SPEAKING THE UNSPEAKABLE:
ADULT CHILDREN'S REVELATIONS OF UNWED PREGNANCY TO PARENTS

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ABSTRACT

Jennifer Lynne Cronin: Speaking the Unspeakable: Women's Revelations of
Unwed Pregnancy to Parents
(Under the direction of Dr. Lawrence B. Rosenfeld)

Revealing difficult information to family members is inevitable and can pose significant

risks to the health and well-being of those involved if not managed constructively. In order to

understand better the conditions that impinge on effective and appropriate revealing of difficult

information to family members, this study focused on one type of difficult disclosure: revealing

unwed pregnancy to parents. Of primary interest to the investigation was the relationship

between an adult unmarried mother's disclosure decisions and her parents' interpretations of

those choices. Also of interest were the process through which an unmarried mother made sense

of her pregnancy and how her experience shaped her disclosure to her parents. Using Ting-

Toomey's (2005) face negotiation theory as a theoretical framework and Glaser and Strauss's

(1967) constant comparative method for data analysis, 32 unmarried mothers and 20 parents (n =

52) were asked to "tell their story" to shed light on how family member expectancies shape the

negotiation of difficult disclosures. Results highlight the conditions that impinge on appropriate

and effective delivery of high-risk information like unwed pregnancy to parents, laying the

groundwork for future research that can enable adult children to better predict parental reactions

and choose disclosure strategies that may result in more positive outcomes.

To my family, whose "beautiful disasters" inspire my work and give it direction.
To my mentors, I couldn't have done this without you.

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The writing of this dissertation has been one of the greatest academic challenges I have faced in my career as a scholar. Although only my name appears on the cover, without the support, patience, and guidance of a great number of people, the production of this research would not have been possible. To them, I express my deepest gratitude. They have made my graduate experience one that I will remember and cherish forever.

I would first like to thank my advisor, Dr. Lawrence B. Rosenfeld, who dedicated many tireless hours of guidance throughout this entire process. His expert knowledge on the topics of disclosure, family communication, and trauma pushed this project in ways that not only made me a better scholar but I believe made it more applicable to every day life. I consider myself incredibly fortunate to have an advisor who gave me the freedom to explore this area of research on my own and in methodological ways that are different from his. His infectious enthusiasm, sarcastic humor, and contagious laughter made every meeting with him an absolute joy, but it was his expertise in the field, knowledge of the literature, and high expectations that instilled in me the qualities that make a rigorous, ethical, passionate researcher.

Second, I would also like to thank my mentor, Dr. Julia Wood, who not only helped craft this idea from the ground up but was there to always listen, give encouragement, and provide sound advice. I am a different person personally and professionally now than when I entered the program at UNC because she challenged me with new ideas and forced me to confront perspectives different from my own. It was via her mentorship and friendship that gave me a new look at the world; she instilled in me a desire to question the status quo, never settle for what is

"normal," and appreciate and celebrate difference. She equipped me with the necessary skills and confidence to stand up for myself and fight for those who are less privileged. I am deeply grateful for the time and energy she invested in me and I hope that I will one day have the kind of impact on my students as she has had on me.

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Last but not least, I want to thank my family. Words cannot express how grateful I am to my husband who (while writing his own dissertation) allowed me to constantly vent, complain,

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

One of the most noteworthy changes regarding the American family over the past several decades is the rising number of children growing up in homes without both biological parents (Amato, 2005; Waldfogel, Craigie, & Brooks-Gunn, 2010). Since the 1950s, studies have noted dramatic shifts in family formation patterns, such as the rise in the number of non-marital births. Conventionally, starting a family involved a sequential process that began with marriage and was followed by having one or more children. Throughout history, the concept of childbearing outside of marriage typically has been synonymous with low-income teenage pregnancy as a result of most non-marital births being disproportionately had by women under the age of 20 (Ventura, 2009). In recent years, however, pathways to parenthood have diversified as the number of births by adult unmarried women continues to rise and rates of teenage pregnancy drop. According to the Centers for Disease Control, in 2010, 40.8% of all U.S. births were to unmarried women (Martin et al., 2011). This compares with 33.2% in year 2000, and 18.4% in 1980.

Scholars have speculated on various factors responsible for the rise of unwed births, attributing the contemporary transformation to more couples cohabitating, later marriages, an increase of women in the workforce and women's new economic role in the family, and changing beliefs in the importance of marriage (Cherlin, 2010; Klein, 2004). However, spurring the widespread interest in non-marital pregnancy patterns is the effect it has on child development. Infants born to unmarried women are at a greater risk of low birth weight, preterm birth, dying in infancy, and are more likely to live in poverty than those born to married women

(Ventura, 2009). Compared to children growing up with both biological parents, children born to unmarried mothers are more likely to reach adulthood with less education (Aquilino, 1996), earn less money and obtain lower occupational status (Amato & Keith, 1991), have non-marital births (Haveman, Wolfe, & Pence, 2001) and troubled marriages (Teachman, 2004), and experience symptoms of depression (Amato, 1991). Children in families with married, biological parents are better off financially, perform better academically, and exhibit fewer behavioral problems (Artis, 2007; Hofferth, 2006).

Supportive family and friends can help mitigate—or buffer (Cohen & Willis, 1985)—the ill effects of stress on health and well-being. In general, social relationships are believed to have a positive impact on physical and psychological well-being because they provide access to emotional, appraisal, informational, and material resources for individuals undergoing stressful life events (Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002; Cutrona & Russell, 1990; Segrin & Flora, 2011). The perceived and enacted availability of resources from friends and family aid the individual in crisis in her/his attempts to cope effectively (see Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002 for a review).

With respect to pregnancy in particular, social support (emotional, informational, and material resources) is considered essential to the well-being of the expectant mother and infant (Feldman, Dunkel-Schetter, Sandman, & Wadhwa, 2000). Social support helps mitigate psychological and physical strains associated with being pregnant (Elsenbruch et al., 2007; Lederman, 1984) and encourages mothers to engage in positive health behaviors (Dunkel-Schetter, Sagrestano, Feldman, & Killingsworth, 1996). Studies have linked social support to improved infant weight, length, and fetal growth. For example, babies born to mothers with low perceived social support tend to be significantly smaller and have reduced birth weight (Elsenbruch et al., 2007; Feldman et al., 2000). Unwed pregnancy can be incredibly stressful for

mothers, as many are ill prepared for the role of motherhood (Singh, Sedgh, & Hussain, 2010), so the benefits of supportive others become even more important.

Social support is also critical for successful child rearing. Children who grow up with supportive family members are more likely to have better physical and mental health, higher self-esteem (Franco & Levitt, 1998; Van Hulst, Séguin, Zunzunegui, Vélez, & Nikiéma, 2011), fewer behavior problems (Bru, Murberg, & Stephens, 2001; Quamma & Greenberg, 1994), perform better in school (Cauce, Hannan, & Sargeant, 1992; Chu, Saucier, & Hafner, 2010), and adapt to stress more easily (Gottlieb & Mendelson, 1990; Van Hulst et al., 2011; Wickrama, Lorenz, & Conger, 1997). It appears that the likelihood of success in all areas (from pregnancy to childrearing) is increased when the mother has a strong network of healthy relationships with friends and family.

Unfortunately, studies show that unmarried mothers actually receive less social support than married mothers. The resources normally provided by parents to their children to help them in the transition to adulthood are substantial, averaging $38,000 in tangible support (i.e., money) and 3,900 hours of personal support (i.e., help) (Schoeni & Ross, 2005). To the unwed mother, both time and money are given less freely. According to one study, respondents who reported feelings of embarrassment towards the prospect of a non-marital pregnancy in the family were between 9% and 16% less willing to provide that member with resources (Mollborn, 2009). Compared to married couples, cohabitating couples with and without children receive less support from their families (Eggebeen, 2005). The cohabitating mother, relative to the married mother, also receives less financial, housing, and child-care assistance from her social networks (Harknett & Knab, 2007). Such evidence provides support that societal norms surrounding non-marital pregnancy may influence others' willingness to provide resources (Mollborn, 2009).

What clearly becomes a cause for concern is how unmarried mothers can maintain relations with network supporters, particularly with parents for purposes of this investigation, if their pregnancy challenges the network supporters' beliefs and expectations of conventional and appropriate motherhood. Unmarried mothers often report fearing negative reactions from their parents and anticipate scenarios that involve disownment, getting kicked out, and even being physically harmed once their news of pregnancy is communicated (Lipper, 2003; Rains, 2009). Such scenarios are not unfounded given that the general public holds negative attitudes towards unmarried pregnancy and instances of ostracized unmarried mothers labeled as "sinners" and "scroungers" continue to be uncovered (Thane, 2011, p. 11). It is still the case that the two-parent household is favored and believed to be the optimal situation for a child (Amato, 2005). Although attitudes do vary for different demographic groups (see Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Kaplan, 1997), it is generally the case that older generations and those who are white, religious, and/or politically conservative are particularly likely to find unwed pregnancy unacceptable (Taylor, Funk, & Clark, 2007).

It is not hard to see why the unwed mother is anxious—worried about how her parents, who grew up during a time when out-of-wedlock pregnancy was rarer, will react to her revelation of pregnancy. In fact, telling parents about her pregnancy is often cited as one of the most difficult moments in an unwed mother's life (Rains, 2009). Families who hold disapproving attitudes towards unwed pregnancy may struggle with the news that an unmarried member is pregnant. So, if disapproving attitudes lead to negative outcomes for unmarried mothers, and the anticipation of revealing to a parent creates a great deal of stress and anxiety, it is worthwhile to explore how families reveal and make sense of unmarried pregnancy.

Project Objectives and Rationale

The purpose of this project was to use the narratives of 32 unmarried mothers and 20 of their parents to examine how unwed pregnancy is revealed, perceived, and conjointly made sense of. By focusing on an unmarried mother's pregnancy sense-making process, her disclosure choices when revealing her news to her parents, and her parent's reactions to those choices, my intent was to set the groundwork for identifying more and less effective means, and the conditions that impinge on effectiveness, of navigating the revelation of high-risk disclosures like unmarried pregnancy. Data from this investigation provide insight into the following: (a) the process through which adult unmarried mothers may make sense of their pregnancy, (b) the disclosure enactment features of revealing unmarried pregnancy to parents, (c) why certain disclosure strategies may be chosen, (d) how disclosure strategies may be interpreted by parents, and (e) the implications of certain disclosure decisions and recommendations for best practices.

My Position as the Researcher

There are a number of ways in which the study of unmarried pregnancy can be approached. For example, some studies position the topic as a moral issue, examining religion and the implications of women suspected of engaging in sexual practices before marriage (e.g., Linn, 2002). As Fonda, Eni, and Guimond (2013) review, unmarried pregnancy can also be approached from a sociological standpoint intertwined with views on gender and human sexuality, the place of religious values in society, the emergence of modern technology, and academic conceptualizations of childhood, motherhood, and women. Numerous studies examine the educational, occupational, financial, relational, and health implications on society as a result of nonmarital childbearing (Amato, 1991; Amato & Keith, 1991; Aquilino, 1996; Artis, 2007; Hofferth, 2006; Teachman, 2004). Critical approaches to unwed pregnancy draw out racialized,

classed, and gendered inequities that challenge and reinforce existing pregnancy discourses (e.g., Froyum, 2010). Although each approach to the subject offers important contributions, this study is focused on family interpersonal relationships and primarily concerned with the communicative dynamics that occur between a parent and her/his unwed adult child. Essentially, this study examines what happens to the family when an unwed child becomes unintentionally pregnant.

I chose to focus on the process of revealing unwed pregnancy to parents for a number of reasons. Like many research studies, this topic was prompted by personal experience: I am the sibling of an unwed father and a close friend to a number of unmarried mothers. In my dealings with my own family and the conversations I have had with friends, I became aware of how stressful the process of revealing unmarried pregnancy to parents can be and how the words, "Mom, Dad. I'm pregnant," can shake a family system to the core. Because of my background in family communication research, I was approached by my brother and asked to provide advice on when he should tell our parents, how he should tell them, and what he should say and expect during the conversation. Unfortunately, at the time I did not know the answers to these questions, particularly because the "best way" to reveal sensitive information means different things to different people. What would be deemed effective and appropriate was likely dependent upon who was asked because what is equally as important as how one tells one's parents is how the parents interpret what is said.

I recognized that my brother was in a unique situation—he was not a teenager, living at home, at risk of being kicked out or not completing his education. Instead, he was a 26-year-old adult, who had finished college, had insurance and a steady income, lived on his own, and operated his own business. These were all characteristics that positioned him differently than an unwed pregnant adolescent. I anticipated that because of this, his disclosure of unwed pregnancy

to our parents would be motivated by different desires and would result in different relational implications than if he were an unwed adolescent. Out of concern for how our parents would react and how the information would affect them personally and professionally, my brother waited nearly two and a half months to reveal to them that he was going to be a father. He described the two months of keeping his secret as "horribly stressful" and "one of the most difficult times" he has ever experienced.

Although I have no doubt that this was an incredibly trying time in my brother's life, I chose not to focus this research on unwed fathers. Instead, I wanted to examine what his pregnant partner was going through, given that she was the one who publically wore their unmarried pregnancy status. Recent research argues that even in contemporary America, a double standard exists when it comes to the standards of sexual conduct that men and women are held to: men tend to be rewarded and praised for sexual contact, and women are derogated and stigmatized for the same behavior (Bogle, 2008; Kaeager & Staff, 2009). I speculated that if women are judged more harshly for their sexual acts, they would report greater fears of negative attitudes from friends and family regarding their unwed pregnancy news and, therefore, need the most assistance in their disclosure.

The findings of this project are not well timed to aid my own family in their disclosure. However, it is my hope that the findings described in this study can help other unmarried mothers and fathers better understand their situation and more effectively and appropriately negotiate the disclosure of pregnancy to their parents.

Importance of the Problem Topic

In general, the process of disclosing difficult or unwanted information to family members is an important area of study. Regardless of how closely-knit families are, difficult interactions

are inevitable. Talking about sex (Chirban, 2007), achieving consensus about child-rearing (Huston & Holmes, 2004), balancing childcare and housework between spouses (Perry-Jenkins, Pierce, & Goldberg, 2004), discussing financial matters, in-laws, and marital roles (Gottman & Silver, 1999), and confronting aging parents and talking about end-of-life decisions (Kees, Aberle, & Fruhauf, 2007) are all examples of issues that are potentially difficult to discuss, yet are also a natural part of the course of relationship development. For children in particular, the thought of revealing to their parents about *prudential issues* (i.e., behaviors pertaining to health, safety, comfort, or self harm, like illicit drug and alcohol use), *moral* and *conventional issues* (i.e., other's welfare and rights and behavioral norms) and *personal issues* (i.e., control over one's body, privacy, and preferences about appearance, activities and romantic choices) can result in great distress (Smetana, 2006; Smetana, Metzger, Gettman, & Campione-Barr, 2006; Turiel, 1983, 2006).

In addition to these everyday encounters, families will undoubtedly face a number of uncontrollable, stressful, even traumatic events, such as death, infidelity, coming out, illness, addiction, unwed pregnancy, and other topics a family may deem risky or taboo. Whether life threatening or not, all are difficult to talk about with those we love, and may pose significant risks to the health and well-being of family members if not managed constructively. Problems and crises arise and affect families in different ways, but with the appropriate tools to disclose and negotiate different scenarios, the unbearable is made tolerable and threats to family functioning are weakened.

What is so often overlooked in stressful situations like revealing unwed pregnancy to others is the agency of the discloser and her/his ability to exercise some control over the anticipated scenario. Negotiating difficult disclosures involves a great deal of choice—

particularly when the conversation is planned, rather than a spontaneous encounter. Once the

person has decided to reveal, he/she must choose *how* (e.g., face to face, using humor, with a

third party), *what* (e.g., all versus parts of the information), *when* (i.e., timing), *where* (i.e., public

versus private setting), and *whom* to tell. Research supports the claims that people make

disclosure choices based on their perceptions of the relationship with the confidant, and different

choices result in different relational implications (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006; Petronio,

2002). If this is the case, why not make use of what is known about the implications of certain

choices to guide our disclosure choices? By investigating an unmarried mother's message design

choices and how her parent interprets those choices, findings from this dissertation are able to

suggest more or less effective and appropriate strategies of reveling unwed pregnancy. Although

the unwed mother may not have control over her parents' emotions and perceptions, what she

can control is how the message is delivered and how her parents' emotions and perceptions are

influenced through communicative strategies. What she needs, therefore, is a knowledge base

and a particular set of skills that help her to make informed communicative choices to manage

this difficult conversation. This study contributes to addressing this need.

Revealing any information about the self to another involves risk (Petronio, 2002). The

individual becomes exposed and his/her character subject to critique; she/he is open to

embarrassment, vulnerability, and rejection, and secretly hopes that what others learn does not

cause them to turn away (Rosenfeld, 1979, 2000). But not all information about the self is

equally as risky. Risk level increases when information is sensitive, particularly information that

may be unwanted or disapproved by the other, like unwed pregnancy (Greene, 2000; Yep, 2000).

Risk further increases when difficult information is revealed to relational others.

For many unmarried mothers, revealing pregnancy to their parents is considered a "high risk" episode (Petronio, 2002, p. 67), with the biggest threats being stigmatization, relational damage, and the loss of support. Unmarried pregnant mothers are a vulnerable population with risky psychosocial profiles, reporting high levels of depression, increased perceived stress, and low self-efficacy (Maxson & Miranda, 2011); they are dependent upon the support and acceptance of others. By examining the relationship between certain strategies and how they are perceived by others, it may be possible to help unmarried mothers deliver their pregnancy news to parents in ways that minimize relational damage and lead to greater support and acceptance.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Several bodies of literature provide a theoretical framework for this investigation. No single theory can completely capture the complexity of familial dynamics; therefore, my theoretical perspective evolves out of an integration of family, interpersonal, and cultural theories. Research most relevant to understanding how family members reveal difficult information and negotiate face is reviewed in this chapter: research on the topics of self-disclosure and concealment, boundary coordination, disclosure enactment and goals, and face negotiation.

Self-Disclosure

Vital to the way relationships are managed with others is the balance of privacy and disclosure. Research centered on self-disclosure dates back to the work of psychologist Sydney Jourard (1964), and refers to what individuals intentionally reveal about themselves to others, be it thoughts, feelings, or experiences (Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993). Communication is considered self-disclosure if it contains information about the self, is intentionally directed at another person, and contains information generally unavailable from other sources (Rosenfeld & Kendrick, 1984). Because people are both public and private, social and autonomous, known and unknown, popular theories such as relational dialectics (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) and communication privacy management (CPM) (Petronio, 2002) view self-disclosure as dialectical. Dialectical perspectives assume that contradiction is a normal and natural part of all relationships and all relational partners experience opposing relational forces, or *dialectical tensions* (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996), that they must learn to manage. As such,

openness and closedness are viewed as oppositional because interactants are in a constant struggle to maintain an appropriate balance of revealed and concealed information. Just as being honest can result in risky and unpleasant consequences (Rosenfeld, 2000), so can avoiding communication and keeping information from others.

Dialectical theories are helpful for examining the disclosure process between family members and for understanding the push and pull implicated in our communication with others. Such theories provide insight into why and how people manage information, highlighting the complexity of disclosure decision-making. Whether to reveal or conceal is based on conditions that are salient to the discloser and frequently measured against the perceived risk in sharing the information with others. Although there may be potential gains in telling (e.g., the ability to cope with and better understand a situation, relationship enhancement, and reinforcement of ideas and values), there are often simultaneous risks, such as rejection, embarrassment, vulnerability, and relational threat (Rosenfeld, 1979).

Although there are a multitude of reasons why one may conceal information from another, individuals most often report concealing from other family members for purposes of protection (Karpel, 1980; Vangelisti, 1994). In a series of studies, Vangelisti (1994; Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997) addresses the question of who the protection is intended for and from what. Their typology includes concealing for purposes of: *bonding* (promote family cohesiveness), *evaluation* (avoid judgment, blame, rejection, or shame), *maintenance* (prevent disruption to family closeness or stress), *privacy* (belief that information is not relevant), *defense* (fear that information will be used against the discloser), and *communication* (concern that those involved do not have knowledge to talk about information). Afifi and Guerrero (2000) argue that concealing information is primarily for purposes of protecting relational bonds or preventing

relational harm (*relationship-based motivations*); managing an impression, avoiding

embarrassment, or maintaining privacy (*individual-based motivations*); and when a person is

unresponsive or incapable of providing support (*information-based motivations*). The literature

on family disclosure is abundant and child-to-parent disclosure boundaries are complex, so more

discussion is in the Communication Privacy Management section of this chapter.

Concealed Pregnancy

Scant research exists on the disclosure of pregnancy. The few studies that do exist focus

specifically on *concealing pregnancy*, a situation involving a woman who is aware of her

pregnancy and chooses to hide it from others (Conlon, 2006). This conceptualization of

concealment assumes intentionality, distinguishing it from related terms like unconscious denial.

Research focused on pregnancy concealment views concealment as a coping strategy—which

allows women to (a) manage their perception that the pregnancy is a personal crisis; (b) deal with

anticipated disapproval; (c) retain control over the outcome of the pregnancy; and/or (d) adapt to

the prospect of motherhood (Conlon, 2006)—and seeks to understand why women may not tell

others about their pregnancy and the health implications of not revealing (Ayaz & Efe, 2008;

Friedman, Heneghan, & Rosenthal, 2007; Thynne, Gaffney, O'Neill, Tonge, & Sherlock, 2012).

Although this line of research is not limited specifically to unmarried pregnant women, reasons

for concealment are often directly related to social factors like negative perceptions of unwed

motherhood.

The large number of factors associated with pregnancy concealment supports the

argument that no single underlying dynamic is responsible for why a pregnant woman chooses

not to tell others about her pregnancy. However, concealment is often related to social factors,

such as the stigma of unwed motherhood or religious beliefs surrounding relationships, sexuality,

or childbearing (Ayaz & Efe, 2008; Wessel, Endrikat & Buscher, 2003). How a woman feels about single motherhood, pre-marital sex, abortion, and adoption, as well as her fears about others' reactions, have been found to impact her disclosure decisions (Conlon, 2006; Friedman et al., 2007; Wessel et al., 2003). Whether or not a woman's pregnancy is consistent with her own self-image can also affect her willingness to reveal. Pregnant women who experience image inconsistencies resulting from unwed motherhood and refuse to believe that any of their symptoms are a result of pregnancy are (obviously) more likely to conceal their pregnancy (Conlon, 2006).

Differences among women who conceal their pregnancy have also been linked to various demographic variables and family communication characteristics. Early studies, such as Kaplan and Grottowski's (1996), reported that concealing pregnancy is largely a teenage phenomenon and the result of immaturity and inexperience. More recently, studies are finding that adolescent girls no longer comprise the majority of pregnancy concealment cases and women most likely to conceal their pregnancy are in their early twenties, primarily students, and multigravidas (i.e., women not in their first pregnancy) (Friedman et al., 2007; Thynne, et al., 2012). Ayaz and Efe (2008) found rates of pregnancy concealment to increase with a woman's age but decrease with better education and working outside the home. They also report that women coming from traditional families who view sexuality as a taboo topic tend to conceal pregnancy, supporting findings that unsupportive familial and societal networks influence decisions to reveal (Thynne et al., 2012).

External stresses, such as illness in the family, have also been associated with pregnancy concealment. Women worried that their unmarried pregnancy will further exacerbate an already upsetting situation are more likely to conceal their pregnancy (Conlon, 2006). Finally,

concealing pregnancy can be a means of retaining control of pregnancy outcomes. Hiding one's pregnancy from family members prevents them from intervening in the pregnant woman's decision making and gives her time to put plans for her future into place (Conlon, 2006; Mahon et al., 1998). Although a number of strategies for concealing pregnancy have been documented—carrying on as usual, wearing baggy clothing, isolating self from others, keeping busy, and minimizing weight gain through exercise (Conlon, 2006)—such strategies become more difficult as a pregnancy progresses and if the woman decides to keep the child.

What makes unwed pregnancy distinct from many other high-risk disclosures are the time constraints placed on how long the pregnancy can be concealed from others. Unless the unwed mother chooses to terminate her pregnancy (not needing financial assistance from her parents to pay for the procedure) or disappear for a number of months (and decides not to raise her child), physical changes associated with pregnancy limit the amount of time she can conceal this information from her parents; disclosure becomes forced. At the onset, the process of revealing unwed pregnancy differs from many other types of disclosure situations where the potential benefits and costs of telling can be assessed prior to making the decision to tell or not. Rather than focusing attention on whether or not to reveal, the unwed mother's attention becomes quickly oriented towards *how* to reveal.

Communication Privacy Management Theory

Communication privacy management theory (Petronio, 2002) focuses on decisions regarding how information is revealed to others. Particularly relevant to the current investigation, which seeks to establish the conditions under which disclosure of unmarried pregnancy occurs, is Petronio's discussion of linkage rules, or how people create collective boundaries around

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information. Petronio (2002) argues that the choice to open boundaries through disclosure depends on certain kinds of linkage rules about confidants, timing, and topic.

Rules about confidants. Much has been written about to whom information is revealed. Attraction (Archer & Burleson, 1980), gender (Dindia & Allen, 1992), age (Papini, Farmer, Clark, Micka, & Barnett, 1990), status (Morgan, 1976; Norton, 1982), and relationship to target (Denholm-Carey & Chabassol, 1987; Rosenfeld & Kendrick, 1984) have all been found to affect disclosure decisions. Most important to this investigation, however, are rules that pertain to how family boundaries are negotiated, particularly when adult children reveal high-risk information to their parents.

Studies suggest that differences in disclosure behavior are predicated on whether the target is of equal or higher status to the discloser, which could explain why unmarried mothers often report fearing reactions from their parents the most (Conlon, 2006; Lipper, 2003; Rains, 2009). More specifically, disclosure to a target of higher status (e.g., a parent) is perceived as being more risky than disclosure to a target of equal status (e.g., a friend). Fathers, who might be perceived as having higher status than mothers, receive the least amount of disclosure and are shut out of conversations more often than mothers, same-sex friends, and opposite-sex friends, regardless of topic sensitivity (Hartup, 1989; Morgan, 1976). Mothers, particularly when the information is embarrassing, tend to be the preferred target of disclosure over fathers (Denholm-Carey & Chabassol, 1987; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Smetana et al., 2006; Wilson & Koo, 2010). Disclosure is highest in mother-daughter relationships (Finkenauer, Engels, Branje, & Meeus, 2004).

Disclosure decisions can also be influenced by age and whether the individual believes that the disclosure target will approve of or accept the information (Vangelisti, Caughlin, &

Timmerman, 2001). For instance, a gay son or lesbian daughter is more likely to come out to a parent if he or she believes that parent will be accepting (Ben-Ari, 1995). Likewise, an unmarried mother is more likely to reveal her pregnancy to her parents if she does not anticipate their disapproval or fear negative reactions (Conlon, 2006). As age increases, children are more likely to reveal information to their peers than their parents, especially if the information is intimate, and they become more comfortable with keeping information private (Groen-Prakken, 1988; Papini et al., 1990; Tardy, Hosman, & Bradac, 1981). Self-disclosure to friends is most strongly associated with self-esteem in the peer context and identity development, while disclosure to a parent is associated with perceptions of family openness, cohesion, and satisfaction with relationships (Papini et al., 1990). Such findings could help explain why women from more egalitarian families (rather than autocratic ones) are more likely to reveal unwed pregnancy to their parents (Ayaz & Efe, 2008). According to Thynne et al. (2012), fear of negative parental response is the most significant predictor of concealed pregnancy.

  Rules about timing. Disclosure timing is often conceptualized as the optimal and appropriate time for information to be revealed during a conversation, in a relationship, and whether the disclosure is spontaneous or planned (Greene, Derlega, Yep, & Petronio, 2003). For example, disclosure of a terminal illness may be more appropriate to reveal to a spouse or parent than a young child because of maturity concerns (Greene et al., 2003). People may prefer planned disclosures over spontaneous ones if the information is potentially embarrassing or stigmatizing, like unmarried pregnancy (Petronio, 2002). Disclosure timing is particularly important when information is negative (Derlega et al., 1993); providing some warning that bad news is forthcoming is often more effective than stalling or being blunt in helping the recipient process the information (Maynard, 1996). Disclosure timing is also important when revealing

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negative information for which one is personally responsible. Revealing later in a conversation may give the impression that the person is avoiding responsibility (Jones & Gordon, 1972); however, revealing late has also been found to be beneficial for the discloser because it limits the interaction (Greene et al., 2003).

