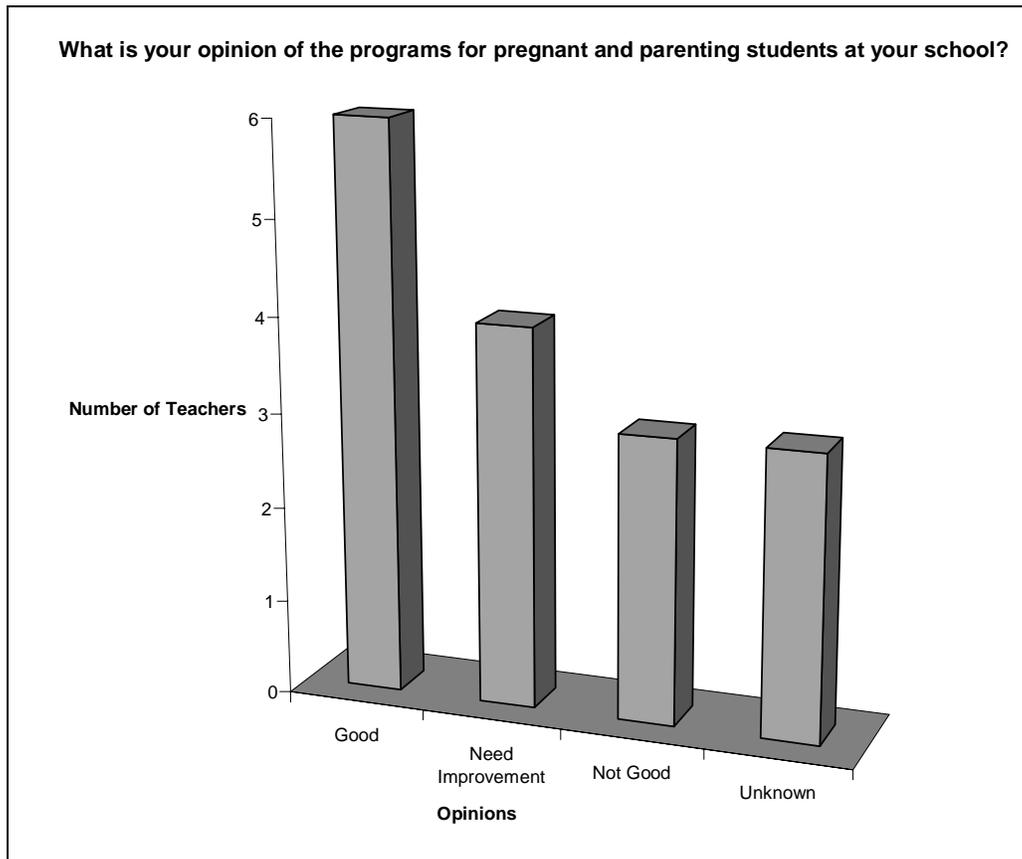


Figure 1: Teacher Responses to Question #9

Responses to survey question #10, which asked if pregnant and parenting students have the same opportunities to graduate from high school as non-pregnant/parenting teenagers, were also categorized. The categories these responses fall into are “yes”, “no”, and “unsure”. 13 of the 16 teachers responded “yes” to the question (over 81%); 3 responded with an unsure or unclear answer (less than 19%); and none of the teachers answered “no”. The administrators all responded with a “yes” (100%). The results show that a majority of the

employees surveyed at the charter school believe that pregnant and parenting students have the same opportunities with regards to school as students who are not pregnant or parenting.

The responses to survey questions numbered 7 and 8 were also tabulated to determine the teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the academic achievement levels of pregnant and parenting teens compared to non-pregnant/parenting teens and to understand their thoughts on how pregnancy and the task of parenting affects the academic achievement of those students. Overwhelmingly, these teachers believe pregnant and parenting students to perform better in school than the students who are not pregnant or parenting. Teachers expressed that the anticipation of or responsibility of raising a child increases their motivation in school. Common responses to question #7 were that pregnant and parenting students are "more focused", "have a new desire to do well", and "are more serious about school". Only the special education teachers (2) expressed that pregnant and parenting teenagers were lower performing due to absenteeism and exhaustion. Most general education teachers mentioned in question # 8 that absenteeism is also a problem with pregnant and parenting teens that could contribute to lower grades, but they continued to emphasize that these students still performed better even though absenteeism is higher among the pregnant and parenting students. Most teachers continued to convey that greater responsibility is what really impacts the higher levels of performance and

academic achievement of the pregnant and parenting students. Only one administrator agreed with the teachers based on the responses given. The other administrators answered that they did not know how the academic achievement of the two groups compared, and they guessed that absenteeism may affect the achievement levels of the pregnant and parenting students.

The art completed by 89 students at this charter school was also analyzed to determine their own perceptions of how they achieve academically and to understand what they project for their futures. 19 pregnant and parenting students and 70 who are not pregnant or parenting were asked to draw two pictures. The first shows how they have achieved academically in the past school year, and the second depicts their future opportunities. Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5 (Addendum C2-C5) display the data collected from the students' artwork. The first drawing done on the students' views of their academic achievement were categorized into themes based on symbols present in the artwork. The themes include: A's/High Grades/Passing/Improvement, which was depicted by the students with "A's" and "B's", good report cards, or assignments with high grades on them; Question Marks; Taking Care of Child; Frown/Tears/Unhappiness, not regarding grades; Failing/Poor Grades, usually expressed with an "F" or a low number grade; Graduation, usually symbolized by a graduation cap, a diploma, or a ceremony; Up Arrows/Thumbs Up/Smiley Faces, with no emphasis on grades; Skipping School; Pictures of School or Classroom; Athletics; and Other. Some themes or

symbols of one group were not seen in the other group's drawings and are therefore left out of Figures 2 or 3. The percentages of each theme are displayed to compare the two groups' drawings and views, and the following similarities and differences are notable. The percentage of drawings with symbols expressing A's/High Grades/Passing were the same in both groups (33%). The percentages of smiley faces or up arrows are close in both groups (17% and 23%), but there was a 7% difference in the Frown/Tears/Unhappy category, with pregnant and parenting teenagers having the higher percentage at 11 percent. Also, the percentage of question marks in the drawings of pregnant and parenting teens was 10 degrees higher than that of non-pregnant and parenting students.