Studies that address pregnancy disclosure timing argue that revealing pregnancy "late"—conceptualized as a pregnancy that remains undisclosed to others in the second and third trimester—can pose a severe threat to the life and health of the child and mother (Brezinka, Hunter, Biebl, & Kinzi, 1994). Risks to the infant due to late pregnancy revelation include premature birth lower birth weight, and higher perinatal mortality rate (Rodie, Thompson, & Norman, 2002; Treacy, Byrne, & Donovan, 2002; Wessel et al., 2003). Risks to the pregnant mother include increased chance of breeched presentation and maternal complications (Treacy & Byrne, 2003).

Rules about topic. Although all disclosures involve risk, not all information about the self is equally risky. The level of perceived risk associated with revealing, and the disclosure decisions that are made as a result vary with topic sensitivity. Highly sensitive topics that may be disapproved of by another yield greater risk and are less likely to be revealed (Petronio, 2002). This may explain why disclosure topics to parents, when compared to same-sex best friends, tend to be more positive, less frequent, and less intimate (Tardy et al., 1981).

Many studies have examined "high-risk episodes" (Petronio, 2002, p. 67), the disclosure of information that has the potential to shame, threaten, or severely embarrass. Topics such as revealing AIDS/HIV status to friends and family, coming out to parents, and boundaries surrounding healthcare and illness (Petronio, 2000; Savin-Williams, 2001) have all been linked to risks such as stigmatization (St. Lawrence, Husfeldt, Kelly, Hood, & Smith, 1990), job loss,

relationship termination, identity crises (Rains, 2009), and vulnerability, violence, and discrimination (Ellison, 2003; Harrison, 2003). Essentially, the more risky the information is considered, the more tightly held the boundaries protecting the information are and the less likely one is to share the information (Petronio, 2002). Perhaps this is one explanation for why the literature tends to focus on pregnancy concealment rather than unmarried pregnancy revelation.

Minimal research has been conducted on adult women's revelations of unmarried pregnancy to their parents. Although popular news articles may argue that negative attitudes toward non-marital pregnancy have relaxed (e.g., Nelson, 2010), for many unwed mothers telling their parents is perceived as a "high-risk" episode (Petronio, 2002). Threats of stigmatization, relational damage, and the loss of support continue to plague those who are unwed and pregnant. Such fears are not unfounded because revealing unwed pregnancy has been linked to relational, identity, and financial risk (Mollborn, 2009). Similar to other high-risk scenarios, unwed mothers must balance their need for support with the negative consequences associated with telling.

Central to understanding an unmarried mother's decision to disclose to her parents is what occurs prior to the revelation, or her experience of finding out and making sense of her own pregnancy. The essential processes through which an unmarried mother personalizes her situation and attempts to reconcile dilemmas surrounding identity, relational, and instrumental risks provides insight into the boundary coordination process and the disclosure rules that guide her decisions. The following research question was posed:

RQ1: What are the processes through which unmarried mothers make sense of their pregnancy?

Disclosure enactment features. What is often overlooked in stressful situations like revealing unwed pregnancy is the agency of the discloser and her/his ability to exercise some control over the elements of the interaction (e.g., timing of disclosure). Negotiating difficult

disclosures involves a number of choices. Once the person has decided to reveal, he/she must choose *how* (e.g., face to face, using humor, enlisting a third party), *what* (e.g., all versus part of the information), *when* (i.e., timing), *where* (i.e., public vs. private setting), and *whom* to tell. As reviewed above, people make disclosure choices based on the topic of information to be shared, their perceptions of the relationship with the confidant, and the relational implications that they assume are likely to result (Greene et al., 2006; Petronio, 2002).

The message enactment choices available regarding when, where, how, and to whom to reveal information (Greene et al., 2006) include: *mode* of disclosure (whether the information is told in a face-to-face setting, on the telephone, or via a third party); disclosure *setting* (public versus private physical environment); *timing* of disclosure (when the information is delivered); *verbal message features* (directness, length, content); and *nonverbal message features* (gestures, speaking style, posture, eye contact). Of interest to the current investigation are the disclosure enactment choices available to the unmarried mother and how her parents perceive the choices she implements. The following research questions were posed:

RQ2: How do unmarried mothers reveal their pregnancy to their parents (i.e., mode, setting, timing, and content message features)?

RQ3: How do parents interpret their daughters' disclosure enactment choices during their disclosure of unwed pregnancy?

Face Negotiation in the Family Life Cycle

Also of interest to this investigation are the underlying reasons why certain choices are made. Shedding light on why a person decides to reveal in ways that she/he does is the research on face negotiation. Literature focusing on self-presentation typically falls under face and facework. First introduced by Goffman (1967), face is "the positive social value a person

effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (p. 5). Socially constructed, public, and situationally shaped, face is the projected image one reveals during various interactions with others. Face is social, so it requires the cooperation of others or "teams" (Goffman, 1959, p. 79). Typically, communicators are emotionally invested in face and feel an obligation to help others maintain face in hopes that the same will be done for them in return (Metts & Cupach, 2008). However, identity performance is not flawless. There are times when a person's behavior is not congruent with others' expectations for a specific role, such as the case of the unwed mother. When such derailing incidents occur, the performance of desired identity is spoiled and one risks losing face.

Drawing on the work of Goffman (1955) and Brown and Levinson (1987) is Ting-Toomey's (2005) face negotiation theory, a framework for explaining identity management when face is threatened. One of the advantages of this theory is its conceptualization of face as a cultural concept, and not an individual possession. Goffman's (1955, 1967) explanation of face and facework is social psychological—taking as the unit of analysis the individual and how the individual is influenced by or influences social environment (Arundale, 2006). Face negotiation, in contrast, is theoretically distinct from Goffman's work because of its intercultural perspective and focus on communication behaviors across identity groups. Essentially, face negotiation theory asserts: (a) people in all cultures have a desired image (or face) they want to project in front of others and they work to maintain that image in all communication situations; (b) the concept of face becomes especially problematic in uncertainty situations (such as embarrassment) when situated identities are called into question; and (c) face concerns influence the use of various facework strategies (Ting-Toomey, 2005).

Perhaps one of the most obvious ways one can lose face is to be seen by others as violating a cultural norm, or to say or do something that is considered taboo or socially unacceptable. This investigation examines revealing unwed pregnancy to parents as a *face threat*, which refers to any encounter that calls into question one's desired image. Such behavioral expectancy violations, or facework collisions (Ting-Toomey, 2009), occur any time there are perceived incompatible values, norms, meanings, or goals between interactants. In fact, any kind of interpersonal conflict is a face-threatening episode; some episodes are simply more damaging to a relationship than others.

What makes a face-threatening episode salient is dependent upon the severity of the violated rule (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Unwed pregnancy serves as an example of facework collision based on society's prescription of "proper" family formation. Although family formation patterns are profoundly influenced by the era in history in which they occur, and the 21st century has witnessed a diversifying of attitudes towards pathways to parenthood (Mollborn, 2009), a number of religious activists, therapeutic professionals, family educators, and public and private groups are still in favor of the traditional family life cycle model, which involves (in this order) leaving home, getting married, and having children (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999). In response to the increasing non-marital birth rate (Martin et al., 2011), the issue of non-marital childbearing is receiving national attention (Dion, 2005; Nock, 2005). For example, several past U.S. presidents have made it a priority to allocate governmental funding to promoting "healthy marriage" and encouraging "responsible fatherhood." In addition, Congress has declared out-of-wedlock birth to be contrary to the national interest, financially investing in policies and programs to reduce teen and unintended pregnancy and unmarried childbearing (Nock, 2005; Thomas, 2012).

Condemning social and sexual attitudes towards non-marital pregnancy still exist, so it is likely that an unmarried woman who becomes unintentionally pregnant will be concerned with identity threat and view the disclosure of her pregnancy to her parents as a face-threatening episode. This might especially be the case if the adult woman experiences feelings of shame or embarrassment, or anticipates disapproval from her parents (Ting-Toomey, 1994).

Face orientation. Remedying face collision involves facework (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Understanding facework efforts involves first uncovering one's primary face concerns, or where that person's attention and energy are directed during a conflict episode. Ting-Toomey (2005) argues that there are three underlying factors of facework categories including *self-face, other-face, and mutual-face*. Self-face is the concern for one's own identity, other-face is concern or consideration for the identity of the other, and mutual-face is concern for both interactants and/or the image of the relationship.

Asserting a strong influence on where one's face is oriented is *power distance*, or how status differences and social hierarchies are handled. Families, like cultures, can differ in the way they view status inequities. Families low in power distance tend to value equal power distributions, symmetrical relations, and equitable rewards and costs based on individual achievement; families high in power distance tend to accept unequal power distributions, asymmetrical relations, and rewards and sanctions based on rank, role, status, age or even gender (Hofstede, 1991; Ting-Toomey, 2005). The perception of this value dimension has important implications for disclosure of unwed pregnancy because it can result in a number of expectancy violations between parents and their daughters. For example, expectations surrounding whether or not an adult unmarried mother should consult her parents about her pregnancy decisions or

whether or not an unmarried mother should expect to be told what to do about her pregnancy by her parent, may differ across families and even among members.

Although facework can be deliberate or unintentional, if people are aware of their face concerns they are more likely to actively engage in behaviors that work to present a certain image, especially if encountering an embarrassing situation that threatens a desired identity or involves disclosure to a person of higher status, like a parent (Goldsmith, 2007). Therefore, due to the stigmatization of unwed pregnancy and the power differentials that exist between a parent and her/his child, it is likely that unmarried mothers will not only be aware of face concerns but will strategically try to prevent face threat when revealing. The following research question was posed:

RQ4: Which face concerns (i.e., self-, other-, mutual-face), if any, do unmarried mothers express when revealing unwed pregnancy to their parents?

Face needs. Facework categories become more complex when taking into account Brown and Levinson's (1987) proposition that there are two kinds of face: positive and negative. Positive face is defined as the desire for appreciation and approval of one's wants. Negative face is defined as the desire that one's actions are not impeded by others. In short, positive face refers to one's self-esteem, while negative face refers to one's freedom to act.

Ting-Toomey's (2005) face negotiation theory cites several kinds of face needs that are brought to the forefront in a communicative scenario. These include, but are not limited to: *autonomy face* (e.g., concern that others see us as self-sufficient, independent, and in control); *inclusion face* (e.g., concern that others see us as likeable, friendly, and cooperative); *status face* (e.g., concern that others see us as attractive, powerful, and reputable); *reliability face* (e.g., concern that others see us as trustworthy, dependable, and loyal); *competence face* (e.g., concern

that others see us as intelligent, skillful, and recognize us as a leader); and *moral face* (e.g., concern that others see us as morally upright) (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Ting-Toomey, 2005). Research Question 5 was posed:

RQ5: Which face needs (e.g., autonomy, inclusion, status, reliability, competence, and moral face), if any, are reflected in an unmarried mother's disclosure of her pregnancy to her parents?

Facework strategies. Fortunately, communicators have a variety of options for preserving face needs during difficult disclosures. If face loss is anticipated, such as the case when disclosing sensitive information to others, one may engage in preventive facework to soften or counteract an event that could damage one's image (Ting-Toomey, 2005). According to Cupach and Metts (1994), preventive strategies may come in the form of *disclaimers* (e.g., "Since you are an expert and I do not know much about this …"), *hedges* (e.g., "I may be off base here, but …"), or *pre-apologies* (e.g., "Before I start, please accept my apology …") to minimize face loss. One may also *pre-disclose* information (e.g., "Since we've all made mistakes before …"), *certify status* (e.g., "I have years of experience …"), or *suspend judgment* (e.g., "Before you get angry, hear me out …"). Although Cupach and Metts acknowledge their list as non-inclusive, the strategies they describe reflect a similar pattern: they are messages that take place during the actual disclosure (i.e., once the communicators come together for the conversation), and overlook efforts to prevent face loss prior to the encounter. Since unmarried mothers may not be focusing their attention on whether to reveal or conceal, it is believed that greater cognitive effort will be dedicated to preparing for the conversation before the unmarried mother and her parents engage in the conversation.

During disclosure episodes a number of face-saving strategies to maintain or restore face can be utilized. Depending upon whether the goal is to defuse the situation, aggravate it, or repair

a damaged relationship, some strategies may be more useful than others. These include: (a) *dominating facework*—competitive, defensive, and aggressive strategies to present a credible image; (b) *avoiding facework*—preservation of the relationship by not disclosing or directly dealing with the scenario; and (c) *integrating facework*—mindful listening, intentional reframing, collaborative dialogue, and mutual problem solving (Ting-Toomey, 2005).

Finally, once face threat has transpired, restorative facework strategies may be implemented to repair damaged images (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Restorative strategies may involve *direct aggression* (e.g., yelling, physical violence), *excuses* to minimize personal responsibility, *justifications* to downplay the threat, *humor*, *physical remediation* (e.g., helping a person up from a fall), *passive aggressiveness* (e.g., denial, acting confused, sarcasm, or complaining to a third party), *avoidance*, and *apology* to alleviate guilt or shame.

The following final research questions were posed:

RQ6: Which facework strategies, if any, do unmarried mothers utilize to prevent or repair face loss during their disclosure of pregnancy to their parents?

RQ7: How are an unmarried mother's facework strategies related to her face concerns?

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

The purpose of this project was to understand unmarried pregnancy in its uniqueness as experienced and made sense of by parents and their pregnant daughters; therefore, this inquiry was driven by qualitative methods, "an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world" (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 520). In this section, I detail the methodological framework for this project by explaining (a) the design of the study, (b) the sample inclusion criteria and recruitment procedures, (c) how data were analyzed, and (d) the strategies implemented to verify results. Prior to any research activity, all study procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. A copy of the approval letter appears in Appendix A.

Study Design

The primary interest of this dissertation was unmarried pregnancy *sense-making*, or the co-construction of a rational explanation for events (Webb & Dickson, 2012). In this study, the "events" being made sense of refer to identity creation and the interpretive repertoires that the participants bring to bear on their situation. For this reason, a qualitative, interpretive design involving narrative interviewing was appropriate (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Merriam, 2009). Qualitative inquiry is an approach that focuses on contextual meanings of a phenomenon and is particularly effective for informing complex social issues that are not well understood (Merriam, 2009; Pajarita & Harris, 2005). Although unwed pregnancy is certainly not an understudied topic and much is known about the socioeconomic implications of non-marital childbearing (see

Smock & Greenland, 2010 for a review), the literature lacks an adequate foundation for studying family communication behaviors surrounding disclosure of unwed pregnancy to parents; this is especially true when considering situations that involve adult unmarried mothers rather than pregnant adolescents. A future goal of my research program is to help adult unwed mothers better predict parental reactions and choose disclosure strategies that may result in more effective and appropriate disclosures, so this dissertation lays the foundation for this work by providing an understanding of how families make sense of unwed pregnancy, uncovering revelation strategies that are used, and determining how certain strategies are interpreted by parents. As such, qualitative inquiry was the best approach to achieve an emic account of unwed pregnancy and provide the necessary theoretical and conceptual material for future research.

This study involved a mixture of inductive and deductive processes of conducting and analyzing in-depth, audio-taped, semi-structured narrative interviews with unwed mothers and their parent(s) in order to gather data and build concepts and hypotheses regarding experiences of unwed pregnancy. Essentially, interpretation was the researcher's understanding of the participants' understanding of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Guiding this interpretation was Ting-Toomey's (2005) face negotiation theory and Greene et al.'s (2006) discussion of disclosure message enactment features (e.g., mode, context, content), discussed in Chapter 2. Analysis of the narratives using these two frameworks shed light on the process of revealing unwed pregnancy to parents and how certain communicative behaviors were perceived.

Narrative inquiry. One of the oldest and most natural forms of sense making is the personal narrative (Jonassen & Hernandez-Serrano, 2002). Narrative inquiry refers to a variety of methods that examine the way people create meaning of their lives through the telling of first-person accounts, told in the form of a story with a beginning, middle, and end. Stories are data

and analysis involves the drawing of comparisons across stories to establish themes (Bochner, 2002). The narrative interview protocol for all participants appears in Appendix B.

In this study, narrative interviewing involved posing open-ended questions to participants (unmarried mothers and their parents) that encouraged them to "tell the story" of their experience with disclosure of unwed pregnancy. This type of qualitative study was selected for two reasons: (a) it is a *self-generating scheme*, and (b) it is *contextually and situationally defined* (Bauer, 1996). Rather than the interviewer choosing the order of the questions, the vocabulary used to describe the event, and the topics that are given significance, this approach afforded agency to the participant. It was the participant who took hold of the responsibly of content-ordering, labeling concepts, and attributing salience to events. Research invested in an emic perspective, like this one, makes room for spontaneous language in the narrative of events (Bauer, 1996). Asking participants to recall unmarried pregnancy in the form of a story, resulted in the sequencing of events as perceived by the individual.

A second strength of narrative inquiry is that it is contextually and situationally defined. Narratives are organized by rules and regulations. The symbols used, the relationships involved, what is deemed possible, and the feelings described are creative expressions of the individual as constrained by material and ideological conditions. As a result, to make sense of stories and determine their significance is to understand something about the local culture (Bochner, 2002). Rather than viewing disclosure to parents as a fragmented event, narrative interviewing permitted access into the family's social environment. Storytelling provided a context for expressed perceptions and interpretations of the disclosure.

Sample Selection

Sampling technique. Purposive sampling was the primary sampling strategy for this dissertation's qualitative design. This strategy, involving the selection of subjects based on certain characteristics, was appropriate for two reasons: (a) the purpose of this project was to produce data useful for responding to qualitative problems such as *how* and *why* the phenomenon occurs; and (b) the focus was on social practices, their unique qualities, and meanings of people in a specific context (Chein, 1981; Lindloft & Taylor, 2002). The power and logic behind this type of nonprobability sampling rests on the assumption that gaining the most insight requires the selection of individuals from whom the most can be learned. Individuals who have personal experience with the disclosure of unmarried pregnancy are more knowledgeable than those who have not and can provide the kind of rich, in-depth information critical to understanding this phenomenon (Chein, 1981).

Sample inclusion criteria. The sample was limited to adult, unmarried, pregnant women (or new mothers) because recent statistics from the CDC report that the highest rates of non-marital births are no longer had by adolescent mothers but by women in their 20s (Martin et al., 2011; Ventura, 2009). In an effort to capture the dominant age group of women having non-marital births, participants in this study were required to be (a) female, between the ages of 19 and 35; (b) unmarried, at least 18 years old at the time of her pregnancy discovery; (c) the disclosure to parents must have already taken place; and (d) no more than five years have past since the revelation to her parents in order to control for memory effects. Inclusion criteria for the parents involved being the parent/primary guardian of the unmarried mother and their daughter's consent to contact them.

Sample size. The sample size, based on "expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon" (Patton, 2002, p. 246), was originally set at 15 families but continued until a point of saturation or redundancy and was terminated when no new information was forthcoming (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The final sample size for this study consisted of a total of 52 participants: 32 unmarried mothers and 20 of their parents. A total of 18 different families were represented in this study due to interviewing both the father and mother in two families. Participant demographic information is presented in Chapter 4.

Sample recruitment. A combination of *convenience* (i.e., a sample based on time, money, and availability) and *snowball* (i.e., sample reached through referrals made by others) sampling recruitment procedures were implemented to identify participants because unwed mothers (a socially stigmatized group) and their parents can be a difficult population to reach (Marpsat & Razafindratsima, 2010). These techniques are common forms of purposeful sampling and are appropriate for reaching an elusive audience (like unmarried mothers) or engaging people about a sensitive topic (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Merriam, 2009).

Upon obtaining IRB approval (Appendix A), I generated a list of pregnancy support organizations on UNC-CH's campus and in the surrounding area, via Internet searches. I also set up a Google News Alert to send me summary emails of published news articles containing the terms "unmarried pregnancy," "unwed pregnancy," "unmarried mothers," or "unwed mothers." I used the articles that were sent to me to identify other unwed pregnancy support organizations nationwide, as well as individuals who might be able to connect me with participants.

After compiling my list of potential contacts, I contacted the leaders of each of these organizations (either via email, phone, or in person), provided them with my study information, and asked for assistance in gaining access to women who might be willing to participate. I

requested that my study's flyer be posted in a visible location in their office building. If the organization maintained an online message board or email listserve for members/clients, I also requested that my contact information and study information be sent out. See Appendix C for the sample flyer and Appendix D for the email announcement.

As a second recruitment strategy, I sent out email announcements regarding the project through family and communication studies listserves such as SmartMarriages.com and CRTNET. I received several emails from professors offering support for this project, indicating that they would pass along the announcement to students who meet the criteria. One university posted the announcement on their department's "Research Participation Opportunities for Students" web page.

Next, I sent out a Facebook message to all of my contacts seeking participants and requesting that they send my contact information to anyone they may know who meets the eligibility criteria. I asked them to repost my message on their homepage in order to access people to whom I was not currently linked. Facebook allowed me to access a large number of people quickly, while also diversifying my sample by reaching circles of friends outside of my own.

Once each unwed mother was interviewed, I asked her if it was possible for me to interview her parent(s). Women who agreed were asked to provide their parents with the details of my study and contact information. Parents willing to participate in the study were instructed to contact me.

Data Collection

Several data collection techniques were used for the current investigation. First, each participant was emailed the consent form and a short questionnaire requesting demographic

information. After signing the consent form, electronically filling out the questionnaire items, and returning them to me, participants then engaged in an audio-taped, semi-structured, narrative interview. Dependent upon participant location and availability, the interviews took place either face to face ($n = 2$) or via telephone ($n = 50$). All interviews were conducted such that privacy and confidentiality were afforded. All interviews lasted approximately one hour and a half.

Demographic questionnaire items. The demographic questionnaire was administered for purposes of describing my sample and capturing characteristics that varied, such as age, race, current marital status, and religion. Surveys administered to unmarried mothers and their parents are in Appendix E.

Semi-structured narrative interviews. The primary method of data collection for this study was narrative interviewing (NI). NI elicits verbal accounts of personal experience that are significant to the individual, providing access into one's conceptualizations of the world, relationships, and identity. What distinguishes this method from other types of interviewing is the type of discourse it produces and its overall function. NI goes beyond the strict question-answer scheme and uses a specific type of conversational interaction, that of storytelling, as a way to produce a valid account of the participant's perspectives (Bauer, 1996). The discursive material it produces mimics that of a story with respect to its contents (i.e., setting, characters, plotline, and story moral) and pattern of development (i.e., all events lead up to a conflict, or climax, and its resolution). The goal is to help the storyteller explain, understand, and make sense of the event (Bochner, 2002).

Participants were asked to recall the revelation of unwed pregnancy and describe what happened as if they were telling a friend a story. Interviews involving the unmarried mothers asked them to describe the situation in which they told their parents they were pregnant,

beginning with the moment they first found out about their pregnancy and leading up to the point of revelation. In parent interviews, parents were asked to describe the situation in which their daughter revealed her pregnancy to them. All participants were encouraged to include any and all relevant information they felt was important to their story, and to provide as much detail as they could.

Once the participant indicated the end of his/her story, interview questions were asked about parts of the story that pertained to content analysis categories (i.e., face negotiation and disclosure enactment categories). These questions served to impose enough structure on the interview to ensure some commonality across participants because the lack of structure in narrative interviewing can lead to difficulty making comparisons and drawing conclusions across participants. The interview protocols for parents and unmarried mothers appear in Appendix B.

All interviews were conducted either face to face or via telephone, dependent upon participant availability and location. Although face-to-face interviewing is the dominant technique among qualitative researchers due to a number of advantages (see Holbrook, Green, & Krosnick, 2003), telephone interviewing is growing in popularity and proved to be particularly successful for this unique group of participants due to the sensitivity of the research topic. As other studies have found (e.g., O'Sullivan, 2000; Sussman & Sproull, 1999) participants seemed to be more comfortable revealing their stories via the telephone than in a face-to-face setting.

Perhaps the two most relevant problems lodged against telephone interviewing are its impersonal nature and the researcher's limited ability to control the interview setting—both advantages of face-to-face interviewing (Holbrook et al., 2003). However, studies have shown that phone interviews can be just as intimate and in-depth as in-person interviews, if not more so (Bird, 1995; Sunderland, 1999). In fact, when topics are sensitive some participants feel more

comfortable disclosing private thoughts via phone because they never expect to meet the researcher in person (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Richman, Kiesler, Wiesband, and Drasgow (1999) report that individuals tend to offer more accurate and complete information about themselves in a mediated setting than a face-to-face setting because not sharing physical presence with those we are revealing to creates a sense of liberation.

Telephone interviews are also advantageous for minimizing time and financial costs, extending a researcher's geographical access to participants, and accessing hard-to-reach participants, such as mothers with small children (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Opdenakker, 2006). Utilizing telephone interviewing enabled me to access participants nationwide. My final sample reflected each region of the U.S.; participants were drawn from 21 different states. Conducting the interview via telephone afforded flexible scheduling (e.g., selecting a time late at night once the baby has gone to bed), but more importantly enabled the women to engage in the conversation without interruption and focus on the questions asked thus enhancing the quality of their responses.

Data Analysis

To separate *data analysis* and *data collection* into separate sections of this dissertation is somewhat misleading. Although some researchers prefer to wait until all data are collected before analyzing and coding, the current investigation approached the two as concurrent processes and relied on a grounded theory approach to data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Transcription. At the conclusion of each interview, a transcript was made of the conversation. As the primary investigator, I transcribed all interviews (rather than hiring an assistant) to ensure confidentiality and because transcribing one's own interviews is one way to generate insight about what will emerge in the data (Merriam, 2009). As the primary

investigator, I transcribed all interviews (rather than hiring an assistant) because transcribing one's own interviews is one way to generate insight about what will emerge in the data (Merriam, 2009). In order to aid me in the transcription process, I used voice recognition software, *Dragon NaturallySpeaking 11.0*. After training the software to recognize my voice, I slowed down the speed of the recorded interview, listened to it via a headset, repeated the words that were spoken during the interview into a microphone, and watched as the software typed out the interview for me into a Word document.

In order to avoid problems related to data analysis software technicalities, all transcription documents had to be properly structured and formatted. For example, to avoid file conversion errors, all documents were converted into rich text format. In order to use the automatic coding feature, all speakers were clearly marked by using unique identifiers (e.g., INT: = Interviewer) and changes in speakers were marked by divisions with blank lines (Friese, 2012).

ATLAS.ti. Data were analyzed using ATLAS.ti 6.2, a computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). ATLAS.ti enables "modifying code words and coded segments, retrieving data based on various criteria, searching for words, integrating material in one place, attaching notes and finding them again, counting the numbers of coded incidences, offering overviews at various stages of the project, and so on" (Friese, 2012). It also allows for the asking of complex questions that may have not otherwise been asked because the manual labor involved in answering them is too time consuming. Most importantly, using computer-assisted software increases the validity of research results, particularly at the conceptual level of analysis, because it can be easy to forget with manual methods which raw data verify or falsify conceptual themes (Friese, 2012).

Informal coding. Following transcription, each narrative was read one time through to review the story as whole. As I read, I kept a log of reflective observer comments using the memo feature of ATLAS.ti. Reflective observer comments include "the researcher's feelings, reactions, hunches, initial interpretations, speculations, and working hypothesis" that seem interesting and important in answering the study's research questions (Merriam, 2009, p. 131).

Formal coding. Next, the transcribed narrative was formally coded. This process consisted of three coding procedures: *open-coding, axial coding*, and *selective coding* (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Open coding is the unrestricted coding that involves going line-by-line and marking units of data that suggest a category. It is unrestricted in the sense that as many categories as possible are generated from the data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002); however, the process was also guided by Ting-Toomey's (2005) face negotiation theory and Greene et al.'s (2006) list of disclosure enactment features. Therefore, in addition to coding data segments that seemed interesting and important, I also looked specifically for events, actions, perceptions and feelings that reflected face concerns, face needs, facework strategies, and disclosure enactment choices and interpretations. An analysis tool with operationalized categories and data examples is in Appendix F.

After codes were assigned to data in the first narrative, codes were compared to one another and grouped into categories of similar material, a process called *axial coding* (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). At this point, a codebook was created in which category names, descriptions, attributes, examples, and number of appearances were logged. It was during this process that I began to scrutinize the data and consider what gave rise to a category, in what context it was carried out, and the consequences that resulted (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Moving on to the second narrative, transcript two was assessed in the same manner, undergoing informal and formal coding procedures. The codes generated in transcript two were compared against those in transcript one for similarities and differences and integrated into the codebook. This process of constant comparison was repeated after each interview and continued throughout the duration of data collection. As supported by Corbin and Strauss (1990), making comparisons helped guard against researcher bias and achieve greater precision (i.e., the grouping of only like phenomena) and consistency (i.e., always grouping like data).

Once a tentative list of categories was derived, a separate document was created to identify themes that occur across narratives. Any codes uncategorizable due to lack of relevance were not included in this document. Themes were supported "by the preponderance of data," meaning that a theme must appear in at least a majority (51%) of the narratives (S. Merriam, personal communication, December 19, 2011). Queries were run using the code manager in ATLAS.ti. to retrieve all data segments associated with specific themes. In effect, the generated themes across narratives answered my research questions (Merriam, 2009).

In addition to retrieving data using simple queries, Research Question 1, which inquired about the sense-making process, was answered using the Query Tool. This tool is necessary for more complex data retrieval that involves a combination of codes. The query for this particular research question involved utilizing proximity operators to identify the spatial relations between coded data segments and to determine the order of events involved in the sense-making process within each narrative. For example, I was able to type the following code into the query tool: Code A, Code B, FOLLOWS which tells the software to generate the number of instances in which Code A (e.g., disclosure to parents., going to the doctor) FOLLOWS Code B (e.g., disclosure to parentsgoing to the doctor). This procedure of querying coded sense-making events

allowed me to discover the sequence of events that take place across narratives before parents are made aware of their daughter's unwed pregnancy.

Evaluating the Quality of Findings

Regardless of the type of research, all studies are concerned with producing credible results in an ethical manner (Merriam, 2009). To make any contribution to the field of communication, research procedures must be carried out with systematic rigor and investigation results must be trustworthy. This section of the dissertation explains the verification strategies used to ensure the quality of the results.

Establishing credibility. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), there are a number of activities that increase the likelihood that credible findings will be produced in a qualitative research study. Some of the more common verification techniques utilized in the current study include *member checks* (Crosby, 2004) and *peer debriefing* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Member checking is a popular method of verification often used in qualitative studies (Crosby, 2004). This involves sharing preliminary findings with some participants during or at the conclusion of their interview to see if they agree with the researcher's interpretations and conclusions. Although, it is not necessarily the case that participants and reviewers will (or should) agree—researchers typically have some insights that insiders do not and vice versa. I transcribed interviews and compared findings concurrently, so subsequent interviews provided an opportunity to test initial themes and hypotheses and solicit feedback from respondents. This strategy helped to correct any misinterpretation of findings that may have occurred. For example, I could ask: "It sounds like women tend to fear reactions from their fathers most. Is that correct?" Putting the respondent on record as confirming research interpretations early on in the project makes it difficult for the respondent to claim investigator error later (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Once all interviews were conducted, transcribed, analyzed, and preliminary results written, I emailed out the findings to 41 participants (parents and unwed mothers) who provided me with their email address and expressed interest in seeing the results once the project was complete. I asked them to please get back to me about their reactions to my interpretations and to let me know if any of my conclusions seemed incorrect. Eleven of the participants (8 unmarried mothers and 3 parents) responded to my email validating my interpretation of their experience and pointing out aspects that were surprising to them (rather than incorrect). For example, two parents explained that they were shocked that some participants found it satisfactory to disclose via text message.

Although there are other techniques that can demonstrate credible findings (e.g., calculating a reliability statistic), this dissertation seeks to capture the participants' worldview— their construction of reality—and offer an interpretive reading that is true to how participants would describe their own experiences. As a result, respondent verification is the appropriate means to ensure participant-driven meanings, rule out misinterpretation, and ensure credible findings (Maxwell, 2005).

Peer debriefing is another important technique useful for establishing credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer debriefing is the process of revealing researcher thoughts and interpretations to another for purposes of exploring, exposing, and clarifying aspects of the inquiry. Not only does this technique provide a cathartic opportunity for the researcher, it aids in the development of next steps and forces the researcher to defend his/her working hypotheses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

At the beginning of data collection, I conducted a training session with another doctoral student to familiarize him with the analysis-coding tool, concepts, and study procedures. We then

discussed any disagreements or inconsistencies. For example, a common participant response to the question, "What was your biggest worry going into the conversation with parents" was disappointing parents. We discussed whether this should be categorized as a self-face threat or other-face threat. After much discussion, we concluded that self-face was an appropriate label for this response because the unwed mother's worry stemmed from a failure to meet her parent's expectations (i.e., an image concern associated with not measuring up), not a concern for a parent's image or overall well-being. The meeting helped provide a check on selective perception, illuminate misinterpretation, and redirect study procedures moving forward.

Findings were also discussed with other graduate students and faculty members inside and outside the department, presented at two conferences, and read by all members of the dissertation committee. As such, peer debriefing was built into the process of writing, defending, and presenting the dissertation.

Ensuring consistency of results. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that qualitative research should also be evaluated on the basis of "dependability" or "consistency." Findings must make sense and be consistent with the way data were collected and coded. One strategy for improving consistency of results is to pretest interview questions. A pilot study was conducted in which three unmarried mothers and one parent engaged in an one-hour cognitive interview with the primary researcher. A cognitive interview is a qualitative method that critically evaluates data collection instruments by studying the ways in which participants understand, mentally process, and respond to presented materials (Willis, 2005). The focus of this technique is not on the answer the participant gives in response to a particular question, but rather *how* the respondent answers the question. It is a systematic process used to examine a respondent's *comprehension* of the item, ability to *recall* relevant information, and *decisions* and *judgments* made with respect

to response options (Willis, 2005). The goal of this technique is to reveal misunderstandings and unexpected problems with the interview protocol prior to administration in the field so that the instrument can be revised.

All three cognitive interviewees were given a consent form and conducted in a similar manner to what would occur during an actual interview scenario. Participants were read the interview prompt (see Appendix B) and asked to tell their story of disclosure of unwed pregnancy. At the conclusion of their story, a number of clarifying questions about their story were asked as well as questions asking participants to explain the meaning certain words held for them (e.g., "what was your desired image when revealing to your parents?" And "what do you think I mean by 'desired image'?"). Participants were encouraged throughout the interview to "think out loud," or verbalize anything that came to mind during the conversation (Willis, 2005).

During the interview, myself my research assistant (who also aided in peer debriefing) and I took field notes on problematic items. Issues that were brought to my attention were revised. For example, one parent expressed concern that the questions I asked of her were a result of what her daughter had said in a previous interview with me (i.e., "Oh no, did my daughter feel that way?"). It was then written into the interview protocol to assure parents that my questions were standard to all interviews and developed independently of their daughters' interviews.

Another example involving revisions to the interview process resulted from an unmarried mother's hesitancy to discuss her abortion due to the possibility that her father would find out. It was written into the interview protocol that I would reiterate participant confidentiality at the conclusion of the interview and discuss the procedure for interviewing parents. I felt it necessary to reassure all unmarried mothers that if I talk to their parents, all interview questions asked

would be based solely on the story parents provide me—not on the information disclosed by the unmarried mother.

A final strategy to improve consistency is the *audit trail* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The audit trail is a log, or research journal, that describes in detail how data were collected, categories were derived, and decision rules were made throughout the inquiry (Merriam, 2009). In addition to the initial observer comments made informally at the beginning of the analysis phase, I kept written record of any and all reflections, questions, problems, decisions, and ideas that could confound the data collection and interpretation phases of this project.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:
THE UNWED PREGNANCY SENSE-MAKING PROCESS

Participants

Fifty-two volunteers (32 unwed mothers and 20 of their parents) participated in this study. Most parent interviews were with the mother of the unwed woman. In two cases, I was able to separately interview both parents of the unwed mother; therefore, 18 different families are represented in this study. Forty-two participants (80.77%) are White, eight are Black/African American (15.38%), one is Hispanic/Latino (1.92%), and one is Middle Eastern (1.92%). All but three participants identified with a religious denomination (94.23%); specifically, nearly one-half of participants indicated they are Protestant, 11 are Christian (with no denomination preference), and 6 are Catholic. The high number of participants who identified with a particular religious denomination is not surprising given the enrollment criterion that required participants to consider revealing unwed pregnancy to others a "difficult scenario" (or finding moral fault with out-of-wedlock childbearing). However, it should be noted this group of participants may be a biased sample and findings may be different from the interpretations of those who did not participate.

Participants were drawn from 21 different states and vary in age, economic class, and socio-political stance. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 35 (for unmarried mothers) and from 48 to 67 for parents. Two participants (3.85%) reported having less than a high school education, 3 (5.77%) reported a high school degree, 20 (38.46%) reported some college, 19 (36.54%) reported being college graduates, and 8 (15.38%) reported advanced degrees. Eleven participants

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(21.15%) reported a household income of under $25,000; 7 (13.46%) between $25,000 and

$49,999; 16 (30.77%) between $50,000 and $99,999; 9 (17.31%) between 100,000 and 149,999;

5 (9.620%) over $150,000; and 4 (7.69%) did not report income. Unmarried mothers were not

living at home with parents, so the amount reported was their own income.

The largest time interval since the revelation to parents was five years. Originally, to

control for memory effects, this number was set at three years since longer retrieval periods can

increase the chances of memory failure (Tourangeau, Rips, & Raskinski, 2000). However, during

recruitment, a few women contacted me and explained that although they did not meet the time

interval requirement, they "remembered the event like it was yesterday" and "knew their story

had something to contribute." It was decided that this study, invested in the perspectives of the

participants, must afford agency to the participants and allow them to determine whether or not

they can recall their experience. As a result, I extended the maximum time interval to five years,

allowing them to participate.

Unmarried Pregnancy Sense-Making Process

Research Question 1 inquired about the process through which unmarried mothers make

sense of their pregnancy. Analysis of the narratives using proximity indicators to identify the

spatial relations between coded data segments and determine the order of events revealed seven

essential phases central to understanding the experience of unmarried pregnancy. The purpose of

this chapter is to delineate each phase and capture how participants understood, personalized,

and embodied unwed pregnancy. This chapter provides an account of how the perception of

stigma regarding unwed pregnancy may influence one's pregnancy behaviors and the unwed

woman's interpersonal relations over the course of her pregnancy. Important for interpretation of

the findings is to recognize that this is not the *only* phase development possible regarding

unmarried pregnancy. Phases may vary according to the unmarried mother's decision-making and unique experiences. The phases presented in this chapter are ones that were typical of the participants involved in this study.

Phase I: Learning about pregnancy. Results of this investigation revealed that the first phase in the process of making sense of unmarried pregnancy typically involved learning about possible pregnancy, or the point at which the unwed woman first noticed pregnancy symptoms and became concerned that she could be pregnant. Thirty of the 32 women reported symptoms such as a missed period, extreme thirst, strange food cravings, nausea, throwing up, sore breasts, and weight gain. They were "not feeling normal" (Kathleen, par. 1), and knew that "something was a little off" (Addy, par. 11). Jamie, a hair stylist from Washington, explained, "I guess like every girl, you just know your body and I knew something was definitely different" (par. 8).

Because early signs of pregnancy can vary from woman to woman, can go undetected even by a physician throughout her first trimester, and a pregnancy test is needed to confirm or rule out pregnancy (American Pregnancy Association, 2012), this stage was characterized by a great deal of uncertainty. Pregnancy was only a suspicion at this point and was one of many possible explanations for experienced symptoms. Cognizant of possible pregnancy, the unwed mothers briefly considered what this could mean for their life if their suspicions were confirmed. Their focus was less on the pregnancy itself, and more on the social consequences of being an unwed mother. Their greatest worry was the reaction of their parents. Lola explained, "I was most worried about telling my parents. I thought—is this going to destroy my relationship with them? I had a deep concern they would never forgive me and that this could be too big. I had shattered their hopes and dreams" (par. 7). Although unwed mothers may choose from a number

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of strategies to manage their perceptions of possible pregnancy, behaviors cited in the narratives fell into one of two categories: denial or confirmation of pregnancy.

     Denial of possible pregnancy. Five of the 32 unmarried mothers mentioned going into a state in denial after suspecting possible pregnancy. They attributed their symptoms to other possible explanations like traveling, being irregular, or just being tired or feeling stressed. They continued living life as normal both mentally and physically as if no symptoms had been experienced, and "ignored it as long as possible" (Sonia, par. 2). They did not alter their clothes, lifestyle, or make any preparations to see a doctor or prepare for the baby—there was no need to because the reality of being pregnant was ignored. Describing her denial, Jane said, "I kept wanting to give it another day because maybe this isn't real, ya know? I was thinkin' maybe tomorrow, maybe tomorrow, maybe tomorrow…" (par. 11). Results suggest that a woman may remain in denial anywhere from a few weeks and a missed period to full term and in labor. The women in this study were not expecting to become pregnant, and some were unfamiliar with the symptoms of pregnancy, so it was easy for them to misinterpret the signs of pregnancy or simply ignore physical changes. Sonia, who remained in denial for almost her entire pregnancy, claimed that even when she met with the adoption counselors a few weeks before her delivery, she still was not convinced she was pregnant. Charlotte, who also put her baby up for adoption, said she did not cognitively register that she was pregnant until she went into labor.

     Although the prevalence rate of denied pregnancy in this study is relatively low (15%), it suggests that denial of pregnancy is not rare. Some researchers have warned that the number of observed denial cases has increased over the years (Wessel et al., 2003). What can be particularly dangerous at this stage in the process, however, is if a pregnant woman remains in denial throughout most of gestation or up until she suddenly goes into labor, as was the case with

Charlotte and Sonia. Studies have found that denied pregnancies typically lead to the mother receiving little or no prenatal care and not making the appropriate lifestyle choices for a pregnant woman, which are both important to the health and well-being of the infant and mother (Wessel et al., 2003).

   Acknowledgment of possible pregnancy. The remaining 27 women began immediately taking steps to confirm or rule out their suspicion of pregnancy. The women recalled (a) looking up their symptoms on the Internet, (b) reflecting back on previous sexual encounters and considering if preventatives could have failed or were not used, and (c) seeking advice from a best friend, sibling, or partner. However, the most common way they acknowledged their symptoms and managed their perceived pregnancy was to take an at-home pregnancy test.

   Thirty of the 32 women reported taking an at-home test at some point during their pregnancy to determine pregnancy status. This is not surprising given that at-home tests are private, convenient, and cost effective—all characteristics that are important to a woman who fears letting others know about her pregnancy status. Reflecting back on their experiences, several women joked about the vast number of at-home pregnancy tests they took and the various brands they tried. Apparently, the positive result they received caused them to question the accuracy of the at-home test and their ability to follow directions and take the test correctly. Laughing, Evelyn said, "Honest to God, my friend turned the directions of the test over and started reading it top to bottom in Spanish to make sure we didn't miss anything or do it wrong!" (par. 11).

   Although the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2006) reports that most at-home tests are 97-99% accurate, the women also knew that the results are reliable only when used according to package instructions one week after a missed period (Harms & Wick, 2011).

These conditions provided a glimpse of hope that the at-home test was wrong, they were not pregnant, and need not worry. The reality of being pregnant for more than half of the women in this study did not set in until they received "official" confirmation from a doctor.

Seventeen of the 32 unwed mothers reported going to the doctor for purposes of receiving laboratory test results from a physician prior to telling their parents about their pregnancy. The women explained that they wanted to be sure that the at-home test was accurate—that they did not read or take the test incorrectly—before "getting everyone all upset and up in arms" (Lana, par. 27).

Although not all of the remaining women explained why they did not go to the doctor prior to telling parents, the few who did claimed it was due to fear of having their secret discovered by parents before they were ready to tell. This is surprising given that the participants in this study are adults (and concerns about health care privacy tend to come from adolescents) and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) ensures protection and confidentiality of their health information and medical records (Klein, McNulty, & Flatau, 1998; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013). Perhaps their fear stems from still being on their parent's insurance, as one participant mentioned. The Affordable Care Act now allows young adults to stay on their parents' health care plan until age 26, an age bracket that includes a majority of the unwed mothers in this study. Any additional charge on an insurance bill could arouse parental suspicion.

Phase II: Reaction to pregnancy confirmation. Confirming pregnancy, by doctor, at-home test, or both, typically triggered an immediate stress response in the unwed mother, or as Lola put it, "a bombardment of shattered hopes and dreams" (par. 3). The unwed mother's angst

that she could be pregnant became a reality and she began to struggle with a number of identity, relational, and instrumental concerns (see Chapter 6 for a discussion of face concerns).

For the unwed mothers in this study, required for participation was that their pregnancy was unexpected and unintentional. Therefore, finding out about pregnancy status was primarily an upsetting event, consumed by feelings of shock, surprise, disbelief, and even devastation; only two women reported immediate positive excitement about their unexpected pregnancy. Amelia explained, "It was really a weird feeling because it happens to your friends and you see it on TV, but you just never think it'd happen to you!" (par. 10). Due to the unplanned and unwanted nature of their pregnancies (at least at that time), the women felt completely caught off guard and unsure what to do next. Recalling her initial reaction to pregnancy, Dena shared, "I just felt like my whole life was literally flashing before my eyes. I wanted to faint. I didn't hear anything around me and everything became blurry" (par. 4).

Partially explaining the reason for the unwed mother's emotional tumult regarding her pregnancy was her assessment of her relational and material welfare. Disclosing stories to me of abusive relationships, called off engagements, one night stands, financial insecurities, unsupportive family members, imprisoned partners, and incomplete educational degrees, the women explained how their current life circumstances did not afford an ideal environment for pregnancy and raising a child. They felt stressed, panicked, scared, and ill prepared for motherhood, questioning whether they were "capable and mature enough to be responsible for another human being" (Lana, par. 9). Fearing inadequacy, the women worried about not having the knowledge or resources available for successful child rearing.

The perception that their life was going to change—regardless of their decision to keep the child or not—fueled feelings of anger, disappointment, and regret. Feelings of guilt were also

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reported as the unmarried mother struggled to negotiate her feelings of not wanting a child or her life to change and her perceptions of society's pronatalist values that there is "nothing more fulfilling than raising a child" and "children should be the central focus of every person's adult life" (Carroll, 2012, p. 5). As Evelyn shared, "It's a struggle with guilt—feeling guilty about being pregnant. You have this sweet innocent child inside you and you feel guilty because you are feeling guilty about your pregnancy" (par. 58). Feelings of guilt and anger were particularly strong among the nine women who claimed to never want children. Finding themselves at the center of an identity crisis forced them to reconsider their plans of voluntary childlessness and how having a child would impact achievement of certain life goals.

All of the women—even those who claimed to be in stable romantic partnerships and have a strong network of friends and family—worried about how telling others the news of their pregnancy would affect their relationships. Fearing an unsupportive partner or the rejection of friends and family, the women experienced feelings of loneliness, embarrassment, and disappointment. As Kat put it, "there is just something about having your dad know that you got knocked up" (par. 40). The women also feared "doing it alone" (Sherrie, par. 3), without the acceptance and support of loved ones.

Consideration of options. The unwed mother's fears regarding the negative perceptions of others, losing the support and acceptance of loved ones, not measuring up to parental expectations or achieving life goals, financial instability, and inadequate access to resources resulted in her exploration of the consequences of being pregnant and an assessment of all pregnancy options (i.e., termination, adoption, raising the child). Lola explained, "For the next few days I was crying all the time. I even had thoughts of getting rid of it. I hate to say it, but I knew I could take care of this. No one would even know" (par. 3). At this early stage in the

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sense-making process, all pregnancy alternatives were considered. The women explained that the circumstances they found themselves in resulted in a questioning of their beliefs regarding pregnancy and motherhood and a reevaluation of all available pregnancy outcomes. Options that they never would have otherwise considered were suddenly put on the table. Evelyn shared, "Seeing that plus sign…even though I have never contemplated abortion before, in that instant I totally understood how anyone would contemplate it" (par. 12). The women knew that if they chose abortion, their "problem" would be resolved and none of their concerns about how pregnancy will affect their relational, educational, or financial future would come to fruition.

First revelation of pregnancy. If the unmarried mother had not already revealed her pregnancy to a confidant (e.g., a few women found it necessary to have their best friend, partner, or sibling with them while they took the at-home test), it was typically at this point in the process that she carefully selected a confidant and disclosed her pregnancy. Most often—in 93% of the cases—the revelation was motivated by relational reasons and functioned as a means of seeking emotional support and obtaining advice on what to do. Most often, the first person she revealed to was (a) the baby's father (because of his direct involvement in the pregnancy), or (b) a relational other whom she trusted and believed would not reject her based on the news (e.g., a same-sex best friend or sibling). Data suggest a fairly even divide with regards to whom she first reveals—in nearly 50% of the narratives the first person she told was the baby's father. In the remaining 50%, the first person she told was a same-sex best friend or sibling (primarily a sister).

In only two instances, the unwed mother's first disclosure to another was motivated by instrumental reasons rather than relational. One woman took her pregnancy test at work and was forced to reveal her status immediately to her boss and coworkers because pregnancy inhibited her from performing certain job duties, like taking x-rays or handling toxic chemicals. The

second woman, keeping her status concealed from all of her friends and family, first revealed her pregnancy to an adoption counselor as she planned for the baby's arrival.

Phase III: Concealment and isolation from parents. Once the unwed woman became aware of her pregnancy, she spent a period of time concealing it from others while she figured out what to do next—only her confidant (sister, partner, or best friend) and perhaps a select few others (e.g., a boss or other close friend) were aware of her secret. As Kaylen put it, the unwed mother went "pretty much underground" (par. 32). Although pregnancy was fairly easy to conceal from others at this early stage, there were a few lifestyle changes that needed to take place (e.g., not drinking alcohol or eating certain foods). At times, these changes were difficult for the unwed mothers to conceal from their parents and suspicions arose—particularly if the unwed mother lived near her parents or spent a lot of time with them. For example, Addy and Julie recalled being questioned for not drinking at social events. Dana told her mother that the reason she was sleeping all the time and missed her period was because she was stressed about school and tired from track practice. Julie shared a story about going over to her partner's parents' home for dinner. She exclaimed:

> I didn't know you couldn't eat shrimp. When my boyfriend told me, "You can't eat shrimp," I looked at him and said, "Your mother is cooking shrimp for dinner because she knows how much I like shrimp! How are we going to explain to her that I'm not allowed to eat shrimp?" He was like, "Oh, yeah. Good point. Eat shrimp!" (Julie, par. 33)

In order to preserve their secret, the women attempted to act like nothing was different by nonchalantly warding off accusations and making excuses for odd behavior. For example, when Lana's mom commented, "You're drinking an awful lot of water," she replied, "Oh, I'm trying to be healthy" (par. 19). Addy explained that when her family questioned her about not drinking

at a social event, she pretended to be sick and explained that it was not a good idea to drink while taking antibiotics. Eventually, however, the women found it easiest to simply avoid friends and family until they were ready to disclose the news to their parents. The women felt an obligation to tell their parents about their pregnancy before many others, so they ended up isolating themselves and withdrawing from their social circles. Unfortunately, as a result, the amount of face-to-face social support the unmarried mother received at this point was minimal, which raises the question if she is receiving no support at all, or if she is receiving it in other ways. For example, the past few years have given rise to various social networking sites that offer online support communities for new moms where they can receive support (e.g., Cafemom.com, mayasmom.com, minti.com, workitmom.com, mombloggersclub.com). Cafemom.com, for example, offers several community threads dedicated specifically to young pregnant women who are not married and want to seek out other women in their situation. Although the interview protocol did not inquire about received online support, it is possible that some women sought out online communities to receive the advice and emotional support they needed.

Certain lifestyle changes are critical for a pregnant mother and the well-being of her child, so concealing pregnancy from others can actually result in dangerous behaviors. Refraining from drinking or smoking at social events or avoiding certain foods toxic for a pregnant woman, can provoke suspicion if these are her common behaviors. Not only must the unwed mother be able to ward off peer pressure for not engaging in typical behaviors, but she must also be convincing enough in her response that she does not reveal her secret. What becomes of concern is the extent to which some women were willing to go when the need to conceal became great. For example, this was highlighted in Julie's narrative, when she was pressed about not drinking alcohol at a friend's 21st birthday. She finally ended up ordering a

drink and drinking in front of her friends because it was the only way to get them to leave her alone.

Narrowing down of options. During the concealment stage, the unwed mothers began narrowing down their pregnancy options. After searching online for information, talking to doctors, discussing alternatives with the baby's father, a close friend, or sibling, the unwed women eliminated certain options. Whereas in the previous phase all options (abortion, adoption, keeping the child) were possibilities, in this phase the unwed mother began to assess her situation and decide which alternative best reflected her current circumstance and was most in line with her values and beliefs. In all but 3 of the 32 cases, it was at this point in the process—before going to their parents—that the women decided on their pregnancy outcome. As such, talking with their parents functioned as a matter of informing them of what was going to happen next, as opposed to asking their advice, getting their permission, or deciding collectively what to do.

The fact that the unmarried mother had already made a decision regarding whether or not to keep her child before going to her parents, suggests that the role of the confidant during decision-making may be significant. Because the unmarried mother has told very few people about her pregnancy, it is possible that she was receiving a limited, or even a biased account, of what she should do and how people will react to her news. For example, many of the women who confided in their baby's father who did not want to be involved received a great deal of pressure to have an abortion. On the other hand, women who confided in the baby's father who did want to be involved were pressured to keep their child. It is important to note that the unmarried mother's ability to make her own decision or chose an option that goes against what her confidant is telling her is not to be discounted. A few mothers, for example, expressed regret that they let their unwed father talk them into a particular decision and wished they had carried

out their original plan. Certainly additional research is needed to determine how influential a confidant is when the unmarried pregnant woman is considering her pregnancy options and to what extent she is able to go against the advice of her confidant—particularly when her only confidant is the baby's father.

Also important to keep in mind is why the confidant was chosen in the first place. Confidants were typically selected because they were perceived to be trustworthy individuals likely to be receptive of the concealed news (Petronio, 2002). Although this person may have given the unmarried mother the emotional support that she needed, this person could have also caused her to establish unrealistic expectations regarding how others will react to her news. In other words, positive reactions from a best friend or sibling—who was chosen because of her/his likelihood to be supportive—should not be taken as predictive of how other friends or family members will react. This can also be the case with parents—when one parent is told before the other, that parent's reaction may not be similar to what can be expected from the other parent, as Shelby learned. She was shocked and caught off guard by how poorly her mother received the news because she had just revealed to an elated father.

Of course there is also the additional risk that the confidant provided the unmarried mother with inaccurate information regarding how others will react. Although a confidant may be selected because of his/her ability to provide insight into how her parents are likely to react, there is no guarantee that the information provided is accurate. A confidant's predictions, then, can result in an unmarried mother preparing for and anticipating parental reactions that are over or under exaggerated.

Preparing for the conversation with parents. Once a decision was made to keep the child or not, the women then considered whether or not to tell their parents. Telling parents was

an inclusion criterion for participation in this study, so all women revealed their pregnancy to their parents; only 2 of the 32 women reported not preparing at all for the conversation. Questions considered included: What will my parents say? When and how should I tell them? What should I say? Where should I tell them? Do I tell both parents at the same time? Should I bring the baby's father with me or do it alone? Should I make my sister come, too? In order to answer these questions and prepare for the conversation with their parents, the women engaged in a number of face-saving behaviors, such as (a) getting advice from a trusted source (e.g., sibling, best friend, partner, mentor, or person who has experience revealing unwed pregnancy to parents); (b) intrapersonally considering various types of parental reactions (e.g., worst- and best-case scenarios) and how to respond; (c) practicing what to say out loud, sometimes with another person; and (d) anticipating parental questions about the future and how to answer them. (See Chapter 6 for more information on preparation strategies).

Phase IV: Disclosure enactment. The next phase of unwed pregnancy sense making began when the unwed mother revealed her pregnancy to her parents and her disclosure plan was implemented (see Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion of disclosure strategies). All of the 32 women explained that disclosing to at least one parent gave them a sense of relief and was a significant event because, according to Sherrie, it marked "a step forward" (par. 31). She explained:

> I just was a mess emotionally. I couldn't do anything. I couldn't focus. I knew that if I didn't do something, I would just still stay in my little circumstance right there. I knew by telling my mom that would be a step forward because she would help me figure out whatever the next phase of this looks like. (Sherrie, par. 31)

During the concealment phase, the women reported being at a standstill, feeling overwhelmed by their situation and unsure what to do next. Telling parents, therefore, was cathartic. It eased their anxiety, provided them with a sense of relief, and forced them to think about next steps to be carried out.