When analyzing the second drawings, the symbols were also placed into categories to compare the art of the two groups. These categories include: College, with nothing related to a job, only symbols of specific colleges; Professional Job, which includes drawing of jobs that require at least a 4-year degree; Non-Professional Job, which are images of jobs that do not require a four-year degree; Money, symbolized by dollar signs or dollar bills; Graduation; Children/Family/House; Job and Family, with both shown in the picture; and Question Marks. These themes were found in both pregnant/parenting students' drawings and non-pregnant/parenting students' work. The following themes were found only in the drawings done by the latter group: Fame, through athletics or entertainment; Smiley Faces; Stars; and Other, such as an alien, grades, and

building blocks. There is only one close similarity between the percentages of symbols drawn between these two groups in this set of drawings, and it is in the category of Job and Family, in which the picture depicted both a family and a profession of any kind in the same picture. Five percent of each group had drawings that fell into this category. The differences between the groups are notable among the following categories: College/No Job, Non-Professional Job, Professional Job, Graduation, and Question Marks. The pregnant and parenting students had higher percentages in the categories of Professional Job, Non-Professional Job, and Question Marks. In the other categories, the non-parenting teens had higher percentages. The greatest difference between the percentages of the two groups in the same category was under the Non-Professional Job theme. 29 percent more (37% total) pregnant and parenting students drew pictures representing non-professional jobs, such as mechanics. The other disparities can be seen on Figures 4 and 5.

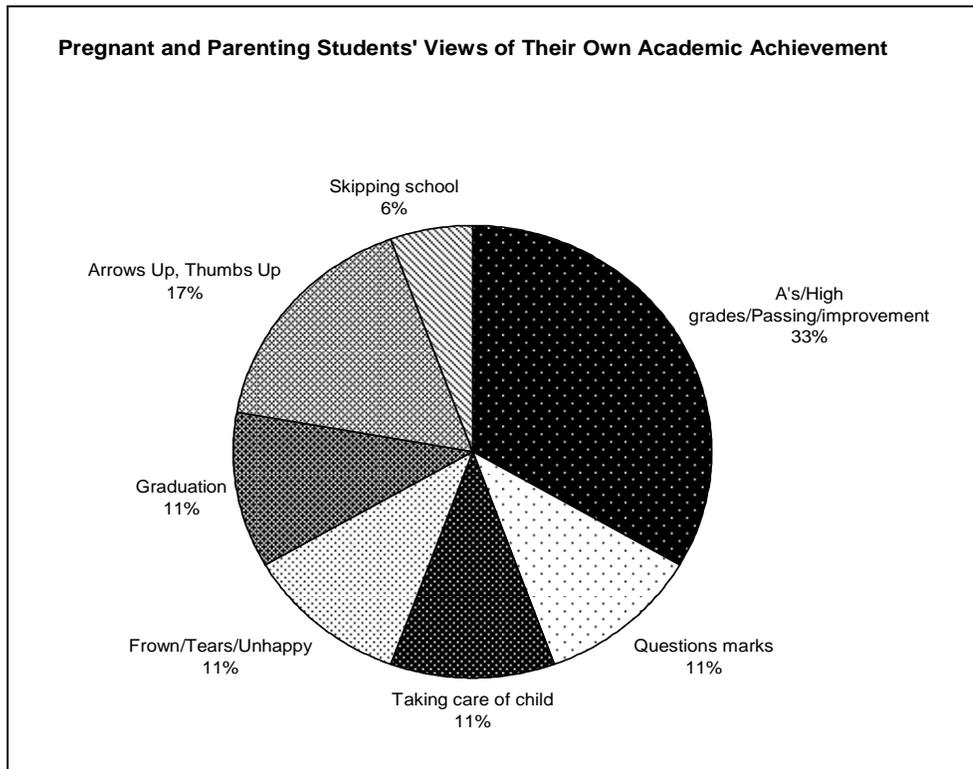


Figure 2: Themes found among the first drawings done by pregnant and parenting students.

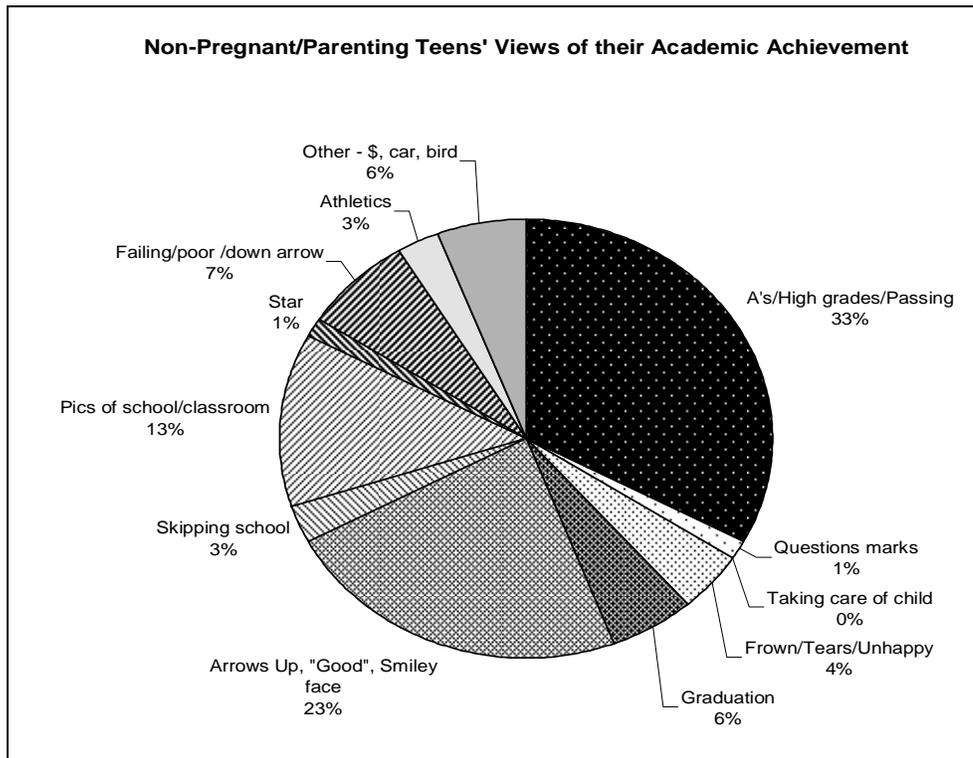


Figure 3: Themes found among the first drawings done by non-pregnant/parenting students.

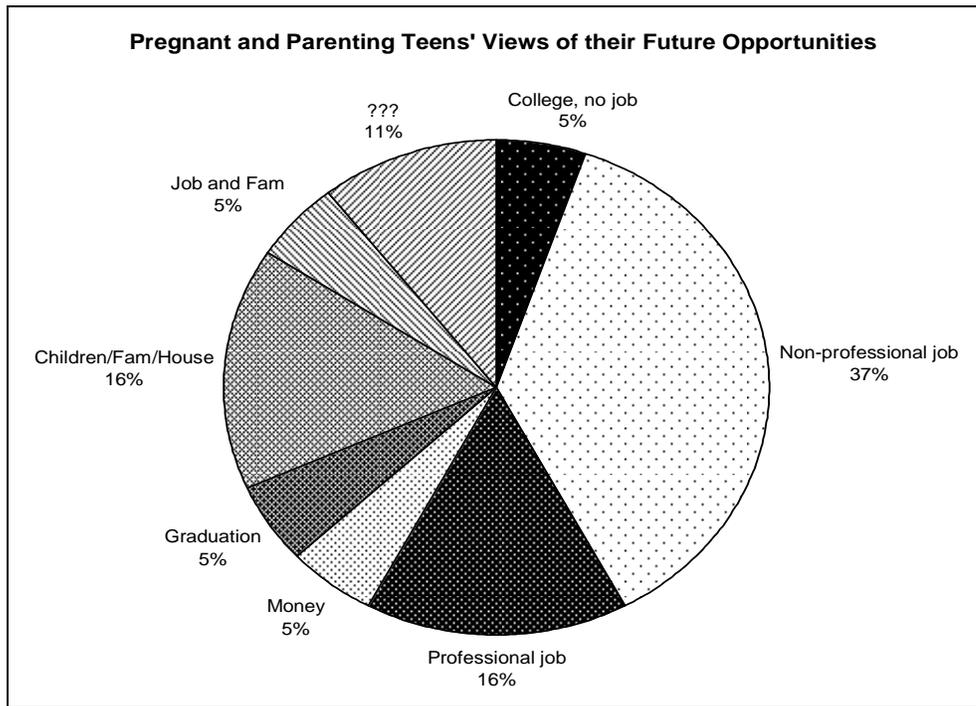


Figure 4: Themes found among the second drawings done by pregnant and parenting students.

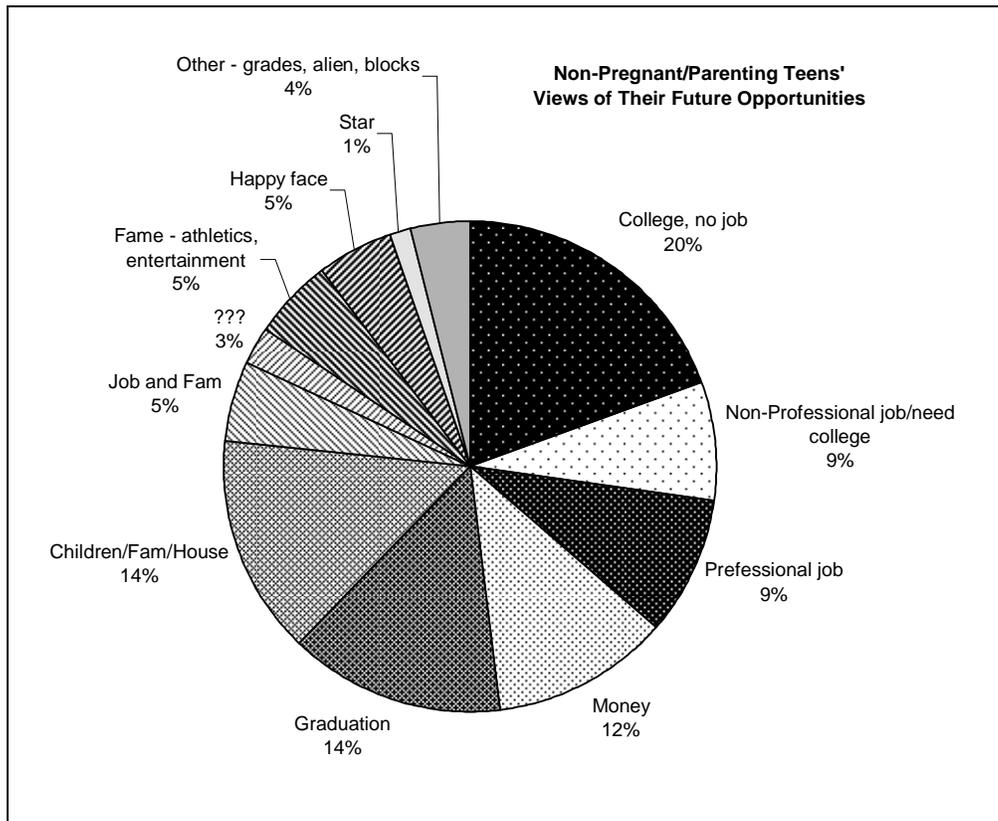


Figure 5: Themes found among the second drawings done by non-pregnant and parenting students.