For some women, telling their parents also functioned as a means of relinquishing their complete control over their situation, and in some instances resulted in solidifying their pregnancy decision. For example, one woman explained that all pregnancy options were available and the decision was hers until she told her parents. Dana said, "I knew that as soon as I told my parents, abortion was no longer in the picture. So, I sorta kinda tried to see my options before going to them" (par. 8). Dana wavered back and forth between keeping the child and having an abortion and confessed that keeping the child made her incredibly nervous. Telling her parents meant that she would lose the opportunity to change her mind later on should she decide to put the baby up for adoption or get an abortion.

The women felt certain of which pregnancy outcomes their parents would advocate—or at least, which ones they would strongly oppose—and by telling their parents, certain options would become no longer available. In other words, if the women were going to make a choice that went against what they perceived their parents wanted, they wanted to do it before they risked losing control of the situation and inviting unwanted parental intervention.

Although 29 of the 32 women had already made their pregnancy outcome decision prior to telling their parents, the salience of maintaining control of their situation was particularly apparent in the narratives of four women. Concealing unwed pregnancy from their parents ensured protection from parental involvement, so these women decided to wait to disclose their pregnancy until it was too late for their parents to interfere with their decision. For example,

Charlotte and Sonia concealed their pregnancies, had their babies, and put them up for adoption before ever telling their parents they were pregnant; Sheena told her mom that she had gotten pregnant one month after she had her abortion; and Josie waited until she was five months along to tell her mother, when abortion was no longer an option for her. In an effort to maintain control and avoid parental pressures to select outcomes they are not comfortable with, these unwed mothers decided to handle their situation without the help of a parent at all—a strategy commonly found in other studies regarding concealed pregnancy (Conlon, 2006).

Finally, the disclosure-to-parent stage was significant because it designated the point at which others can be told about the pregnancy. Up until now, very few people know about the pregnancy—in most cases, only the baby's father and a trustworthy confidant have been informed—due to a perceived obligation that "outta respect, your mom should know before your hairdresser!" (Leah, par. 94). Now that parents were finally aware, the women did not feel as much pressure to hide the news from others. For those who decided to keep their baby, others were going to find out anyway.

Phase V: Relationship strain and identity transformation. Concealment of pregnancy put the unwed mothers under a great deal of stress; revealing the news, then, even when the conversation did not go as planned, afforded the women some sense of relief simply from no longer having to maintain the secret. Unfortunately, however, the strain and tension they experienced in their personal relationships was not alleviated.

Parent-child relationship strain. Following the disclosure to their parents, the unwed mothers explained that their relationship with their parents became strained. In addition to the stress created by the unmarried mother's reaction to her own pregnancy, tension rose due to her parents reacting to the news for the first time. When told about their daughter's unwed

pregnancy, parents experienced a mix of emotions ranging from shock, happiness, and excitement, to sadness, anger, embarrassment, and disappointment that caused strain on their relationship with their child. Out of the 20 parents of unwed mothers who were interviewed, only one reported feeling immediately "overjoyed at the news of finally having a grandchild" (Frank, par. 2). However, even Frank explained that his excitement was tempered by concern for his daughter's future and apprehension regarding her relationship with the baby's father. When asked to describe their biggest concerns regarding their child's unwed pregnancy, all 20 parents expressed concern for their daughter's ability to be a parent in her current situation. They raised questions such as: Is she "mature enough to have a baby?" (Megan, par. 32); "What kind of mom will she be?" (Abigail, par. 13); "How is she going to manage raising a child on her own?" (Sybil, par. 45); "Is she responsible enough to care for a child?" (Claudia, par. 15); "How is she going to do this being such a mess herself?" (Nicole, par. 6), "How is she gonna pay bills?" (Janette, par. 33); "Can they afford this?" (Nora, par. 25). Parents feared for the well-being of their daughter and wondered if she realized "what this is gonna be like in their daily lives" (Nora, par. 25) and does she know just "how hard it is to raise a child when you're not married and living alone" (Abigail, par. 12).

Five parents were so concerned about their daughter's current state that they asked her if she had thought about any alternatives to keeping the child; all five explained that abortion and adoption were not alternatives they would have otherwise considered. Under the current circumstances, the reality and consequences of keeping the child seemed to outweigh their religious beliefs. Worrying about their daughter's ability to care for herself and the child, parents wanted to know their daughter's future plans and how she planned to manage finances, a job, finishing school, insurance, daycare, doctor's visits, and living arrangements.

In addition to financial and logistical concerns, 50% of the parents expressed relational concerns, primarily with regards to the baby's father. Parents wanted to know the identity of the baby's father and the amount of support to anticipate from him. In cases where the baby's father indicated his commitment to the mother and child, parents wanted to know their daughter's feelings toward the baby's father and if there were plans to marry.

A number of parents (8 of 20) reported feeling embarrassed by the news of unwed pregnancy and expressed concern for their own image as well as their daughter's image. Leon, who held a leadership position in his church, explained, "Even in our liberal society today there is still a social stigma attached to it" (par. 19). Parents worried about what others would think of them, if conservative circles would reject them, and even blamed themselves for their daughter's unwed pregnancy. Kay shared, "You feel like you failed your child—like what could I have said or done to prevent this from happening? You try to figure out what you could have done differently" (par. 11). Nicole explained that her embarrassment resulted from thinking that "she had raised her to be above this" (par. 33). She was embarrassed and angry with her daughter for being "that stupid to get pregnant—she should have known better!" (par. 33). The parents in this study—primarily religious and conservative—also claimed to have religious and conservative friends. As Megan explained, "It was hard to get excited and happy about the birth because among most of my friends and family having a baby out of wedlock is not condoned" (par. 11).

Finally, parents expressed disappointment and mourned the loss of their hopes and dreams for their daughters. Feeling like their child was "robbed of her college years and experiences" (Claudia, par. 15), parents were disappointed that their daughters were going to be forced into motherhood so quickly and may not get to achieve everything they set out to achieve. Vicky explained, "She had a plan for her life—she was gonna graduate, teach, coach soccer. I'm

not saying she can't do that one day, but it was dead at that point and that broke my heart for her" (par. 31). Sadie stated, "She is my only daughter, so I have this whole vision of what I expected. As parents, we have a vision for our children's lives and this was just so not what I thought it would be" (par. 9).

Although the amount of time it took for parents to reconcile their concerns varied, the narratives suggest several events that may lead to a parent's acceptance of the situation and an improvement in the parent-child relationship during unwed pregnancy. Moments that marked positive parental excitement about the pregnancy include: seeing an ultrasound for the first time, hearing the baby's heartbeat, planning a baby shower, designing a nursery, picking out items for the registry, buying gifts, finding out the sex of the child, and choosing a name. For the two parents who did not reach a point of positive excitement during their daughter's pregnancy, seeing and holding the baby for the first time seemed to be the catalyst.

Friendship strain. As their pregnancies progressed and babies were born, the unwed mothers experienced changes in their friendships. Few women had friends with children or knew of anyone going through a similar situation, so they felt isolated. Taking time off from school, moving near or back in with parents, and no longer being able to "go out without taking the baby" (Ada, par. 77), caused friendships to dwindle and suffer. The women simply did not have as much time to spend with childless friends nor did they seem to want to participate in the same activities. For example, Julie talked about how she often received late night calls from her friends begging her to meet them out at a bar. She said her friends did not understand that "when you have a kid, it all stops" (par. 89). Although the women reported feeling grateful for the support of their best friend, partner, or family, they disliked not having anyone who they felt truly understood their situation. Dena shared, "For so long I was praying for someone I could

relate to. It's just not the same when you talk to somebody, and they are your friend, but they don't know what you are going through because they don't have a child" (par. 138).

Diminishing friendships can be particularly harmful for the unwed mother because researchers have linked postpartum depression to changes in work and social relationships (U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2012). Although most of the women in this study were receiving either informational or tangible support from their parents, the women missed social interaction with friends and expressed a desire to meet other adult unmarried mothers. The women explained that their parents could not sympathize and offer emotional support in the same capacity that another unmarried mother her age could. There were simply some topics that they did not want to discuss with their parents.

Only three of the women were active participants in a face-to-face support group for adult unwed mothers. Claudia, one of the parent participants, explained how difficult it was to find support for her daughter. She said they could find "support groups for teens and 40-year-old divorcees" (par. 106), but not for a 20-year-old "in their economic class" (par. 105). Her concern raises the question if private and public organizations offering support groups for unmarried mothers are following current trends and targeting the largest group of women having non-marital births, which is now women in their 20s (Ventura, 2009).

Transformation. While the women were experiencing relationship turmoil with parents and friends, they simultaneously went through a transformation of their identity. The unwed mothers began to embody what it meant to be a mother, reconceptualizing the person they saw themselves to be and accepting their role as mother; this is significant given that nine of the women never wanted children and none wanted to be pregnant at this time in their lives. A majority (65%) of the unwed mothers reacted to the news with a sense of identity loss and

worried about how they would be perceived by others. The direction they saw their life progressing was suddenly changing course. They feared not being able to measure up to and fulfill their parents' expectations or achieve the goals they had set out to achieve.

Five of the women also commented on a spiritual transformation or a recommitment to their faith. They viewed getting pregnant as a sign from God that they had "made a mess of life" (Dana, par. 11), "fallen off track," and needed to "get stuff together" (Josie, par. 34). As Sherrie explained, "I can't talk about this experience without making it about how the Lord changed my life because that is what it did" (par. 86). Feeling immoral for their out-of-wedlock pregnancy, the women anticipated rejection from their church and religious friends. Much to their surprise, they said they felt welcomed and accepted and reminisced about church members throwing them showers and offering assistance with pregnancy, childcare, and living arrangements. (The transformation of identity is elaborated on in Chapter 6).

Phase VI: Adjustment and new normalcy. The final phase of making sense of unwed pregnancy involved the unmarried mother and her parents adjusting to their new reality and the strain in their relationship lifting. Thirty of the 32 women and all 20 parents said that since the disclosure of unwed pregnancy, the parent-child relationship either improved or returned to its normal functioning state. Only two participants reported that their relationship with their parent(s) was worse off (e.g., more conflictual, caused lasting resentment) because of their unwed pregnancy.

The most commonly reported change in the parent child relationship—mentioned in 45 of the 52 interviews—was greater closeness. Describing their relationship as a "deeper" (Vicky, par. 32), "more intimate" (Jane, par. 29), "stronger bond" (Nicole, par. 56), participants credited the increased closeness to factors such as spending more time together, talking more frequently,

and having something in common (parenthood). In most cases, getting pregnant resulted in the unwed mother relying on the help of her parents in some way. Whether needing a place to live, financial assistance, childcare, or simply wanting advice or emotional support, the amount of time the unwed mother and her parents spent together and talked typically increased. The parents of the unwed mother have already experienced pregnancy and are parents themselves, so they also served as important sources of information and support. The unwed mother and her parents now had something in common: they were both parents.

It was not, however, just the unwed mother seeking out her parents that led to a closer relationship. Parents in this study were excited about being grandparents and wanted to be involved in their grandchild's life, offering up their time, advice, and assistance as much as possible. Sadie explained, "It brings a different kind of closeness because they can ask these very intimate questions about stuff that is happening to them and you are able to give them an example or solution or just listen in a way that I think a man can't—men can sympathize but not empathize" (par. 95).

In addition to relationship enhancement, the parent-child relationship changed in other ways. Twelve unmarried mothers reported being more open and honest than usual in their conversations with their parents, and seven parents felt like their conversations with their daughters were more open and honest. Prior to their disclosure of pregnancy, the unwed mothers questioned if their relationship with their parents was conditional—wondering if their news and not measuring up to parental expectations would cause their parents to view them negatively, treat them differently, or love them less. Throughout this experience, however, they reported learning whether or not they could trust their parents with news of this magnitude. They gained a sense of the stability in their relationship with their parents and no longer felt pressure to conceal

thoughts, emotions, or behaviors for purposes of upholding a certain image. The pressure to be perfect was lifted through this experience, which gave the unwed mothers a chance to "be transparent" (Evelyn, par. 44) and show their parents their true self. Dana explained, "I feel like that was the worst thing I could possibly have ever told them, so now that that is sorta kinda out of the way I can be more open and honest about things in my life" (par. 143).

A final way that unwed pregnancy changed the parent-child relationship was with respect to how the unwed mother was viewed, respected, and treated by her parents. Both parents and the unwed mothers explained that this experience resulted in parents having "more respect" (Kat, par. 91), seeing their daughters as "more mature" (Dena, par. 98), and treating them like adults. As Claudia put it, "We now have more of a parent-adult relationship than a parent-child relationship" (par. 39). Leon explained, "Before she got pregnant she was 'my child.' Now she is an adult in her own right. What has happened is a maturation process in my mind" (par. 34). Abigail explained that when her daughter came to tell her, her life flashed before her eyes and she no longer saw a child sitting there. She knew her daughter was about to have a new role in life.

Although parents may have initially been skeptical of their daughters' ability to raise and care for a child and worried about the type of parent they would be, most parents admitted that they were "proven wrong" (Claudia, par. 15), "impressed by [their] choices" (Nora, par. 61; Nicole, par. 56), and "proud of [their daughter] for doing the right thing" (Penny, par. 20). They viewed their daughters as strong and courageous (Claudia, par. 47; Vicky, par. 61), admired their bravery (Penny, par. 20), and felt as if they rose to the occasion (Nicole, par. 56). Sonia explained that getting pregnant and not telling her parents until after adoption proceedings

occurred forced her parents to treat her like an adult: "They still give me advice, but it is much more of a suggestion than a directive now" (par. 49).

It is important to note that this final change, more so than other findings, should be understood within the context of parental recruitment and the self-selection of the unmarried women who gave their consent for parental involvement. In other words, this group of parents is a biased sample and this finding may be different from the interpretations of the parents who did not participate.

Conclusion

Pregnancy is a transition period of great physiological and psychological change in which many women report increased anxiety (Petersen, Paulitsch, Guethlin, Gensichen, & Jahn, 2009). Studies examining the content and extent of maternal worries during pregnancy report that the "normal" pregnant woman is most worried about the birthing process, pregnancy complications, coping with a new baby, going to the hospital, preterm delivery, having a child with a disability, and physical appearance (Huizink, Mulder, Robles de Medina, Visser, & Buitelaar, 2004; Petersen et al., 2009). However, few of these concerns appear at the top of the list for the pregnant woman who is not married, at least initially. As made clear by this discussion, the pregnancy sense-making process involves much more than navigating the consequences of becoming pregnant when the pregnancy is unplanned, unexpected, and the mother is not married. It is the interaction of the physiological and psychological changes she endures with the social and identity risks she perceives that make the process overwhelming and thrusts the unwed mother into crisis.

The last decade has given rise to an increase in studies that examine how families confront crisis, highlighting the relationship between communication practices and well-being

during particular crisis situations (Dickson & Webb, 2012). The sequence of events presented in this chapter provides an in-depth look at the sense-making process from the perspective of an adult unmarried woman who discovers that she is unintentionally pregnant. Although her circumstances may be unfamiliar to her, the process itself reflects other models of human response to new or difficult information. For example, Alonzo and Reynolds (1995) delineate the HIV/AIDS stigma trajectory, a model that conceptualizes how individuals with HIV/AIDS experience stigma and how one's experience is affected by each biophysical stage of the illness. The model's four stages include: (a) *at-risk*—perception that he or she may be at-risk for HIV; (b) *diagnosis*—confirmation of HIV status, coming to terms with her/his new identity, and the realization of a shorter life; (c) *latent*—disease is asymptomatic, concealable, and the fear of rejection is high; and (d) *manifest*—individual develops manifest clinical expressions linked to HIV.

Although this model is intrinsically entwined with the disease course and focuses heavily on the biophysical nature of HIV/AIDS (Alonzo & Reynolds, 1995), it does shed light on an individual's psychosocial processes as he or she makes sense of the illness, making it applicable to the experience of unmarried pregnancy. For example, referring to pregnancy as a "*risk*" conceptualizes the first stage as a period of uncertainty consumed by fear for what the future could hold. Although pregnancy is not a "disease to be diagnosed," and people do not fear "catching it," the unmarried mother does experience *confirmation* (stage 2) of her pregnancy status, reacts to the news, and mourns a former self as she is forced to consider motherhood. Similar to Alonzo and Reynolds' (1995) stage three, *concealment* is a significant aspect of the unmarried mother's story, involving a period of time where symptoms can be hidden and the news can be tested out on a few friends and family. Finally, (similar to stage four) unwed

mothers who opt to deliver their babies do reach a point at which the pregnancy is no longer concealable and they must search for meaning, support, and acceptance.

Although the unwed pregnancy sense-making process may fit within this general pattern of confronting stigma and crisis, what this chapter offers is a closer look at the *turning points* (Baxter & Bullis, 1986), the events that are associated with change, over the course of a particular experience—unwed pregnancy—that make it unique. The purpose of this chapter is not to discuss how unmarried pregnancy fits neatly within a general schema of reacting to unwanted and unexpected news, albeit parts of the unmarried mother's story do. Rather, the purpose is to highlight how each phase has its own available choices, identity concerns, and personal and relational struggles that result from being an unmarried mother.

The complexity of the experience is lost when situational effects are not accounted for and the ability to provide families with the best communication practices for coping, therefore, lies within the capability to understand crises in situ (Caughlin, 2012). Essentially, what may count as "helpful" recommendations for how to navigate this crisis (which is a goal of Chapter 7) is inherently situational, calling for research that deconstructs unique family scenarios and communicative patterns, like disclosing adult unwed pregnancy to parents. I elaborate on a few of these unique situational features here.

Reversing the situation. At the onset, the sense making process of unwed pregnancy is distinct from a grieving or ill person with respect to the choices available to them. Unlike the ill individual, for example, who cannot chose whether or not he/she has the disease, or the grieving person who cannot chose whether or not a loved one dies, the unmarried mother can choose whether or not she remains pregnant. This choice alone is significant because it impacts whether or not she is forced to reveal her pregnancy and risk being stigmatized. Should she continue with

her pregnancy, she has the option of giving up her baby for adoption, keeping the baby and parenting as a single mother, or getting married to her partner and co-parenting, as many of the women did. These choices are interesting aspects of the unmarried mother's narrative because they may be perceived as ways to mitigate the stigmatizing label of "unmarried pregnancy."

The adult unmarried mothers in this study recognized that the type of "burden" they were to endure was to some extent within their control. They could remain pregnant (risking the consequences they perceive to be associated with unwed motherhood, such as potential stigmatization or raising a child alone), or terminate their pregnancy, thus "making the problem go away" (and risking the consequences they perceive to be associated with having an abortion). This choice set, and the ability to reverse the situation, is a characteristic not afforded to people in other crises, such as the infertile couple, widowed husband, cancer patient, or hurricane survivor. A grieving patient, for example, does not get to choose whether or not he has cancer; a cheating wife cannot take back her affair; a hurricane survivor cannot not inexperience a natural disaster. The unmarried mother, however, is afforded the option of whether or not to continue with her unwed pregnancy. Her choice set becomes significant when taking into consideration that her decision determines whether or not she is forced to reveal her pregnancy. Because the adult unwed mother's crisis is primarily identity related, terminating her pregnancy may relieve her of her obligation to reveal her news and avert the identity crisis of unwed childbearing all together.

Timing constraints. Another example of the uniqueness and complexity of unmarried pregnancy sense making pertains to timing constraints. Perhaps the most obvious is the one imposed by state law regarding how long a pregnant woman can wait and legally terminate her pregnancy. However, as highlighted in this chapter, timing decisions for unmarried mothers are

much more complex than this because a point is reached when concealing becomes difficult or impossible. Signs of pregnancy, such as weight gain, swelling, fatigue or nausea, and "the baby bump," may alert others to her pregnancy. The "outing" by physical signs may be similar to the experience of a diseased individual whose sores, unexplained weight or hair loss, unusual bleeding, skin changes, lumps, or coughing can alert others that she or he is sick. However, it is often the case that when signs of disease become detectable by others varies, depending on the type and stage of the disease. In contrast, there is a fairly short amount of time that the unwed mother can conceal her pregnancy; most pregnancies become clearly visible to others during the second trimester (Shaw, 2013). Because the pregnancy at this point is difficult to conceal, the unwed mother feels pressure to reveal her news before her appearance does.

Standardized timing constraints further confound the unwed mother's disclosure decisions: does she reveal early because people are going to find out anyway? Does she conceal her news until she is either no longer at risk for first trimester pregnancy loss? Does she wait until she has the baby and is no longer pregnant? In other words, if she is going to miscarry (a 20% likelihood; American Pregnancy Association, 2011) or go away for a while and put the baby up for adoption, there may be no need to reveal if the risk in revealing is too great. In such instances, the "problem" will "take care of itself." Therefore, timing constraints greatly impacts how (and if) they experience stigma due to not being married.

The potential transiency of the crisis brings to light social pressures that encourage realignment with traditional pathways to parenthood. Should the pregnant woman decide to remain pregnant, certain outcomes, such as adoption or marriage, involve changing her single parent status and limiting the duration she is stigmatized and perceived as "unwed." One parent participant, whose daughter ended up marrying her baby's father, explained, "I don't look at him

[the child] and go, 'You were born out of wed-lock.' I do not do that; I do not do that! I do not

look at my daughter and say, 'You had a child out of wedlock.' I don't go there anymore"

(Vicky, par. 31). Vicky's use of the word "anymore" suggests that due to her daughter's

realignment with family formation norms, her identity—which was initially under scrutiny—is

no longer threatened. Marriage, adoption, and miscarriage are interesting aspects of the

unmarried mother's narrative because they are perceived as ways to mitigate the stigmatizing

label of "unmarried pregnancy" and realign with what society deems as an appropriate path to

motherhood.

Unwed pregnancy is a moral issue. Because unwed pregnancy is viewed as a moral

issue, social disapproval complicates the unwed mother's crisis and grieving process.

Researchers such as Klein and Fletcher (1986), argue that stigmatized populations not only have

to deal with the effects of the crisis, but confronting social disapproval requires specialized

support for effective intervention. Although their findings are based on a comparison of gay

versus non-gay men grieving the loss of a relational partner, the additional risk involved of

disclosing socially stigmatized information is similar to the experience of an unmarried mother.

Much like Klein and Fletcher's description of the gay grieving man, the unmarried mother is not,

at least initially, what they refer to as a "traditional" (or non stigmatized) survivor, who has

family members and friends to support her during the crisis period. Not only must the unwed

mother deal with her own feelings of becoming unintentionally pregnant alone (the crisis itself),

but she must confront a disapproving public, who largely does not sanction out-of-wedlock

pregnancy, mourn the loss of her societally acceptable sexual identity, and navigate unfamiliar

role obligations that are usually defined by the institution of marriage (e.g., involvement of

unwed father).

Although it was not their intention to become pregnant, the women in this study perceived their pregnancy as a result of their behavior, of their decision to have sex (since no pregnancies were a result of rape). Perhaps this is why the women reported self-directed blame, putting forth significant effort to initially conceal and later strategically manage their impression while disclosing. They felt personally responsible for "getting off track" and finding themselves in this situation, a sentiment that was also reinforced by many friends and family.

Power dynamics. Finally, revealing unwed pregnancy to parents brings to light status differences and how power dynamics can shape the sense-making process. For stigma to occur, power must be exercised because stigmatization is contingent on who has access to power (Link & Phelan, 2001). For example, because the pregnant woman is an adult and feels entitled to make her own decision about her pregnancy, she makes decisions and performs behaviors that establish her authority (e.g., deciding her pregnancy outcomes before revealing her decision to her parents). However, because she is unmarried, feels vulnerable, and perceives status inequity when considering her disclosure to her parents (i.e., parents hold more power), she also fears telling them and performs behaviors that reflect her fear and subordinate status (e.g., concealing the news or apologizing for a mistake). The power struggle she finds herself in—a need for both autonomy and connection—is highlighted in this situation and discussed throughout this study.

In addition to the power differentials, perceptions of morality, timing constraints, and the transiency of the crisis—all of which impact the unwed mother's sense-making processes—this chapter provides one possible framework for understanding how and why unmarried mothers may negotiate face and a context for why certain disclosure decisions are preferred. The following chapter takes a closer look at the disclosure of unmarried pregnancy to parents, and discusses how family member expectancies shape the negotiation of difficult disclosures.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:
DISCLOSURE CHOICES AND CONSEQUENCES OF
REVEALING UNWED PREGNANCY TO PARENTS

In order to understand better the ways of breaking difficult news like unwed pregnancy, this investigation examined the stories of 32 unwed women and 20 of their parents. Using quotes from participant narratives, this chapter provides insight into the disclosure enactment choices of adult women when revealing unwed pregnancy to their parents, their explanations for why certain disclosure decisions were made, and how parents interpret the choices they make.

Research Question 2 inquired about the unmarried mother's selection of various enactment features, such as the mode, setting, timing, and content of her message. Explanations for why certain choices were made and preferred over others are discussed.

Unmarried Mother's Disclosure Enactment Features

Mode. Disclosure mode, or message channel, refers to the medium through which communicators transmit information. Message channels can be face to face, direct but not face to face (e.g., phone, e-mail, or instant message), or third-party (Greene et al., 2006). Channel selection has important implications because the way a message is sent can affect the way a receiver responds to the message (O'Sullivan, 2000; Wright & Webb, 2011). In preplanned disclosure scenarios, like revealing unwed pregnancy, channel selection provides relational partners with a means of strategically regulating what is known and unknown about themselves (Brown & Rogers, 1991). The narratives in this study suggest a variety of modes that unwed mothers may utilize to deliver their news of unwed pregnancy to their parents, including

in-person, telephone, letter, text, email, and third-party. They are discussed in the order in which they were most utilized by participants.

In-Person. Although the advent of the digital age has led to multiple sources of electronic communication, very few of the women chose to stray from conventional in-person conversation. Most commonly—in 20 out of 32 cases—the disclosure of unmarried pregnancy took place face to face. The women who chose to disclose this way expressed that the seriousness of their situation warranted a face-to-face conversation with their parents, and according to 21-year-old Dana, "no other way seemed appropriate" (par. 116). They indicated that meeting and talking with their parents in person was "more personable" (Kasey, par.47) and "the mature, or adult, way to go about it" (Rita, par. 125). Not disclosing in this manner would have "been disrespectful" (Hilary, par. 147) and likely to "upset [my] parents" (Kasey, par. 47).

Research of the 1970s and 1980s would have found the high number of in-person pregnancy disclosures predictable because early perceptions of mediated channels were pessimistic and technologies thought to be ill suited for the types of complex, emotional interactions important to relationships (O'Sullivan, 2000; Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). More recent studies, however, might question why more unmarried women did not reveal their news via a mediated channel because leaner channels tend to have a greater appeal for delivering negative or embarrassing messages, and can result in reports of higher levels of satisfaction and comfort than bad news disclosures occurring face to face or over the telephone (e.g., Feaster, 2010; O'Sullivan, 2000; Sussman & Sproull, 1999). On the surface, it may appear as if the unmarried mother is putting the needs of her parents before her own by electing to forgo the benefits of disclosing via a mediated channel (e.g., *synchronicity* or *invisibility*) that may make the conversation easier for her (Suler, 2004). However, further analysis reveals that disclosing in

person was not a choice made for purposes of only appeasing one's parents. Face-to-face disclosures were perceived as being advantageous for helping the unmarried mother cope with her situation and effectively manage her identity.

The women felt that an in-person disclosure was the only way to communicate open and honest feelings about their pregnancy. For example, Lola wanted her parents to see that she was "not taking this lightly" and "knew the weight of [her] choices" (par. 27). Feeling remorseful, she wanted her parents to witness her tears and see the distressed look on her face; this was the only way to let her parents know just how sorry she was. Conversely, Evelyn wanted to share her excitement with her parents. Telling them in person was the only way to communicate her happiness about being pregnant: "I wanted to project as much optimism—'this is great, this is wonderful, we get to have a new baby in the family'—and I didn't want there to be any negativity around it" (par. 58). She worried that her parents would not be happy for her, so she utilized the face-to-face setting as a way to curtail negative parental reactions. She hoped that if her parents saw how happy she was, they too might share in her excitement.