The final analysis done for this study was on the researcher's art created while collecting and reflecting on the data from the surveys and the students' drawings. The researcher created two paintings on canvas prior to tabulating the survey responses or categorizing the symbols in the students' art. One of the researcher's paintings shows a silhouette of a pregnant woman, and symbols taken from the students' artwork are displayed to the right of the silhouette. After briefly reviewing the students' art, these symbols were the ones that the researcher found to be most powerful. The symbols drawn are question marks

(7), a house with a family next to it, a set of eyes with a tear coming from one, and a stick figure with the word “urgh!” next to its crooked grin and hair sticking straight up. The colors used were black for the background and white for the symbols and pregnant woman.

The second painting is of a full human figure with arms and legs outstretched to all four corners of the canvas. Symbols are dispersed among the painting that were influenced by the drawings of the non-pregnant and parenting teenagers. The symbols include a star, a smiley face, a graduation cap, a dollar sign, and an “A+”. Light blue is used as the background, and yellow is the color of the symbols and figure. The bright colors contrast the black and white painting done previously. Both paintings are the same size and were done on the same day (Addendum D1 and D2).

Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of teachers and of students regarding the academic achievement level and future opportunities of pregnant and parenting students compared to non-pregnant/parenting students to possibly offer a new way of researching adolescent pregnancy and its effects on the potential of these adolescents. The problem addressed was that we don’t know how teacher perceptions of academic achievement and opportunities of pregnant and parenting students compare to the perceptions these students have of their own achievements and opportunities. We also do not know how student

perceptions compare among pregnant/parenting students and non-pregnant/parenting students.

The first research question in this study asked how teachers of pregnant and parenting teenagers view the academic performance and opportunities of these students. The data shows that over 87 percent of teachers of pregnant and parenting students see these students as high achieving and more motivated to do well. The teachers expressed overwhelmingly that this group of students perform better than the non-pregnant/parenting group of students. As many of the teachers stated, the responsibility of taking care of another person can contribute to the higher levels of performance. Society may not necessarily have the same view of these students, especially because pregnancy is the number one reason that female adolescents drop out of school. This positive attitude by teachers toward the students could improve the high drop out rate. Schools may need to find a way to translate the positive attitudes of the teachers to the students to ensure that they stay in school and remain motivated.

The second research question asked how pregnant and parenting teenagers view their own performances at school and their opportunities in the future. The drawings created by pregnant and parenting students suggest that some students may be unsure of their performances in the classroom and that they center their views of future opportunities on getting a job. The views pregnant and parenting students have of themselves do not directly align with the views teachers have of

them. Just over half of the pregnant and parenting students who participated in this study expressed positive views of their performance through their drawings. The remaining half either expressed negative attitudes toward their performance or only focused on their lives outside of school. An overwhelming majority of teachers felt that these students performed well in school, but almost half of these students do not feel the same way, according to their drawings. Possibly, poor self-esteem related to pregnancy and parenthood may be associated with this disparity, or the services the school is providing are not making the students feel successful. This disparity is not conclusive enough to suggest one particular cause or recommendation.

The third research question addresses how the perceptions of pregnant and parenting teens on academic achievement and opportunities compare to the perceptions of non-pregnant and parenting teenagers. A third of each group showed confidence in performance and academic achievement. Some drawings from each group showed “A’s” and high number grades (Figure 6, Addendum D3). This is a similarity that could be attributed to the fact that teachers see both groups as having the same opportunities at school, or it could be because the services offered to pregnant and parenting students allow them to complete the same assignments and to be graded on the same scale as the non-pregnant/parenting students. The differences in other areas, such as the higher percentage of questions marks and negative attitudes in the drawings done by

pregnant and parenting students, may suggest that an element of mentoring or counseling may be helpful to the pregnant and parenting population at this school. For example, one image done by a young mom “tells the story” of a very sad adolescent crying on a stoop, unsure of herself (Figure 7, Addendum D4).

In the second set of drawings, of future opportunities, another difference was recognized between the two groups. A greater percentage of pregnant and parenting students drew pictures related to working at a job than the other students. One drawing shows a mechanic working on a car, and another student drew herself working as a firefighter (Figure 8, Addendum D5). Both of these jobs were categorized as jobs that do not require a 4-year college degree. The focus of pregnant and parenting teenagers is most likely to care for their children and their main motivation during and after high school may be to support themselves and their families. The high percentage of students who drew pictures related to jobs could suggest that this school may want to include additional services in its pregnancy and parenting program to assist these students in selecting a career, training for a job, preparing to find a job, and other job-related services. The data also suggests that non-pregnant/parenting students see a future in college, whereas college may not be as important to the pregnant and parenting population. Symbols that were common among the drawings done by non-pregnant/parenting teenagers were University of Texas emblems and pictures of students in college classrooms (Figure 9, Addendum D6).