Delivering the news in person also allowed the women to project the impression that everything was going to be okay and they were capable of handling the situation. Kathleen explained, "I just wanted to make them think I was gonna be okay. I didn't want to get dressed or anything, but I still remember exactly what I wore to tell them because I wanted to look put together and like I was doing okay" (par. 59). Lana said that by telling her parents face to face she was able to convey to them that she was taking care of herself, which created the impression that she was also "capable of taking care of this new life" (par. 96).

Made clear by the unmarried mothers who disclosed in person is the perceived benefit that face-to-face communication is a "channel-rich context" (Floyd, 2009, p. 16), affording an

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abundance of information to be conveyed. But who in this encounter is the beneficiary? Face-to-face communication is typically considered advantageous for the person who is listening or observing because physical presence provides the listener with nonverbal cues that add clarity to a speaker's message, offer insight into the meanings of his/her words, and increase understanding (Surinder & Cooper, 2003). However, this is only a limited view of who can benefit when taking into consideration the uniqueness of a planned disclosure.

Less emphasized by researchers—but highlighted by the quotes above—is how the person disclosing (the unmarried mother) can deliberately select a face-to-face disclosure setting and perform preplanned nonverbal behaviors to control the situation in her favor. Analysis of the narratives suggests that unmarried mothers may deliberately choose an in-person setting to reveal their pregnancy to their parents because they believe that their nonverbal behaviors will give them more control over the outcome of the conversation. Research examining the role that nonverbal communication plays in identity management suggests that the women may be right because nonverbal communication can be more important than verbal messages in creating desired impressions (DePaulo, 1992). Studies have shown that positive impressions and enhanced speaker credibility are associated with consistency between one's verbal and nonverbal behaviors (Weisbuch, Ambady, Clarke, Achor, & Weele, 2010). This suggests that as long as the unmarried mothers' nonverbal and verbal behaviors complemented—rather than contradicted—one another, they were more likely to be successful in creating their desired impression. Conversely, those who sent contradictory verbal and nonverbal messages, the in-person setting may have worked against them, giving them less control of the situation. For example, it is much harder for a woman to convince her parents that she is confident and capable of managing her

unwed pregnancy when she is "crying hysterically" (Julie, par. 17) or falling on the ground in despair (Sherrie, par. 4).

The in-person setting may have been particularly advantageous for women who were not being completely truthful in their disclosure with parents and wanted to convey an impression that was different from what they actually felt (e.g., appearing capable while feeling helpless). Although conventional wisdom leads one to believe that nonverbal gestures such as averted gaze or fidgeting can easily give away a deceiver, empirical evidence suggests otherwise. In fact, deceivers tend to sustain more eye contact and fidget less than nondeceivers because they know that not doing so would look deceitful (Guerrero & Floyd, 2006). In such cases, the in-person setting can be perceived as affording more control over a situation because nonverbal cues can enhance the success of a deceptive act (Burgoon, Buller, & Guerrero, 1995). By manipulating various nonverbal cues like posture, eye contact, facial expressions, tears, hair and clothing, and muscle tension and making sure they in accordance with their verbal messages, the unmarried mothers did their best to prepare for, monitor, and adjust which messages they were giving off and which ones were (de)emphasized.

Telephone. The second most utilized mode of revealing unwed pregnancy to one's parents—chosen by 8 of 32 unwed mothers—was the telephone. One reason for choosing to reveal over the telephone was simply because of logistical reasons beyond their control: "living too far away" (Sheena, par. 67), being "away at school" (Hope, par. 84), or work scheduling conflicts (Helen, par. 103; Shelby, par. 42) were all reasons cited for why a face-to-face meeting was not possible. The telephone was perceived as the next best option because it allowed the women to reveal the news in a way that seemed more personal than other modes of disclosing. The perception that the telephone was an appropriate way of revealing pregnancy can be

attributed to the uniqueness of the medium: it bridges the gap between human and mediated communication, and it supports interpersonal communication while not requiring a face-to-face setting (Barnes, 2003).

Another reason for disclosing over the telephone can be explained by the unmarried mother's urgency to tell her parents in a timely manner, before they found out about the pregnancy from other sources; the telephone was chosen because of its ability to transcend time and space (Barnes, 2003). It was perceived as the quickest way to deliver the news. Kellen explained, "I was so worried that by the end of the day, if I waited to tell him [her father] in person, he would have heard it from somebody else. That's what my biggest fear was—I wanted him to hear it from me" (par. 137). Twenty-seven-year-old Shelby expressed similar concerns. Her partner's family was told first, so she feared someone might post a congratulatory message on her Facebook page that could inform her parents before she had the opportunity to do so: "All these social networks and media can actually spill the beans on you!" (Shelby, par. 34). Telling her parents over the phone was one way to prevent this from occurring.

In addition to meeting the unmarried mother's practical and logistical concerns, the telephone was beneficial for handling anticipated negative reactions from her parents. The women explained that their biggest fear was their parents' negative reactions upon learning of their pregnancy. Sheena explained, "When it comes to situations like this, especially when she might freak out, it sounds bad but the benefit of the phone is that if it gets too out of hand, all I have to do is hang up" (par. 59). Agreeing, Kat stated, "Well, if I could have gotten away with a text message I probably would've done that. I really didn't want to do it in person because I guess I didn't want to face it. I didn't think that I could handle my mom being so negative the way I knew she was going to be" (par. 24). The telephone provided the women with a sense of security

should the conversation become too intense and upsetting to handle. Not only did it prevent them from having to face their parents' disappointment, if the conversation became too argumentative they could end it instantly by hanging up.

Finally, the telephone was beneficial for helping the unmarried mother mask honest feelings. Unlike the group of women who chose to tell their parents in person because they could benefit from controlled and strategic nonverbal behaviors, this group of women was less trusting of the cues they would give off in front of their parents. By limiting the number of nonverbal cues to paralanguage, they felt better able to manage their desired identities because leaner channels can be "used to ambiguate, or obscure completely, unattractive or embarrassing aspects" (O'Sullivan, 2000, p. 408). Disclosing over the telephone enabled them to mask feelings of vulnerability and inadequacy so that they would appear stronger and more in control than they actually felt. This way, the unmarried mother only had to worry about sounding adequate and capable, not appearing that way, too.

Other modes. Of the remaining four cases, one participant chose to write her parents a letter, one woman disclosed via text message, and two women were exposed by a third-party source (e.g., a 5-year old nephew). Although letter writing and text message vary greatly with respect to characteristics such as synchronicity, message leanness, and perceptions of interpersonal quality (Barnes, 2003), the two women who chose these media primarily did so for similar reasons. What they feared most were their parents' initial reactions to finding out, so breaking the news in writing before meeting in person seemed to be ideal. The women also felt that choosing a mediated channel to reveal their news would nonverbally communicate to their parents that they were too scared to approach them in person; they hoped their parents would feel sorry for them and not be as angry when they discussed the news face to face.

***Summary*.** The fact that a majority of the women actively chose to reveal their news in person or over the telephone suggests that even though there are a wide variety of media options available, *distance* (i.e., local versus long distance relationship) and *intimacy* (i.e., closeness of relationship) may indeed be the keys to understanding the unmarried mother's media selection, as Baym, Bing, and Lin (2004) suggest. Their study of social interactions across media argues that people are more likely to communicate in person and via the telephone in more intimate relationships. Although other mediated channels like text messaging and letter writing fulfill particular social needs (e.g., choosing when to deal with negative feedback), when revealing difficult news to parents, richer measures of interaction may be preferred.

What is interesting about the disclosure of unmarried pregnancy is that in almost all of the narratives not involving an in-person disclosure, a face-to-face encounter to discuss the situation further occurred shortly thereafter. Although the quality of face-to-face communication is typically not rated any higher than telephone conversations and can be just as intimate and in depth (Baym et al., 2004; Bird, 1995; Sunderland, 1999), there is clearly something distinct about the physicality of the face-to-face scenario that seems to be important in this instance. One explanation offered by the literature on parent-child interaction can be attributed to touch behaviors, and touch being instrumental in coping with trauma process. Studies in the 1950s by psychologist Harry Harlow (see Ottaviani & Meconis, 2007 for a review) provide insight into the unmarried mother's channel selection and argue that when children are scared, affectionate touch from their mother is nearly as important as food or shelter. Trees (2000), in her study of parent-young adult relationships, reports similar findings. She claims that when discussing a relational problem with parents, young adults feel more supported when their mother displays vocal warmth, proxemic attentiveness, and more movement synchrony with them. Therefore, in

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addition to the daughter choosing a face-to-face disclosure for purposes of conveying respect for her parents (e.g., "I am coming to you in person because this is important"), it may also be the case that the unmarried mothers chose a face-to-face disclosure because it is the only medium that would afford them access to affectionate or caregiving touch from their parents.

Context. The category of context refers to the time and place of the disclosure, or the point at which parents are made aware of their daughter's pregnancy and the physical and social environment where the disclosure occurs: timing, absence-presence of relational members, and location of disclosure.

Timing. The timing of a disclosure is typically conceptualized as the optimal and appropriate time to reveal information (Greene et al., 2003). Information that is revealed too soon or too late, especially when the news is negative, can result in significant relational consequences because disclosure timing can impact how the receiver responds to the message (Petronio, 2002). Disclosing unmarried pregnancy to parents for most of the unmarried mothers in this study—19 out of 32—occurred within the first week of finding out about their pregnancy themselves. Of this group, 3 revealed on the same day they found out; 10 women waited 1 to 3 days; and 6 waited one week to tell their parents. Disclosure timing for the remaining women ranged from waiting a few weeks after she found out herself to a few days after the baby was born and put up for adoption.

It is not enough to consider only the self when revealing or concealing (Petronio, 2002), so determining when to reveal unmarried pregnancy to parents involved negotiating what was considered "ideal" and "appropriate" for both the unmarried mother and her parents. In other words, telling information to another before the discloser is ready to reveal it can result in just as many negative consequences as telling difficult information to a recipient before that person is

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ready to hear it (Petronio, 2002). At the forefront of the unmarried mother's mind was how to time her disclosure in such a way that she could benefit from concealing her pregnancy, but not let so much time go by that it made matters with her parents worse.

Ideal timing for the unmarried mother. One of the most common reasons for waiting any period of time was to process the information before revealing it to others. Pregnancies were unplanned and unexpected, so the women were shocked and overwhelmed to discover they were pregnant—especially the one woman who did not know she was pregnant until she went into labor. Taking some time to figure out their own feelings about being pregnant allowed the women to "gain composure" (Lola, par. 23) "accept it," and "personally be okay" (Rita, par. 37). Charlotte said, "I needed to not be in shock and wrap my own head around it before I told them" (par. 16).

The women also wanted to be certain that they were pregnant before going to their parents. For some, this meant not revealing their pregnancy until they were no longer at risk for first trimester pregnancy loss; as a result, four women did not reveal their pregnancy to their parents until they were in their third to fifth month. For most women, however, this meant going to the doctor and obtaining confirmation of their pregnancy before revealing it. For 17 of the 32 women, the wait duration to tell their parents was a reflection of how long it took to schedule an appointment and be examined by a physician.

Finally, the women wanted to take enough time to consider their options and devise a plan for moving forward prior to approaching their parents. In fact, all but 3 of the 32 had already decided upon a pregnancy outcome—having an abortion, keeping the child, or putting the child up for adoption—before coming to their parents, suggesting that the conversation functioned more on informing their parents about what is going to happen rather than seeking

advice on what to do. The women explained that having a plan in place, even if it was tentative, would demonstrate to their parents that they had thought about the situation and were capable of handling it.

Important to note, however, is that not all of the women waited a day or more to plan, process, or confirm their pregnancy with a doctor. Three of the women told their parents immediately, on the same day that that they found out about their pregnancy themselves. For example, Hattie took a home pregnancy test in the bathroom at work. As soon as she obtained the result that she was pregnant, she called her mom and told her to meet her in the parking lot so they could talk. Within the hour, her mother knew about her pregnancy. Explanations for why women revealed on the same day centered on needing immediate parental assistance. For example, Hattie and Amelia both wanted abortions and needed financial support from their parents to pay for the procedure.

Once the unmarried mother was ready to reveal her news, another theme regarding disclosure timing emerged—which parent she would reveal to first. If parents were not told at the same time, it was usually the mother who learned about the pregnancy first, which is often the case regarding disclosures to parents (e.g., Petronio, 2002; Savin-Williams, 2001; Segrin & Flora, 2011). Of the 20 cases where parents were disclosed to individually, only 1 case involved disclosing to her father first. There are a number of reasons cited in the literature for why mothers would be told the news of their daughter's pregnancy before fathers: daughters report being closer to their mothers and sharing more open feelings with them (Noller & Callan, 1991; Segrin & Flora, 2011); disclosure is highest in mother-daughter relationships and mothers tend to be the preferred target of disclosure over fathers when the information is sensitive or embarrassing (Denholm-Carey & Chabassol, 1987; Finkenauer et al., 2004; Furman &

Buhrmester, 1992; Hartup, 1989; Morgan, 1976; Smetana et al., 2006; Wilson & Koo, 2010). For 10 of the women in this study, however, revealing to their mother first was strategic because it aided the women in their disclosure of pregnancy to their father.

Whether her mother's involvement consisted of her disclosing the news for her or simply agreeing to participate in the conversation with her father, it was perceived by the pregnant woman that as long as her mother was present when her father found out about the news, the situation could be kept under control. Perhaps this is because the mother's role in the family is often associated with the *peacemaker* and *conciliator* (Laursen & Collins, 2004), who has the ability to help buffer the negative consequences of an authoritarian father (McKinney & Renk, 2008). This was highlighted in Dena's situation. Her mother's intervention made the difference between Dena having a place to live when she came home from school for the summer and not having a place to live. Her mother was able to calm her angry father down and prevent him from following through with his threat to kick Dena out of the house if she ever became pregnant.

Ideal timing for the parents (as perceived by unwed mothers). Although the women agreed that waiting to tell their parents about their pregnancy certainly had its benefits (e.g., ability to obtain official pregnancy confirmation, develop a plan for the future, and personally process the information), a secondary concern centered on the implications of concealing the information from their parents. They feared that the longer they waited, the more hurt their parents would be once they did find out. If given the opportunity to go back and experience their pregnancies over again, most of the women said they would have told their parents sooner. Josie explained that it was not just the fact that she was unmarried and pregnant that caused tension between her and her parents; it was because she waited until she was five months pregnant to tell

them. She shared, "I think what hurt them more is that I waited so long. It makes it worse the longer you wait" (par. 26).

Summary. The pregnant women's use of time—the fact that they felt constrained by it and expressed a need to reveal their news soon after finding out themselves—suggests something important about closeness and power in the parent-child relationship. It sheds light on who in the family is perceived as having the "right" to know one's pregnancy information. As explained in the previous chapter, very few people know about the woman's pregnancy prior to her parents. When it comes to unmarried pregnancy, there exists a perceived obligation (held by both unmarried mothers and their parents) to tell parents the news before many others know out of respect for their role in the family. However, because the parent-child relationship is not a symmetrical relationship and (typically) it involves revealing to a person of higher status, the disclosure is considered more risky (Jourard, 1964; Morgan, 1976). Although the mother may want to reveal to her parents early, the risk involved may result in her taking additional time to prepare for the conversation.

Conflict researchers would argue that in order to manage this situation in a competent manner, it is important for the unmarried mother to take time to (a) consider various aspects of her context and (b) include a wide range of ideas and information in her disclosure to parents; such strategies tend to result in mindful responses during conflict and controlled impulsive remarks that can damage a relationship (Canary & Lakey, 2006). However, competent management of revealing unwed pregnancy also requires consideration of the health implications associated with concealing the news. Waiting too long, even if it is with good intentions (e.g., to gather more information), can result in serious negative health consequences.

Presence-absence of relational members at the disclosure. Inclusion criteria for this study required that the news of pregnancy be disclosed to a parent. However, it did not require that *both* parents be told nor did it place any restrictions on who had to be present during the conversation.

Parental presence at the disclosure. As explained in the previous section, mothers are typically revealed to earlier than fathers. Also consistent across disclosure studies is that if only one parent knows, it is usually the mother (Petronio, 2002; Savin-Williams, 2001; Segrin & Flora, 2011). The narratives reflect this finding. For 4 of the 32 unmarried pregnant women in this study, awareness of a parent's negative opinions surrounding unwed pregnancy resulted in her not disclosing the news to that parent (i.e., the father) at all. In two instances, the unmarried mother's father has never been told about his daughter's pregnancy and abortion; in two other cases, the father was made aware by his wife of his daughter's unwed pregnancy and adoption, but no communication between father and daughter ever took place.

Why is it that an unmarried mother may fear negative reactions from her father most and decide not to discuss her pregnancy with him? Chodorow (1989) argues that the identification processes that occur at an early age are the key to understanding family psychodynamics and that there is a fundamental likeness between a mother and daughter that encourages close identification. It may be due to this connection that the unmarried mother believes her father to be unable to identify with her situation and should not be involved in the revelation of her news—after all, her mother is the one parent who can relate to being a pregnant woman on a biological and psychological level. Sheena explained, "My dad is great for political debates and I love intellectually battling it out with him, but when it comes to emotional stuff like

pregnancy…I guess I just feel uncomfortable with him because he can't really understand" (par. 18).

Another reason why unmarried mothers may choose not to tell their fathers (or tell him after telling the mother) may be explained by family communication patterns surrounding topics like sex and pregnancy. In general, it is typically the mother who initiates conversations about sex with their daughters, while fathers tend to avoid conversations about sex and intimacy with both daughters and sons (Raffaelli & Green, 2003; Rosenthal & Feldman, 1999). When fathers are involved in discussions about sex, it is usually with their son—not their daughter—and the topic remains general and avoids details (Rosenthal, Senserrick & Feldman, 2001). Research on sex-differences in parent-child dialogue provides a context for why Kat said, "There is just something about having your dad know that you got knocked up" (par. 40).

A final explanation for why unmarried mothers may not have disclosed to their fathers may be explained by perceptions of fatherhood and the power dynamics associated with those perceptions. Although more men today find themselves in the role of the stay-at-home-dad than ever before, in many families the father's primary family commitment is still to provide for the needs of his family (Hatten, Vinter, & Williams, 2002). According to one study, there is a link between fathers' beliefs about the role of fatherhood and their practice (Hatten et al., 2002); for example, fathers who believe their role is to provide, also tend to be responsible for role modeling and disciplining their children. It is no wonder, then, why many of the unmarried mothers—who were still receiving financial help from their parents—viewed their fathers as holding financial power over them.

Many of the women explained that they were still receiving help from their fathers in some way—he often gave them money, helped out with bills, paid for school, took care of home

and car repairs, etc. According to a recent study, the amount of financial support they were most likely receiving from their parents was substantial: on average, and regardless of a family's income level, 10% of a family's annual household income is given to young adult children (Wightman, Schoeni, & Robinson, 2010). Even though the women in this study were adults and wanted to present themselves as such, they had difficulty balancing this need with the fear that their pregnancy news would result in their father's termination of financial aid. The women believed that in order to continue receiving financial support from their fathers, they had to obey their father's rules and succumb to his wishes. In situations where a woman's pregnancy decision was perceived to be in conflict with what her father would want, the woman opted to resolve the dissonance by simply choosing not to share the news with her father at all. Concealment ensured that she, and her baby, would not be put in financial jeopardy.

Unmarried father presence at the disclosure. In a majority of cases—21 of 32—the revelation of pregnancy to the woman's parents took place in the absence of the baby's father. Although not being married does not translate into an unwed father's uninvolvement (Danziger & Radin, 1990), it did seem to be the case that if he did not want to be a parent, he did not participate in the disclosure to the pregnant woman's parents. In 13 of the 21 absent-father disclosures, his absence was due to his wanting little or nothing to do with the raising of the child. The unwed mothers explained that when they told the baby's father about the pregnancy, he "lashed out" (Helen, par.10), "panicked" (Dana, par. 5), "wanted to get rid of the baby" (Josie, par. 11), "was in shock" (Tabitha, par. 45), or "told me to get lost" (Sherrie, par. 18). Such negative reactions were almost always followed by a disclosure to parents without the baby's father.

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However, not all absent-father disclosure scenarios were a result of his choice; in eight cases, absenting the father was a strategic move on behalf of the unwed mother. If the woman wanted to provide anonymity to the baby's father (e.g., she was embarrassed by him or she did not want her parents to think ill of a current partner), or if she thought his presence would irritate the situation (e.g., the baby's father already had a poor relationship with her parents), she may decide not to involve him in the conversation. Although we know that the relationship between the unwed father and mother is a critical factor in predicting paternal involvement (see Johnson, 2001 for a review of literature), it may also be the case that his relationship status with the unwed mother's parents is predictive of his presence at the disclosure.

As a contrast to the absent-father disclosure scenarios are the cases in which the pregnant couple revealed the news together. Eleven of the 32 women disclosed to their parents with their partner present. What is unique about this group of women is their relationship status with the partner. Several were in long-term relationships and had either discussed marriage with their partners previously or were already engaged. As Evelyn explained, because they were planning to marry anyway, all the pregnancy did was "move up our time table a little bit" (par. 17). This could help explain why all 11 women mentioned the importance of presenting a "unified front," or what is referred to in the literature as an effective coparenting relationship.

According to Feinberg (2003), coparenting is the extent to which a couple supports each other's parenting or fails to do so; an effective coparenting relationship, therefore, is one consisting of support, agreement, division of labor, and joint control. Disclosing together, from the perspective of the unwed couple was perceived as critical if they were going to convince their parents that they were indeed in this together, could handle raising a child, and were capable of making their own pregnancy decisions. What is intriguing, however, is the unwed couple's

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description of their coparenting relationship and their use of the war metaphor "united front." Highlighting issues of power, equality, and status, this metaphor implies that some unwed couples may approach this conversation with their parents as if they are preparing for battle. They perceive status inequality (i.e., their parents hold more power), anticipate the need to defend their position against their parents' critiques, and feel stronger together. The question arises then if the unwed father's presence does in fact equalize power relations and discourage early parent-child interactions like a parent's reprimand of their child's misbehavior. From the perspective of the unwed couple, it may.

Sibling presence at the disclosure. The unwed father was not the only relational member asked to participate in the pregnancy disclosures. In five narratives, siblings played an important role during the conversation with parents. Research prior to the 1970s, which characterized sibling relationships in terms of rivalry and competition (Teti, 2002), most likely would have advised against involving a sibling in the conversation with parents. However, the narratives in this study help support more recent claims that siblings tend to provide one another with more prosocial behaviors, like support, than antisocial behaviors, like competition and conflict (see Segrin & Flora, 2011 for a review).

For five women, the thought of telling their parents alone was so anxiety provoking that they turned to their sister for help. The fact that no brothers were involved in the conversation with parents is predictable because among sibling pairs, sisters report greater closeness, exchange more advice, and have more intimate disclosures (Rocca, Martin, & Dunleavy, 2010; Spitze & Trent, 2006; Tucker, Barber, & Eccles, 1997). According to the unmarried mothers, having a sister present at the disclosure gave them the courage they needed to reveal the news; the fact that they had someone there who already knew the information, was supportive, and on

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their side provided them with psychological and emotional support. Sisters provided their pregnant sibling with a sense of security for "when everything gets bad" (Kathleen, par. 22).

A sister's willingness to aid in the disclosure and participate in the conversation with parents speaks to the uniqueness of the family context and sibling dynamics. One study found that "shared task" (i.e., helping each other) is the most frequently reported maintenance behavior mentioned by young adult siblings (Myers & Members of COM 200, 2001). Myers et al. noted that even when a task was perceived as "not fun"—like helping a sister reveal her unmarried pregnancy to parents—there is an attitude of sacrifice and shared burden that is fundamental to the sibling relationship. It is this attitude that explains why every sister who was asked to participate in the conversation with parents agreed to do so.

Whether the pregnant women realized it at the time, siblings did more than just provide emotional support (i.e., behaviors that communicate that the individual is cared for) at the disclosure; they also offered practical support, or performed behaviors that provided assistance (Pierce, Sarason, Sarason, Joseph, & Henderson, 1996). It is somewhat surprising that the pregnant women did not pay tribute to the practical support offered by their siblings because, in general, siblings tend to offer more practical support than emotional support (Voorpostel &Van Der Lippe, 2007). Nevertheless, siblings played an important role in initiating and facilitating the conversation with their parents. In two instances, siblings deliberately put their pregnant sister in situations that incited revelation of her news. For example, once Jamie's two sisters learned about her pregnancy, they immediately drove over to her apartment, picked her up, and all three of them went over to their parents' house to reveal the news. When Kellen was about to change her mind about telling her parents one evening, her younger sister, who was sitting on the couch next to her, grabbed her hand and said, "No, just tell them" (par. 16). Their sisters set the stage

for the disclosure to take place—the unmarried mother was either going to reveal her news to her parents in that moment, or it would be revealed for her.

Sisters were also helpful in terms of keeping the dialogue flowing between their parents and their pregnant sister. For example, Kathleen explained that when she told her parents she was pregnant they just sat there stunned not saying a word. Breaking the silence, her sister, Sarah, said, "Ummm, okay, well are we gonna sit here or are ya'll going to talk about it?" Kathleen was grateful for her sister's intervention and "knew she was there for a reason!" (par. 31).

Summary. The presence of only immediate family members (and the unwed father in only a minority of cases) reflects the common perception among participants that revealing unwed pregnancy is a "private family matter" (Lola, par. 5). This is significant and speaks to the complex nature of family disclosure boundaries that regulate how private information is shared with family and nonfamily members. More specifically, interior disclosure boundaries regulate information flow to other family members and exterior boundaries regulate the flow of information to nonfamily members (Petronio, 2002). Scholars characterize the family as a protective environment because external boundaries afford members a buffer for testing out their ideas, attitudes, beliefs, and positions (Berardo, 1974; Burgoon, 1982). By choosing who is present at the disclosure and limiting the audience to immediate family members, the unmarried mothers attempted to control the level of risk involved in their revelation. The fewer people present, the more security she had while testing out her news. Likewise, a limited audience increased her ability to direct the conversation, or steer it in ways that she desired (Petronio, Reeder, Hecht, & Mon't Ros-Mendoza, 1996).

Location. A second category regarding the conversational environment was the location in which the disclosure took place. Of the 20 disclosures that occurred in person, 16 took place in the parents' home. None were still living at home, so they had to schedule a time with their parents to tell them about the pregnancy, which required them to also come up with an excuse for why they needed to meet with parents because having their parents' undivided attention was important. In order to temporarily disguise the true reason for the encounter and not arouse parent suspicion, the disclosure was often couched in a meal.

Although the remaining four face-to-face disclosures did not take place in the parent's home, three still occurred in a private and intimate setting: one woman revealed in her own home, one in her parent's car, and another in a private dressing room at a maternity store. Only one disclosure scenario occurred in public for fear of how the parent would react. With her mother and the rest of the restaurant customers present, she believed that her father's violent temper and tendency to "punch things" (Simone, par. 15) would (hopefully) be restrained.

Summary. The locations of the disclosures offer an interesting look at exterior family disclosure boundaries by demonstrating how the physical environment in which the disclosure occurs plays a role in controlling access to information and encourages revelation. A parent's home, their car, and even the confines of a private dressing room were strategically chosen so that family members could talk in a "backstage area" (Goffman, 1959) that offered the family a degree of latitude for adhering to societal norms and protected them from the outside world (Berardo, 1974). However, it was also important that the unmarried mother felt comfortable during her disclosure. Most face-to-face disclosures took place in a parent's home, so it is clear that this disclosure setting was meaningful to the women and points to a relationship between setting familiarity, an unmarried mother's anxiety, and her willingness to disclose. Stiles,

Shuster, and Harrigan (1992) argue that the more familiar a setting is, the less anxiety a person may feel. In other words, the pregnant women may have chosen to reveal in their parent's home because of its familiarity and the comfort it provided, making the disclosure of their news easier for them. Other studies provide support for this claim arguing that a sense of normalcy is often necessary when disclosing something extraordinary in one's life. In a study that examined revelation of child abuse, children often waited until they were participating in everyday activities (e.g., watching TV, doing the dishes, cleaning) to talk about abuse (Petronio et al., 1996). Perhaps this explains why some women chose to reveal their news during a family meal.

 Content. A final dimension of disclosure enactment is what Greene et al. (2006) refer to as one's verbal style. Content message features include both the verbal and nonverbal aspects of the message conveyed. These include: breadth and depth of information, directness (explicit versus indirect information), and conversational approach (how the news is presented).

 Breadth and depth of information. One way in which to understand how self-disclosure operates in family relationships is to examine the breadth (i.e., the range of subjects discussed) and depth (i.e., the quality, or personal nature, of the information) of what is shared between members (Taylor & Altman, 1987). The disclosure of unwed pregnancy to parents tended to "be on the lighter side" (Evelyn, par. 23). In other words, for all but 4 of the 32 women, the initial disclosure to a parent can be characterized as a short and fairly impersonal conversation. Parents were often so "taken back" and "caught off guard" (Janelle, par. 39) by the news that they did not know what to say or ask during this first conversation, and the unmarried mothers were so nervous and uncomfortable that they did not encourage the conversation with their parents to continue. As a result, the conversation centered primarily on general or logistical concerns like what the unmarried mother planned to do about her pregnancy or if her insurance would cover

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her, rather than personal subjects, or what Dana referred to as "the wrong type of question" like "when and where this happened" (par. 18).

The succinctness and surface-level content of the conversation is somewhat alarming given that distress disclosure models (e.g., Siles' 1987 "fever model" of disclosure) posit that people in psychological distress tend to disclose more than when they are not in distress and disclosure is often a helpful remedy for distress. If Stiles (1987) is correct and catharsis and self-understanding are predominant goals for the distressed unmarried mother, this begs the question why only four of the women had lengthy, in-depth disclosures with their parents. The number of confidants in the unmarried mother's supportive network at this point is low, so the question is raised: Is the unmarried mother leaving the conversation still in distress because her talk with her parents did not allow her to disclose to the extent that she needed?

We know from the previous chapter that it is unlikely that the unmarried mother is solely dependent on the conversation with her parents to provide her with catharsis. Although her social network is limited, she is probably receiving some type of support (most likely emotional) from the individual she confided in first (e.g., the unwed father, a sibling, or same-sex best friend). However, we also know that one confidant may not be enough to satisfy a distressed person's needs (Derlega et al., 1993), which brings us back to the conversation with parents.

It becomes clear that the disclosure of unwed pregnancy to parents cannot be examined as a single event. Instead, it is a conversation that unfolds over time as both parties begin to process the information, confront their emotions, sort out feelings about the situation, and essentially figure out what questions to ask and what topics to talk about. Although revealing pregnancy was most commonly a short conversation, it was not the only conversation the women had with their

parents about their pregnancy. In fact, the women explained that following their disclosure lengthier, more in-depth conversations with parents took place.

The unmarried mother's goal for the disclosure was simply to inform her parents of her pregnancy and what she planned to do about it. It was indeed a primarily cathartic event as Stiles (1987) suggests, because relieving the burden is all she may have desired most out of that moment. However, she did not want to go into detail about her situation during that conversation, nor did her parents encourage her to do so. Therefore, the lack of depth and breadth of the disclosure may speak to the unwed mother's ability to determine what is appropriate to reveal upfront, as well as her parent's acknowledgment of her adult status and right to regulate certain information (O'Connor, Allen, Bell, & Hauser, 1996).

Directness. In addition to being short, the disclosure was also abrupt and most often began with a nervous "blurting out" (Adrianne, par. 7) of "I'm pregnant!" (Kathleen, par. 22). The women explained that they "just came right out and said it—didn't wait around or foreshadow anything" (Kasey, par. 19). They may have even "sprung it on [parents] in an unfair manner" and "probably could have couched it better" (Evelyn, par. 81). Several women compared the delivery of news to "dropping a bomb" (e.g., Jamie, par. 182; Janelle, par. 80; Lana, par. 115) or "pulling the pin on a grenade and running" (Evelyn, par. 81). However, they felt justified in their delivery because they "couldn't wait anymore" (Josie, par. 107), "didn't know any other way to say it," and there was "no sense in beating around the bush at that point really" (Adrianne, par. 7).

The directness of the women's disclosure to their parents can be expected given that revealing bad news is a psychologically taxing event (Zheng, 2011). Stressful and mentally demanding disclosures can result in revealing the news in an abrupt, straightforward manner

(Zheng, 2011). In situations of psychological distress, purging pent-up information and emotion is most important because the revelation relieves the burden of concealment (Stiles, 1987). The abruptness, therefore, is often a byproduct of the discloser's own discomfort in releasing the news. However, just because this behavior is common and there exists a reason for why the behavior occurs, this does not mean it is a strategy void of implications. Although straightforward disclosures can be quite effective and functional in relationships (Canary & Lakey, 2006), some researchers refer to straightforward disclosures of bad news as a "common mistake" made by revealers and argues that abrupt deliveries do not help facilitate the recipients' acceptance of the information (Zheng, 2011, p. 104). Being confronted suddenly by unfavorable news (like unwed pregnancy) can be extremely challenging for the recipient, so they advise implementing a "warm up period," or a forewarning that bad news is coming to help reduce the element of shock (Ptacek & Eberhardt, 1996). It may be the case that strategies that conceal the fact that bed news is coming (e.g., disguising the disclosure in the context of a meal) may actually do more harm than good when it comes to parental acceptance of the information.

 Conversational approach. Once the news was disclosed, the conversation alternated between the pregnant mother championing her plan for her future and her parents asking questions. What is most interesting about the content of the conversation is the approach taken by the pregnant women. Twenty-nine of the 32 women explained that their goal for this conversation was not to ask parental permission to enact whichever outcome they had planned or to solicit their financial help, but to inform their parents of what was going on and tell them what was to happen next. The women were not asking their parents to handle or "fix" their situation; they were asking them to go through the situation with them. According to Jamie, "I did want to prove to her that since I got myself into it, I was gonna work it out" (par. 43). Most women had

already decided on their pregnancy outcome before approaching their parents, so they felt

strongly about whether or not they were planning to keep the child. From the perspective of the

unmarried mother, a critical step to ensuring that her plan is carried out is to communicate to her

parents that she is an adult and that this is her decision, not theirs.

Although the women did not want to be told what to do by their parents, this is not to say

that the conversations were devoid of remorse or embarrassment or the women were dismissive

of their parent's advice. On the contrary, several women cried throughout the conversation,

apologized to their parents (even if the apology was for parents not agreeing with their decision),

and some even had difficulty saying the words, "I'm pregnant"—for these women, out-loud

verbalization to another seemed to make it a reality. None of the women were particularly proud

of the situation they were in; therefore, they found it important to balance feelings of remorse

with expressions of confidence and what they planned to do next.

The women were for the most part receptive of their parent's advice—after all, this was

their first pregnancy—and they appreciated their parents bringing up aspects relevant to their

situation that they had not yet considered. Leah explained that her parents' questions were very

helpful. She said, "They had practical questions for me. It wasn't a grand inquisition or anything

like that, but I guess they were just from my mom's personal experience" (par. 110). Questions

about insurance, day care, financial stability, medical bills, and maternity benefits helped Leah

and her boyfriend to think more about how to successfully manage their current circumstances

with child raising.

As explained previously, it was usually the case that after the disclosure, more detailed

conversations ensued between the mother and her unmarried daughter. For Ada, however, this

was not the case. She explained that her mother did little more than say, "I will support you with

whatever decision you make" (Ada, par. 23), and never shared her opinions on the situation or offered advice. During the disclosure of her news, Ada was glad that her mother did not interrogate her with questions or bombard her with advice. However, as her pregnancy progressed she became angry that her mom did not talk with her more, give her advice, and warn her about "how hard it would be" (Ada, 24). She said, "I really wanted her to say, 'Ada, here's your options. This is how this will play out; this is how that will play out.' Ya know, give me some scenarios. But she didn't" (par. 23).

Ada's experience is indicative of the implications of *parental hesitancy*—a term that refers to when parents fail to articulate their own values about crucial topics—a common problem in childrearing (Spock, 1997, p. 23). It is "the parents' job to teach their children what they themselves have learned" (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999, p. 271), so when parents fail to discuss their principles and personal values with their children, then children are forced to infer them from the way their parents live, which may not be in alignment with what the parent would necessarily teach (Spock, 1997). This suggests that if pregnancy conversations between the unmarried mother and her mother do not increase over time or penetrate to more intimate levels of disclosure (e.g., opinions and feelings; Taylor & Altman, 1987), this can result in the unmarried mother being unprepared for motherhood and feeling resentful of her mother who did not care enough to talk with her more about her future plans (Ada, par. 23).

Another aspect of message content that emerged in the data had to do with the role the baby's father played in the conversation. The unmarried mother was not the only one engaging in impression management. For those instances in which the unwed father was present at the disclosure, the unmarried mothers reported that he, too, worked hard to foster a good impression in front of her parents. In fact, three women said that it was her partner who started the

conversation, told her parents about the pregnancy, and took the lead in disseminating their

pregnancy plan. The women explained that in addition to just being there and nonverbally

communicating their support, the baby's father also wanted to verbally state his involvement.

Telling her parents that he is supportive, the couple is "in this together" (Lana, par. 28), and he

"wasn't going anywhere" (Lola, par. 13) were important. Dena, whose boyfriend was disliked by

her parents, explained that if the father wanted to change her parent's negative impression of

him, it was important for him to come to the disclosure, state that he was supportive of Dena

keeping the child and they planned to marry, and he would be contributing financially,

physically, and emotionally (par. 7).

Summary. The content of the disclosure, particularly the conversational approach taken

by the pregnant adult women, provides an interesting look at a young adult's negotiation of

autonomy and interconnectedness. Per the inclusion criteria, the pregnant women in this study

ranged in age from 19 to 35, which places them in the human development stage of "young

adulthood," a category that emphasizes separation between parents and their children (Erikson,

1968; Fulmer, 1999; Waterman & Archer, 1990). It is during this period in the life course that

one leaves home, establishes a career, identity, and a family of his/her own (Waterman &

Archer, 1990). It comes as no surprise then why conversational aspects such as being direct,

creating boundaries, establishing authority, and appearing capable and confident were evident in

the unmarried mother's disclosure to her parents. However, it is important not to overemphasize

autonomy and individualism, as the developmental literature has historically done (Fulmer,

1999). Young adulthood is not a developmental time where needs for connection and relatedness

are absent or any less important (Bowen, 1978; Fulmer, 1999; Gilligan, 1991; O'Connor, et al.,

1996), particularly during times of family distress.

Present in each narrative were feelings of anxiety and fears about how revealing their news would affect their relationship with their parents. Although the women felt strongly about their pregnancy decision and they wanted to verbalize that, they also wanted their parents' support; so, disclosing in-person, appearing remorseful, and responding respectfully were also important. They considered the relational implications of their choices and often made disclosure decisions with their parent's interests in mind. It is this compilation of aspects that provide insight into how stressful situations like disclosure of unwed pregnancy to parent can bring desires for connection to the forefront. Parenting requires the new mother (and in some cases her unwed partner) to gain credibility and assume power as the sole executor(s) of their new family system (Anderson, 1999), but this autonomy is particularly difficult for the unmarried mother who becomes unintentionally pregnant and must do so at a time of high stress and when she may feel less than prepared to do so. Her disclosure decisions, therefore, provide a glimpse into how distressed young adults may attempt to reconcile their needs for autonomy and connection with parents.

Parent Interpretations of Disclosure Enactment Features

Research Question 3 inquires how parents perceive certain disclosure enactment features by examining the consequences that result from the communication choices that are made. In order to accurately interpret the results presented in this section, it is important to consider the recruitment strategy for obtaining parent volunteers and that many of the parents of unmarried mothers were not interviewed. Parents were recruited via snowball sampling and asked to take part in the study by their daughters, so they compose a limited and biased sample. The results presented in this section may be different from the interpretations of the parents who refused to participate.

Mode. Of all of the disclosure choices enacted during the disclosure of unmarried pregnancy, parents expressed the strongest opinions about message channel. Out of 20 parents, 19 felt that an in-person, face-to-face conversation was the ideal way to reveal unwed pregnancy to parents. Other media were viewed by parents as "impersonal" (Claudia, par. 23), "cowardly" (Gerry, par. 168), and "disrespectful" (Sybil, par. 142; Penny, par. 39; Jane, par. 17; Megan, par. 43). Parents felt strongly about being told in person and indicated that this was because only a face-to-face encounter would allow them physical contact with their child. Without a face-to-face conversation, parents "couldn't respond the way [they] needed to" (Vicky, par. 61). When parents, particularly mothers, learned of their child's unwed pregnancy, they expressed a need to touch, hug, hold, see, or simply be with them. Penny stated, "I needed to physically touch her. I needed to see that she was alright. There was a need to be with my baby, so I could hug her" (par. 56).

Parents were particularly adamant about not disclosing pregnancy via computer-mediated media, such as text message and email. For example, Vicky exclaimed, "Text message? No, no, no, no, NO! I would have died! I would have died! I needed it in-person, looking me in the eye!" (par. 61). Claudia shared, "I definitely would have killed her if she had sent me a text or email" (par. 23). All but one parent felt that being told via text messaging would have been greatly offensive or deeply hurtful. The one parent who found texting appropriate explained that texting is the primary way that she communicates with her children and felt that this situation should not be handled differently. She attributed the mediated channel as the reason why her daughter felt comfortable revealing her previous abortion to her in the first place.

Providing conceptual bases for why parents strongly advocated for a disclosure that permitted physical contact (and was *not* computer mediated) are two large bodies of literature.

The first pertains to attachment theory and parental separation anxiety (Bowlby, 1969). Although more attention has been given to parents' separation from infants and young children, parents can also experience separation-related issues as adolescent and young adult children increase autonomy (Hock, Eberly, Bartle-Haring, Ellwanger, & Widaman, 2001). The disclosure of unwed pregnancy can be viewed as a *separation even*t (Bowlby, 1969), because parenthood is recognized as the final marker of separating from parents and becoming an adult (Carter, 1999; Settersten, 2011). When parents encounter a separation event—particularly one that is unexpected and they feel unprepared for—they experience feelings of separation anxiety that impel them to provide their child with protection and increase physical proximity to them (Bowlby, 1973). Although separation from parents is a normal part of the family life cycle (Carter, 1999), this separation event is unique in that it deviates from the traditional path to parenthood and contains a perceived threat to their child (e.g., my daughter is in trouble and needs me to help her). This unexpected threat often translates into the parent wanting to be there and a strong desire to be physically accessible to their child—characteristics that only an in-person setting can afford.

The strong negative feelings expressed by parents regarding revealing via computer-mediated media are also supported by recent statistics that describe electronic device user trends among different generations. For example, younger generations (i.e., 18-24 year olds) are the most active text messaging users and prefer texting to voice calls (Smith, 2011). Adults ages 50-64 send far fewer texts than young adults (roughly 1/8th of the number of texts sent by young adults on an average day) and prefer a voice call to texting (Smith, 2011). Based on these trends, one may be surprised that more unmarried mothers did not utilize text messaging to reveal their news, especially because this channel is advantageous for not having to directly confront

negative reactions expressed by another (Floyd, 2009). One may also question if future generations of parents will perceive text messaging to be an unacceptable means of communicating sensitive information like unwed pregnancy. The narratives of the parents as well as the unmarried mothers suggest that there may be some disclosure topics between parents and their children that will remain (at least for a while) reserved for an in-person setting.

Context. Parent narratives confirm that decisions regarding the point at which they are made aware of their daughter's pregnancy and the physical and social environment where the disclosure occurs impact their response to the news. Parent interpretations of their daughter's *disclosure timing*, the absence-presence of relational members, and the location of the disclosure are discussed.

Timing. During disclosures of threatening information, research suggests that in order to earn a favorable evaluation from a disclosure recipient, it is best to divulge early—especially when the discloser is personally responsible for the event (Derlega et al, 1993; Jones & Gordon, 1972). Reluctance to disclose negative information can give the appearance that the discloser is untrustworthy and avoiding responsibility (Jones & Gordon, 1972). Although parents found it difficult to identify a definitive time that an unmarried mother should reveal her pregnancy to her parents, they were mostly in agreement that telling sooner, rather than later, is best. They did not, however, interpret their daughter's concealment as her attempt to avoid responsibility.

On the contrary, delayed disclosures caused parents to blame themselves, rather than their daughters, for her concealment. They reflected back on their relationship with their child and questioned what they had done to make their child so nervous to come to them. Parents were upset to learn from their daughter the amount of anguish and psychological torment she experienced at the thought of disclosing her pregnancy to them. Parents explained that they "felt

so bad [their] child had to deal with something so huge alone" (Penny, par. 20), were "hurt by [their] child not coming to [them] sooner" (Megan, par. 10) and "wished [they] could have shortened the amount of time this was going on" (Jane, par. 15).

Parents also expressed concern about how their daughters' delayed disclosure timing impacted her physical health and how they could have helped if only they had known sooner. Essentially, parents wanted to fulfill their role as a parent: they did not want their children going through the physical changes associated with pregnancy without their help and advice. For example, Penny explained that had she been told about her daughter's pregnancy earlier, she could have taught her about necessary prenatal care (par. 38). Had Cecilia been told sooner, she could have talked with her daughter about the possible complications of having an abortion and the importance of follow-up medical care (par. 29). Finally, Claudia warned about the dangers of waiting too late to reveal the news to parents: "There's just so many things that you need to be doing as far as going to a doctor, getting help, going ahead and getting your plan rolling and action" (par. 99).

Although parents prefer to be told early on and "resent being one of the last to know" (Megan, par. 6), there are conditions under which revealing occurs too soon. Parents felt it was important for their daughter to "contemplate things" prior to coming to them and "not do anything out of impulse or emotion" (Janette, par. 93). She should wait long enough that (a) her emotions are under control, (b) information has been gathered and options considered, and (c) a tentative plan has been put into place. Parents also suggest that unmarried mothers time their revelation around an in-person meeting at their parents' home because face to face is generally preferred, and avoid disclosing during holidays or special events that may ruin the occasion. Choosing to reveal at a time that restricts the ability to discuss all relevant meanings—like

disclosing on a holiday or without a plan in place—imposes a burden on all parties (Petronio, 2002).

Summary. Although waiting to reveal did not seem to have detrimental consequences on the parent-child relationship, it is important not to overlook how delayed disclosures can be dangerous for the mother and her infant, particularly because studies show that women who have unintended pregnancies tend also to be physically, emotionally, and economically ill prepared for motherhood (Singh et al., 2010). Although parents did not necessarily think that their adult daughter was deficit in all of these areas, they did feel that there was no way for their daughter to know everything she needed to know about pregnancy or appreciate the difficulty involved in parenting—especially because the pregnancy was unexpected, unintentional, and she was unmarried—without their help. They knew that the transition to parenthood even for a married couple that plans for a child is a shock and consumed by stress (Curran, Hazen, Jacobvitz, & Sasaki, 2006). Parents feared that their daughter may have exaggerated expectations for her relationship with the unmarried father and a romanticized view of pregnancy and life with a baby, like most new parents do (Carter, 1999).

A parent's perception of being needed and her or his desire to be told the news soon is not unfounded or a result of their egotism. Research has documented the importance of parent relationships as an individual encounters adjustment periods throughout adulthood (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). Parents have navigated the "becoming parents" process before, so they and serve as important and consistent source of information throughout their daughter's pregnancy (Clarke, Gross, & Psychol, 2004).

Presence-absence of relational members. Parents of the unwed mother expressed strong feelings about whether or not the baby's father should be present at the disclosure of pregnancy.

Surprisingly, in all cases except one, parental opinions on the matter seemed to mirror the reality of the situation: in situations where the baby's father was not present, parents expressed not wanting him there, and in situations where the baby's father was present, parents seemed to think that his presence was important. This suggests one of two things: (a) either the unwed father's presence at the disclosure does not matter and parents will adapt to whatever setting they are put in, or (b) the unmarried mothers did an exceptional job at crafting a disclosure scenario that met their parents' expectations. With respect to this particular disclosure feature, analysis supports that the later may be true.

Parents in favor of the unwed father's presence (5 out of 20 parents), all felt strongly that if he saw a future with their daughter and/or the baby, his presence at the disclosure was necessary. Parents explained, "It is not one person that is having the child" (Claudia, par. 51), but rather "it takes two to make a baby" (Vicky, par. 104), and both parties should take equal responsibility in delivering the news. Parents acknowledged that coming to tell them in person was undoubtedly difficult, and it would have been easier not to face them. The fact that he was there "said a lot for his character and who he is" (Penny, par. 66). His presence helped demonstrate to parents his support and commitment to their daughter and the unborn child. Conversely, unwed fathers who did not attend the disclosure were perceived as less committed and supportive. Vicky elaborated, "Him being there showed us that he must care for her. Somebody that doesn't care for somebody will send them off on their own to tell the bad news!" (par. 105). Similar to the narratives of the unmarried mothers, parents also mentioned the power of the unified front. Coming together enabled parents to view the couple as a unit, in agreement with one another, which according to Abigail, "spoke volumes about their relationship" (par. 34).

It established the couple as the decision-makers, forcing parents to recognize that they are adults and the pregnancy outcome was indeed their decision.

Most parents, however, (15 out of 20) explained that they did not want the unmarried father present at the pregnancy disclosure. The most commonly cited reason for this was a parent's negative feelings towards him. If parents "did not like him" (Leon, par. 73), "didn't know him" (Kay, par. 40; Megan, par. 28), felt he was "unreliable," a "burden," or "noncommittal" (Frank, par. 6; Gwen, par. 23), or "knew that he didn't want anything to do with the baby" (Sybil, par. 26), parents explained that it was best for him not to be a part of the conversation. These responses are consistent with the narratives of the unmarried mothers, many of whom seemed to be aware of their parents' ill feelings toward the baby's father and cited that as the primary reason why he was not present at the disclosure to begin with.

Parents of the unmarried mother also explained that having the baby's father present would prevent them from relating to their child because their attention would be divided between their daughter and her partner. Parents preferred for him not be present out of fear for either "not knowing how to deal with him" (Kay, par. 40) or responding to him in a negative way. For example, one father in a joking manner stated, "I think that it was fine he wasn't there. If he was there maybe I would've been on the six o'clock news!" (Leon, par. 73). It appears that the unmarried mothers may not be the only ones attempting to manage their identity effectively. Parents were put in a position where they had to respond to difficult news spontaneously—and people under stress mostly consider their immediate goals and do not have time to consider self-presentation needs (Ohbuchi, Chiba, & Fukushima (1996)—so they were relieved that non-family members were not subjected to their immediate responses. Perhaps their relief stems from their battle with a competing notion: they were experiencing a bombardment of emotions that

they wanted to express freely. Parents wanted to be afforded the opportunity to be blunt with their child, ask tough questions, and get honest answers—all of which they felt would be constrained by the unwed father's presence. Most of the unwed mothers were receiving financial support from their parents, so parents felt that their continued financial sacrifice entitled them to inquire and comment on their child's behavior, even is she was an adult (Fulmer, 1999).

Summary. It is clear in the parent interviews that learning about their daughter's pregnancy was an emotion-laden event likely to arouse intense feelings—feelings that could be exacerbated by the presence of a non-family member, like the unwed father. Family disclosure boundaries (i.e., if he was welcome at the disclosure) were only opened to him under the condition that the unwed father was going to become a member of the family. His commitment and desire to be involved seemed to grant him access into a conversation that would have otherwise been closed and perceived by both unmarried mothers and their parents as a "private family matter" (Lola, par. 5).

The level of familiarity that is common among parents and their children from having known each other for a long time, suggests that the unmarried mother has a keen sense of what her parents would prefer and because of that she is able to make decisions about the disclosure that increase her chances of navigating the encounter successfully. For example, knowing that her parents may be concerned with the unmarried father's level of commitment, the unwed mother can consider how his presence or absence may impact their concern.

Location. Parents did not comment extensively on the environment in which they were told about the pregnancy other than to say that being told in a private place, preferably their own home, was important because it provided them with a sense of comfort, security, and being in control, things that were likely to be shaken by this event; this is a similar phenomenon to the

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psychological and rule-related advantages that a home team is said to have over a visiting team in sports (e.g., playing in familiar facilities, surrounded by supportive fans, game rules favoring home team such as last at bat). Not only were parents familiar with their surroundings, but also the venue allowed parents the option of expressing their emotions openly and honestly to their daughter. As previously stated, once the news was delivered, parents experienced a bombardment of emotions that they wanted (and felt entitled as the parent) to freely express without the constraint of an unfamiliar, public setting. From their perspective, if there was a place where the rules of engagement called for openness and honesty, it was within the walls of their own home.

Content. When asked to describe their preferences for what should be said during the revelation of unwed pregnancy, all parents explained that they most desired openness, honesty, and vulnerability from their daughters. Parents wanted to be able to ask questions and they expected "complete honesty, devoid of leaving even one part out" (Vicky, par. 92). For Vicky, it was important for her daughter to tell her everything all at once, so that there were no more surprises that she would have to confront down the road. Kay, who was lied to about the identity of the baby's father, explained that the dishonesty from her daughter did nothing but further aggravate the situation when she found out the truth later (par. 40). Two other parents explained that they greatly respected and appreciated the fact that their daughters felt comfortable enough to cry and express felt emotions.

It is interesting that parents reported wanting both complete honesty and openness from their daughters in an in-person disclosure setting. Amount and truthfulness of disclosure tends to vary according to condition (i.e., face to face or not face to face), and face-to-face interactions have the potential of being less honest than online ones. In a 25-year meta-analysis on the role of

computers in personal self-disclosure, Richman et al. (1999) report that individuals tend to offer more accurate and complete information about themselves in an anonymous online setting than a face-to-face one—albeit anonymity was impossible for the unwed mothers in this study—and that the differences increase the more personal the information. Not sharing physical presence with those we are revealing to creates a sense of liberation for revealing and allows us to distance ourselves from the consequences of our messages (Suler, 2004). However, studies also show that when the audience is known (e.g., family and friends), as in the present investigation, the risk of disclosing can increase and honesty regarding sensitive information becomes more difficult (Petronio, 2002). This means that parents may have to choose which message feature they feel is more important—complete honesty or a face-to-face meeting—because conflicting research suggests the two may be at odds with one another. If an honest and open discussion is what parents prefer, talking via a computer-mediated channel may be the easiest (or only) way to encourage their daughter to reveal things she would not normally discuss in a face-to-face setting (Suler, 2004). However, if a face-to-face meeting is more important, parents may need to prepare themselves for a less transparent encounter.

Further analysis of the interviews suggests that parents may not really want as much openness and honesty as they say they do, at least initially. As the unmarried mother interviews revealed, the conversations with parents tended to be short and superficial. So, if parents really wanted more information, why did they not ask for it? It is clear by the lack of conversation taking place between parents and their daughter that when parents learn of their daughter's pregnancy, they find themselves forced into the role of the *reluctant confidant*, or the recipient of undesired information (Petronio, 2002). Parents were not expecting this news nor did they ask to be put in this situation, which explains why parents were often so "taken back" and "caught off

guard" (Janelle, par. 39) by the news that they really did not know what to say or ask during this first conversation. Being a reluctant confidant often means being unprepared to handle the consequences of the disclosure and having difficulty navigating the conversation (Petronio, 2002). However, there is more to it than simply being caught off guard and not knowing what to say.

There was a limit to how much vulnerability and openness with which parents were comfortable. As Claudia put it, "coming in and being a basket case was not helpful" (par. 76). For their own peace of mind, parents wanted to be reassured that their daughters were going to be okay, were well informed of their options, and were capable of carrying out whatever pregnancy outcome they were choosing. They did not expect their daughters to have answers to every question they asked, but they did want them to demonstrate thoughtful consideration of their current situation. Coming in with a tentative plan for the future was important to parents, illustrating to them that their daughter was strong, mature, and capable of handling the difficulty that lay ahead. Perhaps what parents meant by "complete honesty" from their daughters is (a) enough information to prevent further surprise about her situation and (b) enough concealment of her fears so that parents are assured of her capability.