Figure 6: Drawing done by a non-pregnant/parenting student



Figure 7: Drawing done by parenting student



Figure 8: Drawing done by pregnant student



Figure 9: Drawing done by non-pregnant/parenting student

Two more pieces of art were created for this study. I produced two painting that represented what stood out most to me from the drawings the students created. I saw more of the differences between the two groups than the data shows. The drawings expressed more than the calculation of numbers do. Some symbols spoke to me in such a way that I had to incorporate them in my own art. The painting in black and white with the symbol of a silhouette of a pregnant woman next to multiple question marks and other symbols of confusion and

frustration represents not only how some of these students view themselves but also how the outside world often sees them. The pregnant woman is drawn as a silhouette because once an adolescent becomes pregnant, it seems that her pregnant belly is focused on more than her abilities and her opportunities. Also, many assume that the pregnancy will lead her to a life that does not include college or high levels of success, and some students think this way as well.

The second painting created represents the multiple abilities and opportunities associated with an adolescent who does not have the “burden” of raising a child holding him/her back. This blue and yellow painting uses symbols from the artwork created by non-pregnant/parenting teenagers to reflect the common belief by society and adolescents alike that one can do anything he wants if he/she waits to raise a child. The contrast the two paintings present when side-by-side really demonstrates the attitudes society has toward the two groups, which is what inspired me to investigate perceptions that teachers who interact with these teenagers have of them and what these adolescents think of themselves (Figure 10, Addendum D7).



Figure 10: Paintings created by researcher

The data collected in this study and the analysis offered can help schools improve upon their current programs for pregnant and parenting students by allowing them to understand the perceptions these teenagers have of themselves and their futures. These students are performing better in school, according to their teachers, and many of them are aware of this, but a large enough percentage is not. Programs that boost confidence and that allow students to communicate more with their teachers may help bring this percentage up. Also, compared to non-pregnant/parenting students, pregnant and parenting students focus more on getting a job after high school, which means that schools should create programs that assist these students even more in their search for a career and in their job

skills. These changes may result in lower drop-out rates in some schools and in more productive programs for pregnant and parenting students.

Although this study can offer some conclusions that may help schools and future research, it has not offered enough conclusive information. If done in the future, similar results may be found, but a larger number of participants would greatly help the results. With a larger sample of pregnant and parenting students, the results may show more evidence of confusion or negativity among pregnant and parenting students with regards to school than this study showed. This population is dropping out of school either due to the pressures outside of school or in school, and one would expect that this group of students may draw negative images when prompted properly. Another limitation to this study has to do with the prompts given to the students. They were not specific and did not directly relate to the questions asked to the teachers in the survey. The drawings may have been more conclusive if the prompt asked the students to draw their opportunities in the next 2-3 years or to draw their academic achievement based solely on their grades. Also, the group of students that participated were given the drawing assignment by their teacher, which could have influenced what was drawn. When the drawings were complete, only one person analyzed the artwork to find themes and to decipher symbols. These limitations may have affected the results. With some improvements made, this study could be very helpful to schools in determining which services are most important to pregnant and

parenting students, and it can offer a new way to understand this group of adolescents.

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Addendum

Addendum A
Questionnaire – Pregnant and Parenting Students

1. Please circle your ethnicity.

Caucasian Hispanic African-American Asian Other

2. How old are you?

3. What level of education do you have? (Please circle.)

High school grad
Associate's degree
Some Undergraduate courses
Bachelor's degree
Teacher Certification
Some graduate courses
Master's degree
PhD

4. What is your job title?

5. If you are a teacher, what subject do you teach? For how long have you been teaching?

6. Approximately what percentage of your total students are pregnant or parenting students?

7. How does the academic achievement of pregnant and parenting students compare to that of non-pregnant/parenting students?

Addendum B
Drawing Assignment

You will get two sheets of blank paper and a pencil. Then, draw a picture for each of the two prompts below. (You may use color if you have any.)

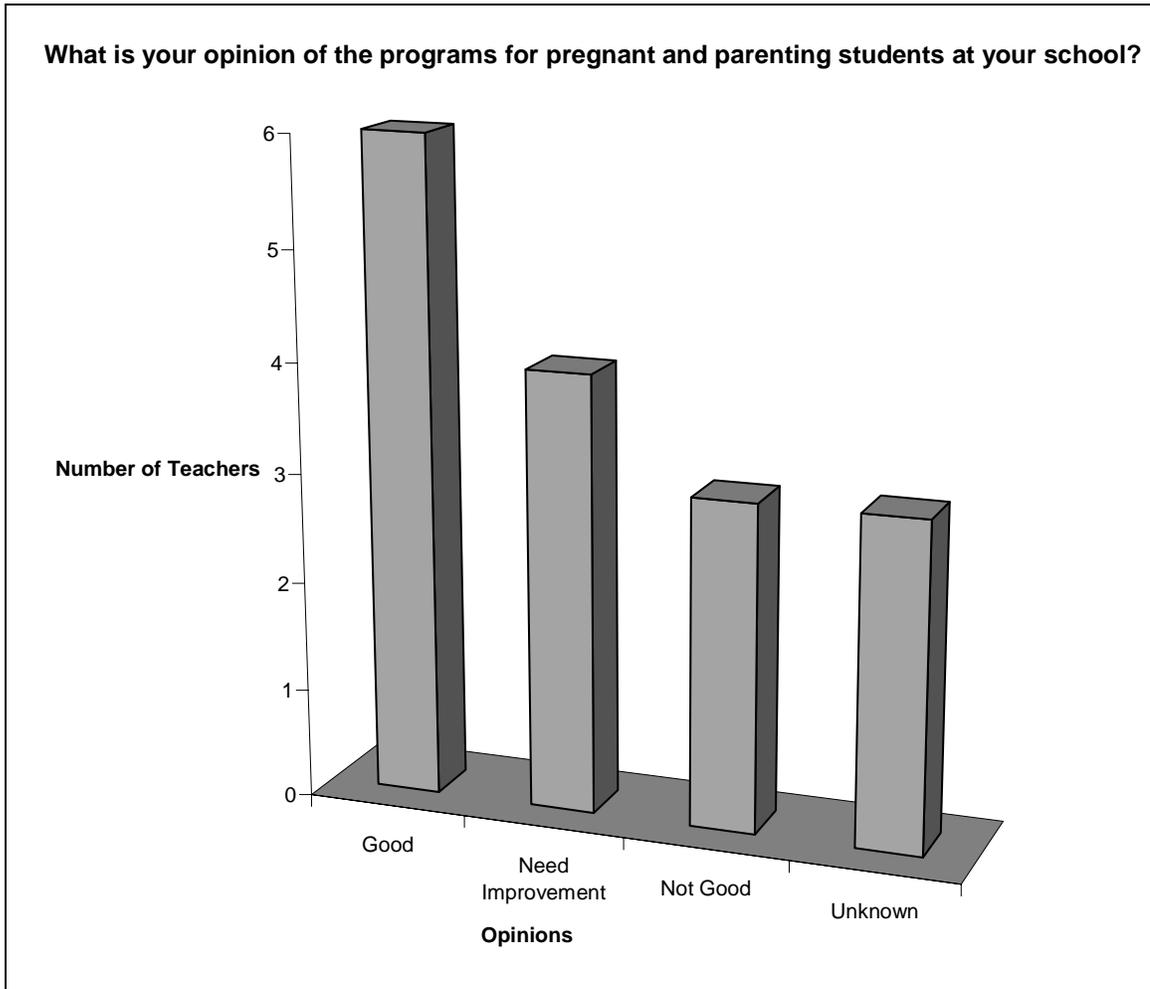
- 1) Draw a picture that represents how you have performed academically in the past school year.
- 2) Draw a picture that represents your opportunities in the next few years.