It is clear that parents were having difficulty navigating their daughter's separation and transition to parenthood because there was also a limit to how much of her disclosure should consist of autonomous content (i.e., messages indicating she could do it on her own). Although parents agreed that their daughter's strategies to make herself appear confident and capable did help convince them of her capability, they also made parents feel hurt and rejected if their daughter did not ask for their help or advice and indicated that she wanted to do everything on her own. Claudia explained, "I remember feeling very hurt—I felt like she was acting like she

didn't want our help at all. I felt like she was kind of cutting us off at that point" (par. 75). It appears that the unmarried mothers' attempt to present a capable, reassuring image in front of their parents (if too emphasized) can be interpreted by her parents as a devaluing of their wisdom and a disinterest in their involvement. If this is not the case and the unmarried mother does want her parent's involvement, the data suggest that disclosures of unwed pregnancy may need to contain messages that reflect both autonomy and connection—parents want to be assured of their daughter's capability but they also want to feel like they are needed, wanted, and their help is appreciated.

In short, parents seemed to want their daughters to be both autonomous and dependent, and emotional and vulnerable while also in control—an interesting feature of the parent-adult child relationship, which captures the term "adult child" well. As explained in the previous chapter, disclosing unmarried pregnancy is a turning point for parents and their children. It is a transitional moment when the child moves from child to adult, which may explain why parents want to see a blend of these two identities in her disclosure to them.

Finally, parents expressed anger if their daughter failed to acknowledge the seriousness of the situation or did not admit to making "a bad decision somewhere along the way" (Jane, par. 45). In a few situations, the unwed couple was perceived as acting "flippant" (Megan, par. 10), or turning the revelation into a joke (Leah, par. 5). This was particularly troublesome for the parents who were religious and found moral fault in unwed childbearing. As Fulmer (1999) explains, parents expect a sense of loyalty from their adult children—that the choices they make in their own lives reflect the values of the family—and it can be difficult for parents when they feel as if their values are not being acknowledged or carried forward. The disclosure of unmarried pregnancy, for many families, is an event where parents may feel that their daughter's

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decisions are contrary to their family values. When the unmarried mother discloses to her parents in a way that seems to contest or overlook the importance of her family's values (e.g., not admit mistake or ask for their help), this can lead to exacerbated negative parental reactions. This finding sheds light on parental expectations regarding how the conversation with them *should* be conducted. Whether the unmarried mother finds fault in her behavior may be irrelevant if her primary goal is to appease her parents. If her parents are expecting an apology, she may want to consider how one (or lack of one) will impact their reception of the news.

Conclusion

In every family, sad, bad, or difficult information must be revealed. When family members deliver information in a way that ignores another member's perspective, recipients of the news can experience greater anger and increased distress than if the same news were presented in a manner that reflects care and concern for the other. As the narratives in this study suggest, even when a significant amount of consideration is put into how one reveals upsetting news, there is no guarantee that negative reactions will be avoided.

Revealing unwed pregnancy to parents is a complex scenario with a number of decisions that can greatly impact the outcome of the conversation. The results of this investigation suggest that difficult news should be delivered in ways that do not violate disclosure expectations and are typical of how a family normally communicates. However, it is also important to keep in mind that when a woman experiences a change in circumstance, such as becoming unexpectedly pregnant, the distress she experiences may trigger a new set of disclosure rules and result in her revealing in ways that are, for her, atypical or idiosyncratic (Carpenter, 1987; Coates & Winston, 1987; Stiles, 1987). People in psychological distress (whether the discloser of bad news or the

recipient) may become so preoccupied with their own circumstance that it becomes difficult for them to view their situation objectively and from the other person's point of view (Stiles, 1987).

Although the participants in this study claimed to have each other's best interest in mind—and by no means were the other's feelings overlooked—it was often the case that their disclosure decisions and interpretations of what transpired were primarily self-interested. The next chapter of this dissertation unveils more about the unmarried mother's disclosure decisions, shedding light on her identity and relational concerns, and providing a context for further understanding why she disclosed in ways that she did.

CHAPTER 6: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:
UNWED MOTHER'S FACE CONCERNS, NEEDS,
AND NEGOTIATION STRATEGIES

Why certain disclosure enactment choices are implemented over others may be explained by the unwed mother's face concerns and face needs. Self-face is the protective concern for one's own image; other-face is the concern or consideration for the other conflict party's image; and mutual-face is the concern for both parties' images and/or the relationship image (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Face needs include autonomy face (e.g., concern that others see us as self-sufficient, independent, and in control); inclusion face (e.g., concern that others see us as likeable, friendly, and cooperative); status face (e.g., concern that others see us as attractive, powerful, and reputable); reliability face (e.g., concern that others see us as trustworthy, dependable, and consistent); competence face (e.g., concern that others see us as intelligent, skillful, and recognize us as a leader); and moral face (e.g., concern that others see us as morally upright).

Face Concerns and Needs

Research Questions 4 and 5 inquired about the unwed mother's face concerns and needs when revealing unwed pregnancy to her parents. Findings suggest that when adult women reveal unwed pregnancy to their parents for the first time, they are primarily concerned with threats to their own identity. Important for interpretation of the following section is that the findings presented here are not meant to suggest that the women who cited self-face concerns did not also worry about their parents' image or that the women who cited other-face concerns did not worry about threats to their own identity. The narratives were categorized according to the concern that

was given greatest salience and where their attention was focused (i.e., image of self, other, or relationship) during the conversation.

Face concerns. When asked about their greatest concern going into the conversation with parents, 23 of 32 unwed mothers cited *self-face concerns*. Although all of the women were shocked to discover their own pregnancy, this group of unwed mothers reacted to the news primarily with a sense of identity loss and worry about how they would be perceived by others. The direction they saw their life progressing was suddenly changing course. They feared not being able to measure up to and fulfill their parents' expectations or achieve the goals they had set out to achieve. Several claimed to be the "favorite child" (Evelyn, par. 36), "the good kid" (Kathleen, par. 72), "daddy's little girl" (Dana, par. 17), "the baby" (Hattie, par. 60), "little angel" (Julie, par. 73), or "the sports star" (Rita, par. 63), and felt as if their parents "had [them] on a pedestal" (Ada, par. 36), and "never would have expected something like this" (Hattie, par. 60). They were "supposed to be the example," and a role model for their siblings (Dena, par. 3).

The most common fear reported by the unwed mothers was parental disappointment. They felt inadequate and disappointed in themselves and their biggest worry was that their news would cause their parents' opinion of them to change. They were afraid of becoming "the girl their parents had always warned them about" (Sherrie, par. 57). Hattie explained, "I was mostly worried about disappointment. I mean every kid hates the words: 'Oh I'm not mad, but I'm disappointed in you'" (par. 60).

Although none of the women wanted to upset, embarrass, or anger their parents, only 3 of the 32 women reported a primary concern that was *other-face* oriented. Julie, Sheena, and Hope said that they most worried about threatening their parents' role in the family, making them feel not needed, and preventing them from helping with a situation they cannot fix. The women

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explained that they did not want to make their parent "feel helpless" or "put this on her emotionally" (Sheena, par. 67).

Four women reported *mutual-face concerns*. When asked about their primary concern, their response contained elements of both self- and other-face. For example, Kathleen was not only worried about disappointing her parents, but she also worried that her news would make her parents question the quality of their parenting and worry that "they had raised [her] the wrong way" (par. 55). Kasey worried about straining her relationship with her parents because they were disappointed in her (par. 89). Lola's narrative was unique in that not only was parental disappointment a concern, she was equally concerned with how her parents (who taught Sunday School at her church) would be perceived by other church members as well as how her parents would see her boyfriend, a man about whom they knew little. Shelby explained that her primary concern was that her mother would be disappointed and not be able to show genuine excitement about the pregnancy because Shelby, like her mother, was going to fit the stereotype of being a young, black, unwed mother.

The remaining two women explained that their primary concerns were not attributable to identity concerns at all. Instead, they reported practical concerns related to their pregnancy situation. For example, Simone feared how alcohol, drugs, and not eating the right foods would affect her baby (par. 44), and Dana feared "doing it alone" (par. 75).

Summary. Face negotiation scholars would most likely begin unpacking the reason for the biased number of face concerns (i.e., more self-face concerns than other-face or mutual-face) by determining dimensions of cultural variation. More specifically, in order to understand how culture relates to social psychological phenomena, one must first determine how the cultural constructs, such as individualism-collectivism and power distance, are emphasized.

Emphasizing *I-identity* (i.e., individual image), members of an individualistic culture are primarily invested in helping themselves; members of a collectivistic culture, on the other hand, emphasize "we-identity" (i.e., group image) and are more invested in promoting group needs (Ting-Toomey, 2005; Triandis, 1995). Because the United States is largely considered an individualistic culture and calls for more situations involving I-identity responses (DeAngelis, 1992; Hofstede, 1991, 2000; Ting-Toomey, 2005; Triandis, 1995), it is not surprising that self-face concerns dominate the narratives. Although scholars have referred to the individualism-collectivism dimension as "one of the most common" and "most promising dimensions" for understanding culture's impact on social psychological phenomena (Gudykunst & Matsumoto, 1996; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai & Lucca, 1988), this value dimension provides only an underlying base for understanding why people behave in the ways that they do and lends credence to Ting-Toomey's (2005) call for more situational-based research (e.g., family culture, parent-child relational dynamics, content of information shared).

More helpful in explaining why a greater number of women report self-face needs than other-face needs may be attributable to situational variables like the content of the information, age of the interactants, and how the family deals with social hierarchies and status inequities (e.g., family background, age, birth order, gender, education, relationship symmetry). The high number of self-face concerns suggests an interesting interaction of three variables: age of the unmarried mother, the relational symmetry with her parents, and the perception that her news is negative and stigmatizing.

Because the news they have to share with their parents is potentially negative, it is not surprising that unmarried mothers would be concerned with their parents' opinions of them and express self-face concerns. Likewise, because the unmarried mothers are adults and feel entitled

to make their own decisions about their pregnancy, it also makes sense for them to focus on establishing authority and expressing their autonomy and competence (which are self-face needs). However, the high level of nervousness associated with telling parents their news suggests that their self-face concerns are most likely not a result of perceptions of equalized power in the parent-child relationship but rather perceptions of status inequity.

According to Lim (1994), as one's status over another increases, he/she claims more right to perform acts that threaten the other's face. Although participant recruitment specified that the conversation with parents must be considered a "difficult conversation," the extremity of their nervousness provides significant insight into the parent-adult child relationship of the participants. Not one of the unmarried mothers reported feeling "not nervous at all" about the disclosure of pregnancy to their parents; in fact, 21 of the 32 women reported feeling "very nervous" to "extremely nervous" about disclosing. Reports of nervousness about the disclosure suggest that some kind of perceived status inequity by the unmarried mothers (in light of their young adult status): their parents were the ones who held the power to cut off resources, view them differently, or terminate the relationship. Studies have shown that their fears are not unfounded because unwed mothers, relative to married counterparts, tend to receive less time and money from their network supporters (e.g., Mollborn, 2009), which may shed light on why unwed mothers may be primarily concerned with threats to their own image.

Face needs. Reports of nervousness about revealing to their parents found across narratives are clear indicators of *inclusion face,* or the need for their parents to acknowledge that they are worthy family members. In light of their behavior and deviance from family expectations (no family in this study condoned unwed pregnancy), the unwed mothers wanted their parents to recognize them as a member of the family, worthy of association.

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While the unwed mother is concerned with how others' views of her may change and if she will remain an accepted member of the family, she simultaneously struggles with how her own (often conflicting) views of herself are changing. Balancing her needs for inclusion are her needs to also be recognized as an autonomous and competent individual. Although the women may secretly battle with feelings of doubt and inadequacy and worry about not being prepared for or capable of successfully raising a child, two-thirds of them wanted their parents to recognize that they were adults, in control of the situation, and were capable of handling what lay ahead. Expressing autonomy and competence face needs during the conversation with parents, they wanted to appear "mature and strong" (Kathleen, par. 59), capable of getting through this (Janelle, par. 55), and as if they "didn't need anyone else to help fix [their] problems" (Rita, par. 79). Lola shared, "I wanted them to know that I was telling them not because I am a child and want them to fix it, but because I am respectful of the fact that my decision affects them, too" (par. 17). They felt confident in their ability to determine which outcome is best for their particular situation and wanted their parents to respect their decision.

Reliability face needs were also common in one-third of the interviews. This group of women felt that getting pregnant was out of their character and inconsistent with their typical behavior, and they wanted their parents to see them as the person they had always been—the kid who had always made good choices, received good grades, was successful in athletics, etc. For example, Tabitha explained how she wanted her mother to see her as the daughter she had always loved and cared for, not as "the screw-up that [she] felt" (par. 57).

No matter how high their self-esteem may have been prior to pregnancy, the unmarried mothers seemed to embody society's condemning views of unmarried motherhood. They described becoming critical of themselves, disappointed in their actions, regretful that they were

not more careful, and angry that no matter what decision they made their life would be forever changed. They expressed feelings of loneliness, shame, and embarrassment, and felt as if their "world was crashing" (Dana, par. 5) and "life was over" (Lola, par.3). They did not want to be thought of as the "type of girl who gets knocked up" (Kat, par. 40). During the disclosure to parents, more than half of the women expressed moral face needs, and hoped that they would remain "a good girl in [their] parent's eyes" (Addy, par. 61).

Summary. Ting-Toomey (2005) speculates that individuals with an I-identity orientation will tend to emphasize autonomy-face needs and express more self-focused emotions such as pride, personal hurt, insults, fairness, and individual justice. Individuals with a we-identity orientation, on the other hand, will tend to focus more on shame, public embarrassment, communal honor, and communal wrongdoing. The majority of women expressing self-face concerns fit the pattern of I-identity orientation of the face needs presented here (i.e., autonomy, competence, reliability, and moral face needs). Because the women were primarily concerned with threats to their own identity, they wanted their parents to acknowledge their independence, self-sufficiency, reliability, and moral uprightness.

Most intriguing, however, is how the unmarried mother's perception of her I-identity behavior conflicts with her parent's perception of her I-identity behavior. From the unwed mother's point of view, her situation is personalized—her pregnancy is a result of a choice she made (because no pregnancies in this study were a result of rape), and a situation that she feels charged to manage. After all, it is her body that is pregnant and, therefore, her image at stake. Knowing that her parents do not condone unwed pregnancy, she attempts to take sole responsibility for her actions, appear capable of carrying out her pregnancy plan, and convey to her parents that her pregnancy is not a result of inadequate parenting or something that should

reflect poorly on the family. In doing so, however, her self-face orientation—intended to buffer reputational threat to the family—was actually perceived by some parents as an oversight of family image threats. From their perspective, her I-identity behavior was not necessarily interpreted as an attempt to take on the social stigma of unmarried motherhood and remove the family from public embarrassment but rather a failure to acknowledge how the news will affect the reputations of other family members. It is precisely the interaction of multiple face perceptions during interpersonal interactions (e.g., the unmarried mother's expression of adult status and parent's need for acknowledgement of family reputation) that can result in misperception or miscommunication (Holtgraves, 2009).

Facework Strategies

Research Question 6 inquired about an unwed mother's facework strategies to soften or ward off face loss when revealing unwed pregnancy to her parents. In addition to strategic decision making involving disclosure enactment choices (see Chapter 5), a number of preventative and restorative strategies were found across narratives. The most commonly implemented facework strategies for revealing unwed pregnancy to parents include: seeking advice from a confidant, establishing a clear plan, anticipating and debunking parental concerns, justifying capability, apologizing, and expressing remorse.

Preventative facework strategies. Prior to the conversation with their parents, unwed mothers engaged in a number of behaviors to prepare for the conversation, guard against face loss, and enhance their image. The most common preventative strategy reported involved talking with a confidant and seeking advice regarding what to say to parents and how to say it. All but 1 of the 32 unwed mothers reported talking to at least one other person—a partner, sibling, friend, or other trusted source—for purposes of gaining insight into how the conversation with parents

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should be approached and handled. Fearing negative opinions from relational others, the unwed mother is selective in the confidant she seeks out.

Narratives suggest that confidant selection is driven by the unwed mother's desire for emotional and informational support, resulting in a likelihood that the person chosen is either directly involved in the pregnancy (e.g., the baby's father), or someone the unwed mother trusts, anticipates will be receptive of her news, and/or can provide valuable information regarding how to reveal the news to parents. Although these findings mirror what has already been suggested in previous studies with respect to the relationship between disclosure decisions and relationship to target (Denholm-Carey & Chabassol, 1987; Hartup, 1989; Morgan, 1976; Rosenfeld & Kendrick, 1984), and the likelihood that the news will be well received (Ben-Ari, 1995; Conlon, 2006; Vangelisti et al., 2001), unique to this study, however, are the 23 cases in which a confidant was selected because of his or her ability to help preserve the unwed mother's desired image in some way. Confidants with previous experience revealing unwed pregnancy to parents were deemed particularly helpful. Seven women explained that they asked other unwed mothers how they revealed their pregnancy to parents and how the news could be delivered in the least face-threatening manner. Individuals who personally knew the unmarried mothers' parents were also helpful in providing advice. Nine siblings and six extended family members were sought out because of their close relationship parents and perceived ability to accurately predict parental reactions.

For most of the women (24 of 32), talking with a confidant resulted in more than just gaining insight regarding how the information should be delivered to their parents; it also forced the unwed women to consider the logistics of negotiating pregnancy and motherhood and begin establishing a plan for the future—the second common strategy utilized for preparing for the

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conversation with their parents. Rita explained that while rehearsing what she was planning to

say to her parents with her friend Samantha, Samantha helped her consider the practical issues

surrounding pregnancy, such as finances, completing school, insurance, living arrangements, and

childcare. Rita said, "She kind of asked the questions I needed asked. At that point I was only

feeling. I was very emotional. She snapped me into reality and was like 'OK, you need a plan'"

(par. 46). The women felt it was important to go into the conversation with their parents with a

plan so that they did not appear like they "didn't know what [they were] getting into" (Bonnie,

par. 78). Bonnie shared, "I didn't want to seem like I had no idea what I was doing or how I was

going to handle the situation I was in. I didn't want my mom and dad asking me questions about

what I was gonna do and then have no answers" (par. 78).

The desire to establish a plan for the future yielded a third preventative strategy:

anticipating a parent's questions and concerns, and formulating answers. More than half of the

unwed mothers explained that part of their preparation for the conversation with their parents

involved assessing their parent's values, considering how parents normally act in distressing

situations, and predicting their parents' reaction to the news. While focusing on the issues they

felt would be most important to their parents, they formulated answers to questions they

perceived would likely be asked and practiced verbalizing responses to the anticipated parental

objections. For example, some women knew that their parent's primary concern would be if the

couple planned to marry. Both Kathleen and Shelby knew that marriage was going to be a point

of contention with their parents because they had no intention of marrying right away. Therefore,

it was important to discuss with their partners beforehand how they were going to handle that.

Other women knew that their parents highly valued education and would want to know how they

planned to continue pursuing a degree while raising a child. Becoming a part-time student,

enrolling in online programs, and transferring to colleges closer to home were some of the options that the unmarried women shared with their parents in an effort to comfort and ease their concerns and prevent face loss.

Anticipating parental reactions and concerns was not only advantageous for the unmarried mother. For the 10 women who disclosed their pregnancy to their parents with their partner present, predicting how parents would likely respond to the news helped to prepare the baby's father for what to expect—a fourth preventative facework strategy. By sharing their expectations regarding how the conversation was likely to unfold, the unwed mothers were able to coach their partner on what to say (or not to say) and how to act during the interaction with the parents. The women explained that giving their partners some idea of what would happen helped to ease their partner's anxiety.

Although less utilized, a final preventative facework strategy was found in the narratives. Three women explained that in conversations with their parents prior to the disclosure of their pregnancy, they deliberately brought up situations that presented the couple relationship or partner in favorable light. They assumed that because their parents knew little about (or had a negative view of) a dating partner, this strategy would allow their parents the opportunity to get to know the partner better, begin building a favorable impression of him, and/or even curtail some negative preconceived notions.

Summary. When an individual anticipates face threat, as in the case of disclosure of unwed pregnancy to parents, there are a number of preventative facework strategies designed to soften or ward off the occurrence of face loss. Cupach and Metts (1994) report that preventive strategies may come in the form of *disclaimers* (e.g., "Since you are an expert and I do not know much about this …"), *hedges* (e.g., "I may be off base here, but …"), *pre-apologies* (e.g.,

"Before I start, please accept my apology …"), *pre-disclosures* (e.g., "Since we've all made mistakes before …"), *certifying status* (e.g., "I have years of experience …"), or *suspending judgment* (e.g., "Before you get angry, hear me out …"). The preventative strategies presented in this chapter serve as an extension of their work in that they illustrate how preventative facework may occur long before a conversation transpires. Conversing with a confidant, gathering information on how to reveal, anticipating parental objections and how to address them, preparing a partner for what to expect, and establishing a plan, were all proactive behaviors enacted for purposes of presenting a desired image once the conversation did occur: the image of an autonomous, capable, reliable, morally upright unwed mother.

The preventative strategies found in this investigation are useful for explaining some of the findings in previous chapters. For example, gathering information, establishing a pregnancy plan, preparing a partner for the conversation, and seeking out others for aid are not quick processes and help explain disclosure timing decisions, such as why most unmarried mothers waited at least a few days to reveal their news to their parents. The preventative strategy most useful, however, for explaining the unmarried mothers' disclosure enactment choices may be consideration of parental reactions. As supported by Zillman (1993), who argues that anticipating one's negative reactions to potential conflict scenarios limit such reactions, the unmarried mothers' consideration of how their parents would likely respond under different conditions (e.g., face to face, via the telephone, text message) enabled them to make informed decisions regarding where, when, and how to disclose. As the results from the parent interviews in Chapter 5 suggest, the unmarried mother has a keen sense of what her parents would prefer in regards to the delivery of her news. Therefore, in addition to the level of familiarity that is common between parents and their children, the unwed mother's anticipation of her parents' reactions

increased her ability to exercise *episode control* (Canary & Lakey, 2006), or control over the situation via her disclosure enactment choices.

Preventative strategies also provide insight into other findings such as to whom the news is revealed first. Because the unmarried mother seeks out knowledge from others who may help her uphold her desired image in front of her parents, this preventative strategy helps explain why parents are rarely the first to learn about their daughter's unwed pregnancy. Further, the advice an unmarried mother's confidant provides her may influence her disclosure decisions, particularly if that confidant is perceived as a trustworthy, reliable source (e.g., the confidant has experience revealing her own unwed pregnancy to her parents, or she knows the parents of the unwed mothers in this investigation).

The unmarried mother not only views disclosure of her pregnancy to her parents as a face-threatening episode, but goes to great lengths to develop strategies to preserve her image before the conversation takes place. Depending upon the preventative measures she takes, her pregnancy sense-making scheme and disclosure enactment can be radically altered.

Restorative facework strategies. In the event that the unmarried mothers perceived face threat during the conversation with their parents, they implemented restorative strategies to repair their damaged identities. The most commonly utilized strategies include: *justification, apology, excitement, humor*, and *avoidance*, with many women often using more than one strategy.

Justification was the most common restorative strategy found in the narratives, utilized by 23 of the unwed mothers. Attempting to combat parental concerns and objections, the unwed mothers spent considerable time justifying their pregnancy decisions and providing examples that illustrate their capability to follow through with their future plans. Evelyn explained, "I told

them, 'I'm 26, I have a great job and a great family. I have a support system, income, good insurance, and I'm educated.' I was in a good place, so it wasn't up for discussion" (par. 13). Kat shared, "I told them, 'It's not like I'm Sarah!' That's my younger sister who's 10 years younger. 'I'm not in high school, I have a job, I'm financially stable, I don't have a lot of debt. I make enough money to stand on my own two feet'' (par. 48). This group of unwed women worked to restore face loss by justifying to their parents how their current socioeconomic status afforded them (at least some of) the resources they would need to successfully raise a child. A few women even brought up their parent's unwed pregnancy and pointed out reasons why their circumstances were no worse off than what their parents had successfully made it through. It was particularly interesting that parents often omitted this information in their narratives. In fact, I learned from one unmarried mother that her mother refused to fill out the demographic questionnaire because of question #5, which asked if she at any point was also an unmarried mother. In the event that parents freely admitted to being an unwed parent, it was with respect to not wanting their daughter to endure the same hardships they had been through.

Justification was also important to the women who chose other alternatives to keeping and raising the child. For example, Charlotte, who did not know she was pregnant until she went into labor, felt it was important to justify to her mother why she and her partner viewed giving the baby up for adoption as their only option. Explaining to her mother that the couple chose an open adoption so that the family could be apart of the child's life if they wanted to, seemed to be a key factor in helping Charlotte restore face loss once her mother began challenging the decision. Although Hattie's mom was instantly in agreement that she should get an abortion, she still felt the need to justify why she was not ready to be a parent.

Apology was also a restorative strategy found in 15 of the narratives. It was important to these unmarried mothers that they acknowledge their parent's disappointed feelings and apologize for some aspect of the situation. Several women in this study explained that their apology to their parents was a result of feeling morally at fault and personally ashamed of their out-of-marriage pregnancy. They found it important to act repentant and remorseful during the conversation with their parents, attempting to present an image of themselves that they were genuinely "not proud of what happened" (Tabitha, par. 122), sorry for "the mistake" (Dena, par. 46; Lynnette, par. 6), "foolish" (Dana, par. 17), knew "it is not ok" (Jamie, par. 10), and wanted "forgiveness" from their parents (Lola, par. 7).

A feeling of remorse was not the only explanation, however, for utilizing the apology strategy. Other women, like Sonia and Hilary for example, apologized to their parents for different reasons. They were not sorry, nor did they feel regretful of their actions. Instead, they apologized to their parents as a means of defusing conflict; they felt that not doing so would have only exacerbated their parent's anger and hurt. Unfortunately, I was not able to interview Sonia and Hilary's parents, which raises the question: to what extent are parents able to detect insincere apologies, ones offered solely for strategic purposes? More obvious with this explanation than the previous, it is important to clarify that the apology strategy was I-identity focused, rather than an apology for how the news would affect the reputation of the parents or family.

In contrast to apologizing or acting upset and remorseful, a third restorative strategy involved projecting optimism and happiness about the pregnancy and the opportunity to be a mother. Rather than appearing upset, sorry, embarrassed, or ashamed—reactions that often accompanied justification and apology restorative strategies—12 mothers worked to repair face loss by carefully concealing these feelings from their parents and projecting only happiness and

excitement about their pregnancy. They hoped that smiling, laughing, and acting excited about their pregnancy might curtail negative parental reactions by fostering the impression that this is "actually a happy thing" (Evelyn, par. 57). A few even took advantage of their parents' desire to one day be a grandparent and explained that they, too, should be excited about a new baby in the family and their new role as a grandparent.

According to two parent interviews, however, their daughters took their excitement too far by not taking the situation seriously and acting "flippant" (Megan, par. 10) or turning the revelation into a joke (Nora, par. 5), suggesting another restorative strategy: humor. For example, Nora explained, "My daughter and her boyfriend shouted, 'We're gonna have a baby, *bye*!' and then they acted like they were gonna dash out the door" (par. 5). She stated that the rapid delivery of the news and their rehearsed quick exit "really didn't work for me" (par. 30). Although Nora attributed her daughter's behavior to nervousness and her anticipation of negative parental reactions, she said she would have preferred that her daughter tell her in a way that was not "overly casual" (par. 34). Megan's daughter also disclosed to her in a light-hearted manner. Megan explained, "She told me she was driving in for my birthday. We sat down and I was all excited about seeing her and she said in a sing-song voice, 'I have a surprise for you! You're going to be grandmother!' All I said was, 'You aren't *serious*…'" (par. 4). Megan, a woman in the ministry, was bothered by the fact that her daughter delivered "that kind of news" (par. 10) on her birthday and in a way that did not seem to acknowledge that this is not happy news to her.

It is important to note that some scholars approach the face-saving category of humor more broadly and include (in addition to the lay interpretation of comical or amusing expressions) acts such as a smile or laughter (e.g., Edelmann, 1994). They may argue that the previous remedial strategy (smiling, laughing, and expressing excitement) falls underneath the

umbrella category of humor. However, conceptualizing humor in this way seems to confound the unmarried mother's motivation for (and her parent's interpretation of) her behavior and make it difficult to uncover the successfulness of this strategy (which is discussed in the summary following this section). As such, it seems important to distinguish between a disclosure that consists of smiling, laughter, and/or expressions of happiness and more comical expressions like revealing in a joking or non-serious manner.