Please NO NAMES on the drawings. Also, if you are pregnant or a parent (male or female), please write a P with a circle around it on the back of both drawings.

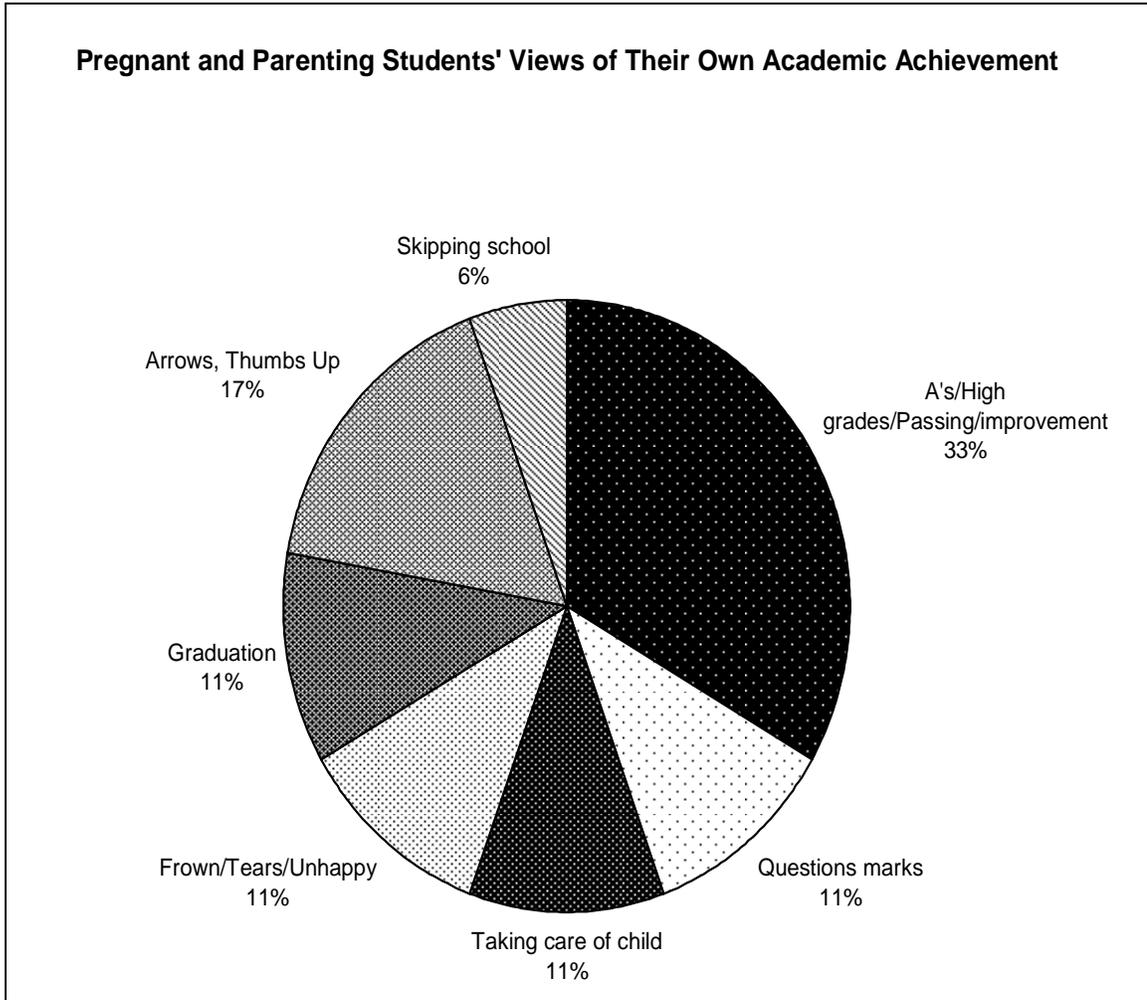
P

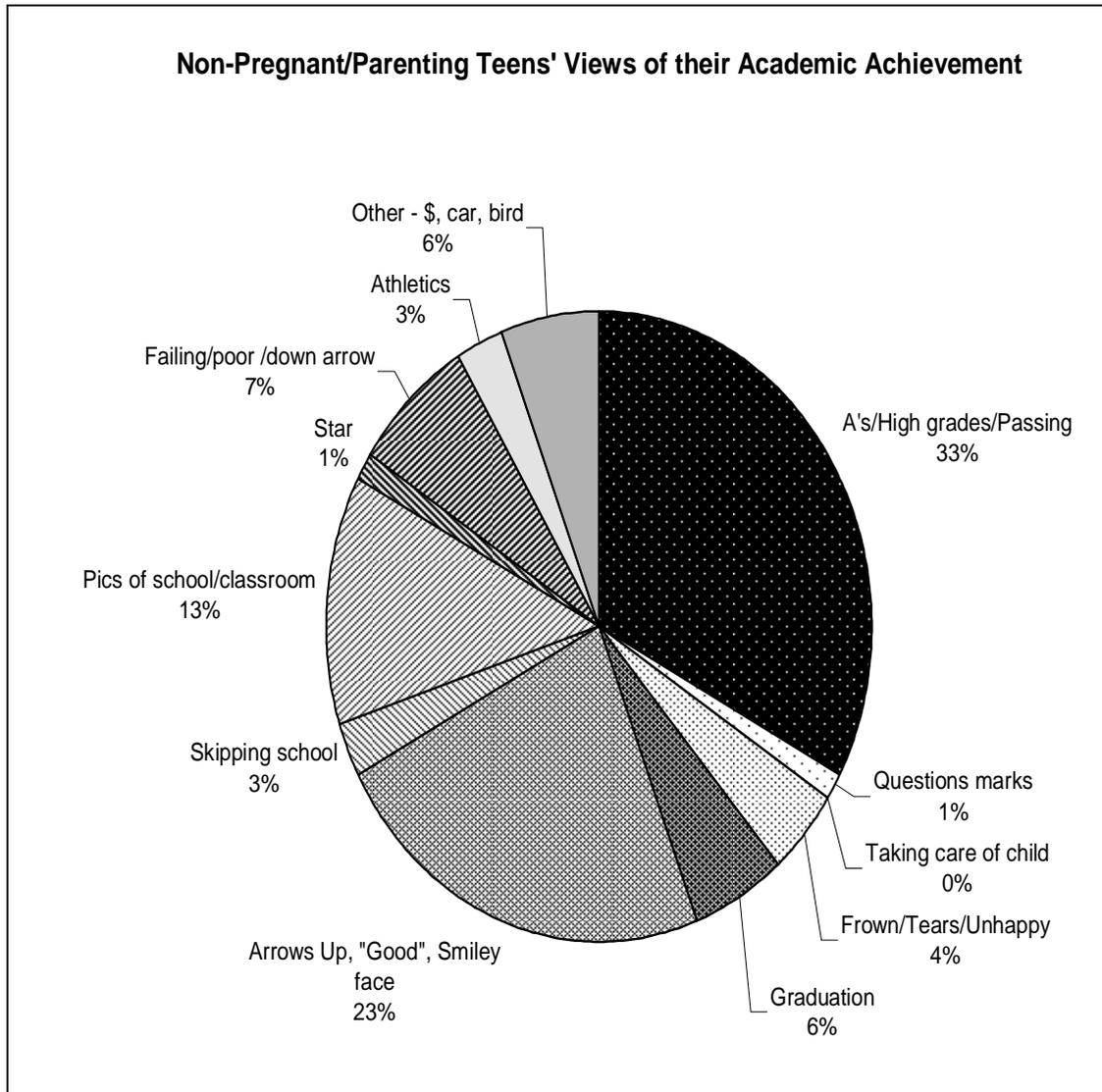
THANK YOU!

Addendum C-1

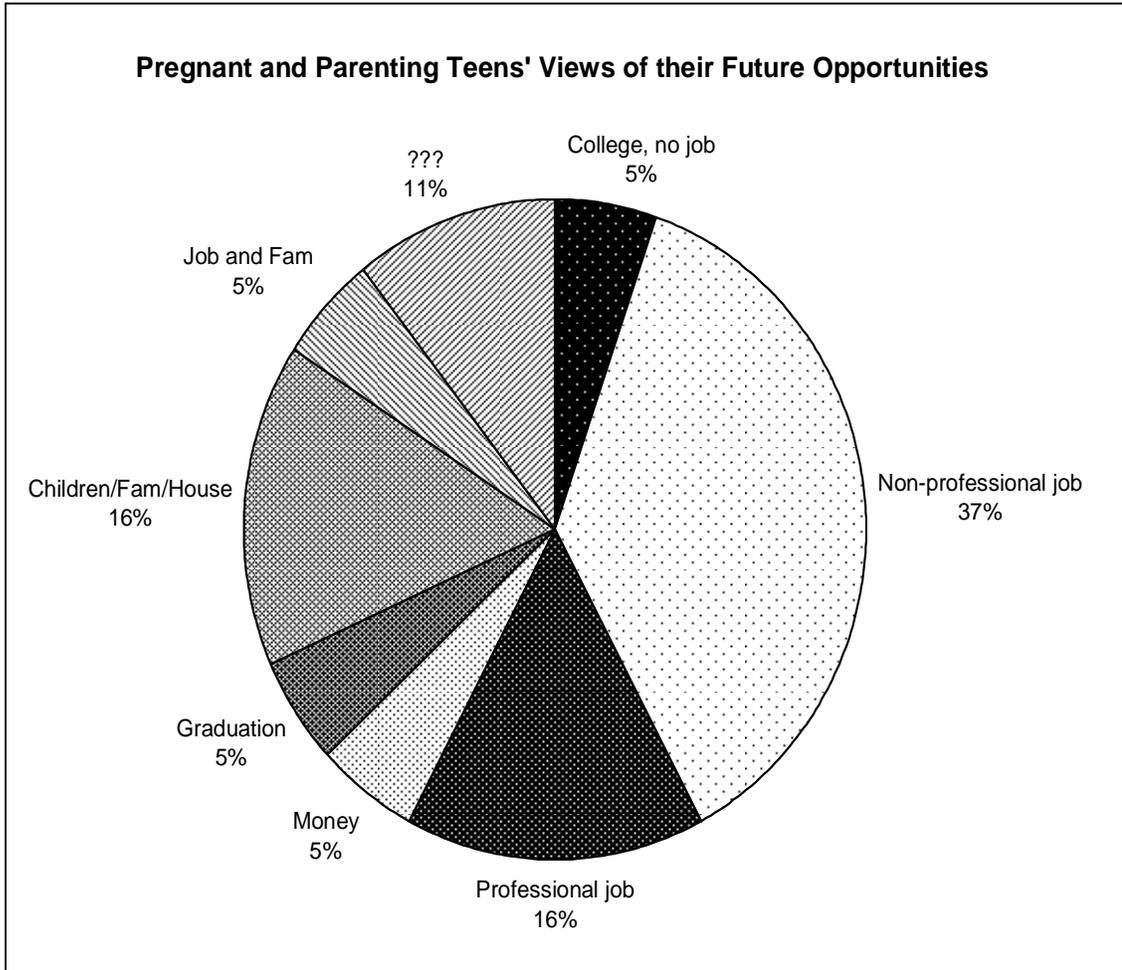


Addendum C-2

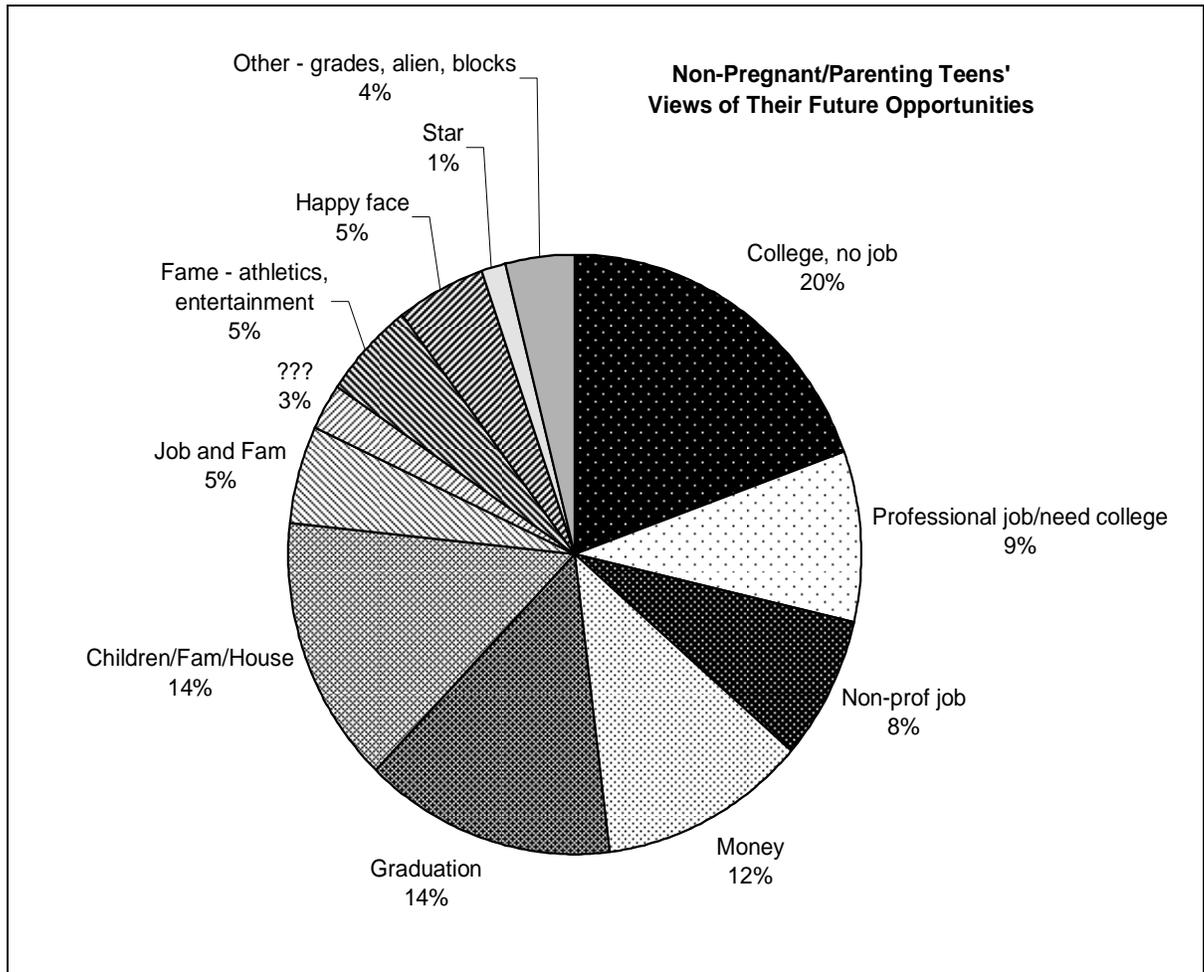


Addendum C-3

Addendum C-4



Addendum C-5



Addendum D-1
First Painting by Researcher



Addendum D-2
Second Painting Done by Researcher



Addendum D-3



Addendum D-4



Addendum D-5



Addendum D-6



Addendum D-7