A final restorative strategy found in the narratives was avoidance, which involved either physically retreating from a social encounter or avoiding the topic of pregnancy in an attempt to evade an awkward situation. Although 29 of the 32 unwed mothers reported avoiding the topic of pregnancy with their parents as a preventative strategy, 8 women used (or are currently using) it as a restorative strategy. For example, the women said that they avoid the topic of their pregnancy altogether because their parents "don't want to talk about it" (Charlotte, par. 56), "pretend that it didn't happen" (Hattie, par. 08), and prefer to "ignore the problem" (Dena, par. 102). For these women, averting further face loss involves remaining silent whenever pregnancy is brought up or refraining from initiating a conversation about their situation. In two instances, where one pregnancy resulted in adoption and the other abortion, the fathers learned of their daughters' unwed pregnancy from their wives, but no communication has ever taken place between the unwed mother and her father. In these two families, adoption and abortion were not options their father supported, so declaring the topic taboo and off limits for discussion is how they have chosen to manage the situation.

In the remaining narratives, the women said that they physically avoided their parents for a period of time after revealing their news. It was too difficult to face their parents and be ignored. Chapter 4 (the section on parent-child relationship strain) helps to contextualize the

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unmarried mother's temporary physical avoidance and offers suggestions for moments that may lead to positive parental excitement about the pregnancy and lessen her desire for avoidance.

Summary. The restorative strategies utilized by the unmarried mothers are characteristic of what has been found in the literature involving strategies a person can implement to mitigate threats to identity following undesired or unwanted behavior (Edelmann, 1994). When social performances are botched and identities threatened, people tend to respond with one or more of the following: apologies, excuses, justifications and/or denials (Goffman, 1971; Itoi, Ohbuchi, & Fukun, 1996; Schlenker, 1980, Schlenker & Darby, 1981; Tedeschi & Riess, 1981). Across studies, apologies, excuses, and justifications are generally recognized (Edelmann, 1994). In situations involving embarrassment in particular, avoidance, humor, describing the incident, reacting with aggression, and requesting help are common responses (e.g., Cupach & Metts, 1990; Fink & Walker, 1977).

Consistent with the literature, the unmarried mothers in this investigation utilized a number of common strategies to restore face loss: justification, apology, humor, and avoidance. It is not surprising that justification strategies were most commonly utilized. Studies have shown that when a person is personally responsible for an embarrassing or inappropriate behavior, he or she is more likely to try to account for, or justify, the event (Metts & Cupach, 1989; Sharkey & Stafford, 1990). According to Edelmann (1994) and Cupach and Metts (1994), justifications involve admitting that the embarrassing or inappropriate behavior has occurred, assuming (at least some) responsibility for it, but denying or downplaying the negative consequences associated with it. The vivid descriptions of nervousness found in the interviews along with the number of preventative measures to ward off face loss serve as support that all of the women acknowledged to some degree that becoming pregnant while not married was embarrassing or

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inappropriate. Their facework attempts to express autonomy, competence, and reliability (as well as verbal statements that this is not the fault of their parents) demonstrate their acceptance of responsibility, and not one of the women thought her behavior was without implications or that her decision was going to be easy to enact.

Where their justifications seemed to go wrong—at least according to their parents—was in their downplay or denial of negative consequences that would reflect upon or impact their parents. Very few of the women were primarily concerned with how their news would affect their parents' reputation (other face), which became quite evident in their attempts to justify their situation. In their efforts to appear capable, assume responsibly, and clarify for their parents that they were not asking for their parents to "fix their situation" or "raise their child for them," miscommunication and misinterpretations occurred if such explanations made their parents feel unwanted or unneeded.

The facework literature characterizes justifications as an explanation of undesired behavior directed at another in order to heal a damaged image (Ting-Toomey, 2005). However, not all justifications in this study were employed for purposes of mitigating negative parental opinions, nor were they always offered in response to a parent's condemnation of a particular decision. This is highlighted in the narratives in which justifications of pregnancy outcome (i.e., if they should get an abortion, seek adoption, or raise the child) were reiterated after a parent's endorsement of their decision. More specifically, after Hattie's mom responded with "Oh, thank *goodness*!" to her news of wanting to terminate her pregnancy, Hattie continued to verbally state (for another 45 minutes) why this was the best alternative for her particular situation. Most women, like Hattie, chose a pregnancy outcome that their parents would have wanted anyway, so

the question is raised: why would the women feel the need to continue justifying a particular decision to parents who are already in agreement?

The answer may lie in the target of identity work and the biased tendency of researchers to conceptualize identity-management as an individual's desire to manage his or her impressions in the eyes of others (Afifi & Guerrero, 2000; Baumeister, 1982). As Afifi and Guerrero (2000) point out, there is another conceptualization of identity management that should not be overlooked: individuals' psychological need to protect their identity for *themselves*. This view of identity management emphasizes how people convince themselves (rather than another) of their desired image (Greenwald & Breckler, 1985). What may be emerging from the narratives is an unmarried mother's attempt to mitigate her negative self-image by returning to (or emphasizing) the correctness of a decision upon which she and her parent agree. Essentially, her justifications are aimed at herself, rather than to her parent who is already in agreement. Reiterating that she and her parent are both in agreement about her pregnancy outcome may be her way of coping with her decision, requesting social validation for the choice she made, and/or making sense of her situation (Edelmann, 1994, Petronio, 2002; Rosenfeld, 2000).

Apologies, another common restorative strategy (Goffman, 1967), ranged in the data from half-hearted statements of "I'm sorry" for purposes of meeting parental expectations and defusing conflict, to more elaborate expressions of remorse and devastation. Although only half of the women reported utilizing verbal apologies to restore face loss, it is possible that parents observed involuntary apologies from their daughters as well. Scholars have argued, "The very act of being embarrassed can itself serve as an apology, providing a visual sign that the person acknowledges responsibility for the untoward act" (Edelmann, 1994, p. 240). Unfortunately, it may have been the case that parents did not receive an apology because their daughters found it

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difficult to appear embarrassed while also appearing strong, capable, independent, and able to successfully manage their situation.

Numerous studies have indicated that humor is also a common face-saving strategy useful for diffusing a difficult situation, particularly when the situation is considered embarrassing (Cupach & Metts, 1990; Emerson, 1970; Fink & Walker, 1977; Sharkey & Stafford, 1990). Although unwed pregnancy may be perceived as an embarrassing situation (and several unmarried mothers and their parents affirmed that it is), the narratives suggest that humor may not be an effective facework strategy for revealing unwed pregnancy to parents. Not only was humor rarely utilized by unmarried mothers during their disclosure to parents—likely due to perceptions of unequal status between interactants and the seriousness of the event (Fink & Walker, 1977)—more importantly, when implemented it tended not to be well received by parents. The appropriateness of this remedial strategy and whether it can effectively repair lost face hinges on *teamwork* (Goffman, 1959), or the reciprocation of humor; therefore, results suggest that making light of unwed pregnancy tends to exacerbate negative parental reactions and results in further identity threat.

Closely related to humor and a strategy that does, however, have the potential to be successful in repairing face loss is projecting optimism and excitement. To the extent that an unmarried mother's disclosure involved both expressions of happiness (e.g., smiling, laughing, projecting optimism) about her pregnancy and the acknowledgement of the seriousness of the event, such acts helped to reassure her parents that their daughter was indeed going to be OK. However, if her disclosure revolved around a joke or made light of the situation, rather than reducing tension, this strategy may offend her parents and result in negative outcomes.

Individuals tend to treat topics as taboo in order to avoid identity and relational threat (Vangelisti, 1994), so it is not surprising that avoidance restoration strategies were also found in the interviews. According to Greenhalgh (1986), conflicts over values are among the most difficult to resolve. Discussing unmarried pregnancy will most likely touch on a number of values associated with issues such as sex before marriage, cohabitation, and abortion that may be central to a person's belief system (and not easily compromised), so it makes sense that parents and their daughters would tend to avoid bringing up these issues with one another (Rokeach, 1968; Roloff & Ifert, 2000). However, an unmarried mother's avoidance strategies were not always provoked by an attempt to repair her own identity and relational threat. Instead, they were often a result of her parent's refusal to discuss the situation. In other words, knowing that her parent does not wish to talk about issues pertaining to her unwed pregnancy often led to the unmarried mother avoiding the topic of pregnancy with that parent entirely. For example, Hattie explained that every time she tries to bring the topic up to her mother, she "shoots it down right away and says we don't talk about that" (par. 112). She eventually stopped bringing up her abortion because she assumed her mother preferred to forget it ever happened. Perhaps what initially began as the unmarried mother's self-face remedial strategy to repair her own identity threat evolved into an other-face preventative strategy to protect her parent's face or guard against relational damage.

Relationship Between Face Concerns and Facework Strategies

Finally, Research Question 7 inquired about the relationship between an unmarried mother's facework strategies and her face concerns. Ting-Toomey (2005) argues that facework strategies are highly dependent on one's face concerns. Face negotiation theory posits that individuals with self-face concerns will enact strategies that reflect an independent self and

individuals with mutual- or other-face concerns will enact strategies that reflect relational or group connectedness (Ting-Toomey, 2005).

Results suggest that when compared to unmarried mothers with "we-identity" concerns, a higher percentage of unmarried mothers with "I-identity" concerns utilize the following facework strategies: *anticipated parental reactions and formulated responses* (a preventative measure) and *avoidance* (as a remedial measure). When compared to unmarried mothers with "I-identity" concerns, a higher percentage of unmarried mothers with "we-identity" concerns implemented the following strategies: *developed a plan* (preventative), *justified decisions* (remedial), *apologized* (remedial), *and used humor or projected happiness* (remedial). The preventative strategy *talking to and seeking advice from others* was common across narratives, regardless of reported face concerns. Percentages of strategy utilization by orientation group are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Facework Strategy Utilization by Face Orientation Group

Strategy	% of I-Identity Respondents	% of We-identity Respondents
Preventative		
Talking with friend	96	100
Establishing a plan	73	100
Anticipating reactions	61	33
Prepared baby's father	26	50
Restorative		
Justification	70	83
Apology	48	50
Humor	35	50
Avoidance	35	0
Observations	*n* = 24	*n* = 6

Note. Observations do not total 32 because of the miscellaneous category not pertaining to identity concerns

Although some of the facework strategies in this study extend the list presented in Face negotiation theory (e.g., establishing a pregnancy plan), a number of them are fairly common and have been addressed by previous scholars. From their work, relationships between face orientation and strategy usage have been established and are useful for helping to explain the findings presented in this study.

A few studies have linked avoidance strategies to we-identity orientation. For example, Oetzel (1998) found that avoiding/obliging styles are positively associated with interdependent self-construals or we-identity orientation. Oetzel and Ting-Toomey (2003) report similar findings, suggesting that a positive relationship exists between other-face concerns and avoiding conflict tactics. Surprisingly, nearly all of the women utilized this strategy as a preventative measure, regardless of face concern, and the women who also used it as a remedial measure reported a self-face orientation. Ting-Toomey (2005) posits that those with an I-identity priority are more likely to use self-face restorative strategies such as justifications. However, Petronio (1984) concludes that women find excuses more helpful in reducing embarrassment than justifications. Again, findings are surprising because justification was not only the most utilized remedial strategy among the women, but it was also utilized by a higher number of women with we-identity orientation. This is in conflict with Oetzel (1998) and Oetzel and Ting-Toomey (2003), who argue for a positive association between we-identity orientation and avoidance or obliging styles, not justification or assertive styles.

To the extent that the variations in utilization of a particular strategy make a difference in the parent-adult child relationship is difficult to determine in an exploratory study, however, findings suggest that there may be a number of remedial and preventative strategies that are common to situations involving potential stigmatization regardless of where one's face concerns

are oriented. Strategies such as talking with a friend and justifying capability are common in most narratives and seemed to be independent of whether or not the unmarried mother was self- or other-focused. Further, one may also speculate that the underlying reason for the close range in percentages of strategies for the I- and we-identity groups is due to the uniqueness of the family context and the fact that the unmarried mother struggles to find a balance between expressing her inclusion and autonomy needs. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) refer to this occurrence as a *nonantagonist contradiction*, or when an interpenetration of opposed voices occurs within the individual. In other words, just as parents and their daughters may experience opposed voices during an interpersonal conflict, an individual may experience opposed voices intrapersonally. Results point to the occurrence of centrifugal voices of dependence, affection, and connectedness reflected in the unmarried mother's assertion of her independence (Baxter, 2006).

Conclusion

Ting-Toomy (2005) argues that an *independent* and *interdependent self* exists within each individual, regardless of cultural identity (individualistic vs. collectivistic). The independent self emphasizes that the individual is a unique entity with an individuated repertoire of feelings, cognitions, and motivations. The interdependent self, in contrast, emphasizes the importance of relational or in-group connectedness. Depending on the scenario, certain situations may evoke the need for more independent versus interdependent decisions and actions.

Many identity and relational concerns flood the narratives of the unwed mothers. In each story, multiple voices can be heard, supporting the claim that people have both independent and interdependent selves (Baxter, 2006; Ting-Toomey, 2005). However, the overwhelming majority of women with self-face orientation suggests that adult women's revelations of unmarried

pregnancy to their parents may be one situation that evokes more independent-based decisions and actions. Perhaps the uniqueness of the parent-adult child relationship and how social hierarchies are handled in the family can offer explanations for why this may be the case (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2006). The unmarried mother's fears of not being seen by her parents as reliable, competent, autonomous, and moral may trigger her primary concern for self-face protection. However, because she desires inclusion and wants (or needs) her parents' support, she strives to find a balance between expressing how she truly feels while adhering as much as possible to parental expectations.

Although she reports being primarily self-focused, the blend of I-identity and we-identity oriented facework strategies found among the narratives provide support that in addition to her own image, she is also concerned with the face needs of her parents. Also important for consideration are the few women who did not attribute their greatest worry to face concerns at all. Face negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 2005) argues that conflict of any kind is face-threatening and people try to maintain face in all communication situations. However, it may be the case that individuals in distress turn their attention to more practical concerns rather than image-related concerns. Fears about being on their own, not having the financial means to support a child, or how certain lifestyle behaviors may affect pregnancy may be more important than how the news will affect other's opinions of them.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Revealing difficult information to a family member is a delicate venture, laden with choice, strategy, and consequence that can pose significant risks to the health and well-being of those involved if not managed constructively. In order to understand better the conditions that impinge on effective and appropriate revealing of difficult information to family members, this study focused on one type of difficult disclosure: revealing unwed pregnancy to parents. Of primary interest to the investigation were the relationships between an adult unmarried mother's face concerns, her disclosure decisions, and her parents' interpretations of her disclosure behavior. Also of interest was the process through which unmarried mothers made sense of their pregnancy and how their experience shaped their disclosure to their parents. Using Ting-Toomey's (2005) face negotiation theory as a theoretical framework and Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method for data analysis, 32 unmarried mothers and 20 parents ($n = 52$) were asked to "tell their story" to shed light on how family member expectancies shape the sense-making and negotiation of difficult disclosures.

From these interviews, the unmarried mother's six-phase, pregnancy sense-making process was delineated and explanations for why and how she revealed her news to her parents were presented. In this section, I elaborate on several aspects of the unmarried pregnancy story, sketch out recommendations for more and less effective and appropriate ways of revealing unwed pregnancy to parents, and address the limitations of the study and future directions for research.

Major Research Findings

One of the primary objectives of this dissertation was to understand the experience and sense-making process of unwed motherhood. The literature has a great many studies that examine the economic and health outcomes associated with unintended, unmarried pregnancy (Amato & Keith, 1991; Aquiliano, 1996; Havemen et al., 2001; Mosher, Jones, & Abma, 2012; Teachman, 2004; Ventura, 2009) and the factors that affect decision-making regarding abortion, birth, or adoption (Henshaw & Kost, 1992). Less investigated are the events and communication patterns that transpire when one discovers one is pregnant while being unwed and reveals the news to relational others. What events shape an unwed mother's perception of her pregnancy? Who (or what) aids her in her decision to keep or give up her child? How does she gather information, prepare for the conversation with her parents, and deliver the news? The results of this study provide tentative answers to these questions. Rather than reviewing the findings chapter by chapter, the following discussion cuts across chapters.

Making Sense of Unwed Pregnancy

Findings from 32 unmarried mother narratives yield six phases of unmarried pregnancy sense making: (a) *learning about the pregnancy* (pregnancy symptoms, denial/acknowledgement of pregnancy, pregnancy testing); (b) *reaction to pregnancy confirmation* (stress response, consideration of options, first revelation of pregnancy); (c) *concealment and isolation from parents* (narrowing down of options, preparation for the conversation with parents); (d) *disclosure enactment* (how and when news is revealed); (e) *relational strain and identity transformation* (changes in parent and friend relationships, embodiment of motherhood); and (f) *adjustment and new normalcy* (alleviation of relationship strain, changes in disclosure patterns and role perceptions). Each phase provides a closer look at the *turning points* (Baxter & Bullis,

1986) over the course of unwed pregnancy and highlights how each phase has its own available choices (e.g., whether or not to continue with pregnancy, to whom to reveal, timing of disclosure) and personal and relational struggles (e.g., relationship changes, role sense-making, and identity transformation) that result from being an unmarried mother. Perhaps most important is how the sense-making process is shaped by the degree of social embarrassment or reputational threat she perceives as a result of her unwed pregnancy, which warrants further discussion.

Unwed pregnancy stigma. Whether or not unmarried pregnancy is a stigmatizing event in today's society is a point of contention in the literature. As family formation patterns change and rates of non-marital births continue to rise (Martin et al., 2011), researchers now argue that sex outside of marriage and cohabitation are the norm (Syltevik, 2010; Thornton, Axinn, & Xie, 2007), and women may no longer feel obligated to marry before or as a result of becoming pregnant (Solomon-Fears, 2008). Popular news articles and social media outlets pervade the Internet claiming "single motherhood carries little stigma today" (Nelson, 2010, par. 1). A contrasting body of literature, however, uncovers a public with largely unfavorable attitudes towards unmarried pregnancy, claiming that societal attitudes vary for different demographic groups (Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Kaplan, 1997; Pew Research Center, 2010): it is generally the case that older generations and those who are white, religious, and/or politically conservative are more likely to find unwed pregnancy unacceptable (Taylor et al., 2007). It is precisely this generational difference that is highlighted by the findings of this study and offers support for why revealing unmarried pregnancy to parents can be a stigmatizing event and difficult for families to manage.

Required for participation in the current study was the criterion that the unmarried mother perceived the disclosure of her unwed pregnancy to her parents as "a difficult conversation." The

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literature offers various interpretations of what characterizes a conversation as "difficult," distinguishing it from other types of conversations. Difficult news has been defined as any information that "produces a negative alteration to a person's expectations" (Buckman, 1984), or "results in a cognitive, behavioral or emotional deficit in the person receiving the news" (Ptacek & Eberhardt, 1996). Other researchers, defining the term more broadly, have deemed it any potentially face-threatening communicative act (Wagoner & Waldron, 1999). The narratives of the unmarried mothers, however, suggest that what characterizes her disclosure of her pregnancy to her parents as "difficult" is primarily identity related and stems from her fear of parental disappointment. Emerging from the narratives were intense feelings of nervousness, worry, and even fear regarding the negative impact her news could have on her parents' opinion of her. Not one of the unmarried mothers reported feeling "little nervousness" or "not nervous at all" about her disclosure. Such feelings are not surprising or unfounded given that research continues to uncover a largely disapproving public regarding unmarried pregnancy or the self-selection of subjects for this research (i.e., unwed mothers perceived their parents as fitting the mold of a disapproving public).

Concerns of the unwed mother. Although research studies support the conclusion that maternal worries are common to all new mothers (Huizink et al., 2004; Petersen et al., 2009), the concerns of the unmarried mothers in this study diverged from what has been documented about her married counterparts. Worries about the birthing process, pregnancy complications, coping with a new baby, going to the hospital, preterm delivery, having a child with a disability, and concern about one's appearance, which are common among married new mothers (Huizink et al., 2004; Petersen et al., 2009), were not at the forefront of the unmarried mother's mind. Instead, her primary worries were fueled by negative perceptions—those she had of herself and those she

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presumed others had of her—regarding what it means to be a woman who is unmarried and pregnant, and who deviates from society's prescription of "proper" family formation (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999).

For the 32 women in this study, unwed pregnancy was a transitional period of not only great physiological changes related to the pregnancy itself, but also of psychological and relational changes related to their single status and perceptions that their pregnancy carried a mark of shame (Herek & Glunt, 1988). They were overwhelmed by feelings of shock, surprise, disbelief, fright, panic, and even devastation at the discovery of their pregnancy. They felt stressed and ill prepared for motherhood. They were disappointed in themselves and angry about their situation because no matter which decision was made (to keep the child or not), their life was never going to be the same. They had become "the girl their parents had always warned them about" (Sherrie, par. 57).

The thought of revealing their information to their parents spurred a number of relational and self-image concerns (see Chapter 6). Their perceptions of themselves were changing in dramatic ways and they feared how their news would change their parents' perceptions of them as well. Their greatest worries were primarily identity-related because the news they had to share was perceived as negative and revolved around the possibility that their parents would be disappointed in them. Their struggle to negotiate their young adult status with perceptions of status inequity with their parents (i.e., parents possessing more power) became evident as they expressed the need for their parents to acknowledge their independence, self-sufficiency, reliability, and moral uprightness, but feared no longer being the "favorite child" (Evelyn, par. 36), "the good kid" (Kathleen, par. 72), or "daddy's little girl" (Dana, par. 17).

Unmarried mothers' facework strategies. Knowing that their parents did not condone unwed pregnancy, the unmarried women attempted to take sole responsibility for their actions and went to great lengths to prepare for the conversation with their parents and present an image that would guard against self-face threat. Although it is natural for people to hold self-serving biases to protect themselves against indictment (de Dreu, Natua, & van de Vliert, 1995), their disclosures, according to the parent interviews, also tended to meet their parents' expectations. Seeking advice from a confidant, establishing a plan for the future, confirming pregnancy with a doctor, anticipating parental concerns, preparing a partner for what to expect, and bringing up situations that presented the couple or partner in a favorable light, were all proactive strategies initially implemented for purposes of presenting the unmarried mother's desired image—an image that reflected an autonomous, capable, reliable, morally upright adult unwed mother—but also helped her enter the conversation with her parents mindfully. Mindful behaviors (i.e., preventative facework strategies) not only allowed the unmarried mothers to present their desired image, but also afforded them a greater understanding of their situation and the ability to predict their parents' reactions to the news (Canary & Lakey, 2006).

The strategic effort put forth by unmarried mothers, and their tendency to meet their parents' expectations, provides support for the claim that conflict can be managed in ways that bring about positive outcomes for all parties (Canary & Lakey, 2006; Langer, 1989a, 1989b; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001), people have the power to change paths of conflict, and active processing of information helps people gain new information and new options (Langer, 1989a, 1989b). Thinking mindfully about what to do beforehand and engaging in the facework strategies listed above enabled the unmarried mothers to explore options beyond their first response and to adapt their behavior to the expectations of the situation successfully (e.g., implement restorative

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strategies in the moment to repair face loss). In fact, strategies involving the anticipation of negative reactions to conflict—a common preventative strategy found in the narratives—have been found to limit such reactions (Zillman, 1993). Therefore, it appears that the unmarried mother's consideration of how her parents would likely respond under different conditions (e.g., face to face or via text message) enabled her to exercise *episode control* (Canary & Lakey, 2006) and make informed decisions regarding where, when, and how to disclose to her parents that may have limited their negative reactions (see Chapter 5).

Further, it may also be the case that the act of selecting a particular circumstance for the disclosure to occur (e.g., limiting the audience, directing the conversation, revealing in-person) is what encouraged the unmarried mother to follow through with her disclosure to her parents. As Petronio et al. (1996) argue, when people are able to deliberately arrange their own disclosure situation (as is often the case in preplanned disclosures like unwed pregnancy), they are afforded a sense of normalcy and mastery over their privacy boundary, thus limiting their perceptions of disclosure risk.

In addition to the unmarried mothers' strategic efforts, explaining successful disclosure enactment also needs to consider the uniqueness of the family context and the level of familiarity that is common between parents and their children (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2006). Although the women initially said that they did not know how to tell their parents and felt uncertain of how their parents would react, they also said that their parents responded in ways they expected and that they were quite successful in portraying the image they intended. They misjudged their ability to predict parental reactions and create a disclosure scenario that met their parents' expectations. As one parent pointed out, "If you want to be

honest about it, you can probably predict how [we] are gonna react and how you should tell [us]. I mean, you have known [us] for quite some time!" (Leah, par. 103).

Leah's comment speaks to a defining feature of family communication. Family members establish *intersubjectivity*, or a shared social reality, which allows them to interpret family member behavior and predict how other family members will likely interpret their own behavior (McLeod & Chaffee, 1972). Often this results in family members assigning similar meanings to behaviors, which findings suggest tends to be common when revealing unwed pregnancy to parents. For example, both parents and their daughters expressed similar opinions about the preference for an in-person disclosure of unwed pregnancy (i.e., revealing in person was considered more personable, respectful, and mature). However, intersubjectivity is not flawless and consists of an element of uncertainty and idiosyncrasy. Members can never hold identical social realities because social reality is influenced by each member's unique experiences and beliefs (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2006). As such, when a person experiences a change in circumstance (e.g., becomes unexpectedly pregnant), the distress and uncertainty she or he experiences may trigger a new set of disclosure rules, perhaps resulting in that individual revealing in ways that are, for her or him or the family, atypical or idiosyncratic (Carpenter, 1987; Coates & Winston, 1987; Stiles, 1987). People in psychological distress (whether the discloser of difficult news or the recipient) may become so preoccupied with their own circumstance that it becomes difficult for them to view their situation objectively and from the other person's point of view (Stiles, 1987). This helps to explain why some disclosures to parents resulted in a violation of the parents' expectations (e.g., a parent who expects an apology but the daughter does not offer one), and why some women may decide to conceal their unwed pregnancy for a long period of time.

Unwed pregnancy concealment. Although Chapter 4 discusses the implications of concealment on the parent-child relationship (e.g., revealing late can lead to a parent's resentment), the literature has much to contribute regarding the implications of concealed pregnancy that are relevant to family communication research and important to note. Most alarming about the *concealment from parents phase* of the unwed pregnancy sense-making process are the possible risks it poses for the mother and her child. Such risks warrant family communication researchers to examine more closely how the disclosure to parents can be managed more effectively.

Concealment results in a great deal of psychological discomfort, which has been linked to various negative outcomes, such as low infant birth weight, preterm delivery, and neonatal death and risk of maternal mortality (Geary et al., 1997; Treacy et al., 2002). Women who conceal their pregnancy are more likely not to receive adequate prenatal care or adapt to lifestyle changes appropriate for a pregnant woman (e.g., healthy eating regime, stop smoking or drinking, avoid strenuous physical work) in an effort to keep the pregnancy a secret (Conlon, 2006; Treacy et al., 2002; Wessel et al., 2003). Concealing pregnancy also results in the unmarried mother cutting herself off from the help and advice from relational others. Evidence for all of these concealment implications are supported by the findings of this study. When taking into account that many unwed mothers are indeed ill prepared for motherhood (Singh et al., 2010), and family and friends are an important and consistent source of information throughout pregnancy (Clarke et al., 2004), not having a supportive network to offer advice can be dangerous to the physical health and emotional well-being of the unwed mother. Therefore, if concealing pregnancy results in a number of negative relational and health implications for everyone involved, family

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communication researchers are tasked with determining disclosure strategies that can aid an unmarried mother in her disclosure to her parents.

Suggestions for Revealing Unwed Pregnancy to Parents

Results of this investigation, regarding how the disclosure to parents should be delivered and how parents are likely to interpret certain disclosure choices, provide the basis for tentative suggestions for the disclosure of unwed pregnancy to parents. Therefore, in order to understand the process of revealing pregnancy to parents more fully, the findings presented in Chapters 4-6 must be taken together. For example, examining a disclosure strategy in isolation and discovering that it is implemented more often than another strategy, does not mean that it is the best or preferred strategy. It is important to consider what the unwed mother wanted to achieve from the conversation having chosen that strategy, as well as how it was perceived by her parent during the interaction. Careful assessment of the narratives reveals several disclosure enactment features that seemed to satisfy the conversational needs of both the unwed mother and her parents, which are reviewed here. They serve as conversation guidelines, or suggestions for things to consider when disclosing unwed pregnancy to parents.

Disclosure Mode

The strongest opinions regarding the best way to reveal unwed pregnancy news to parents involved the channel via which the information should be shared. Although leaner channels may have a greater appeal for delivering negative or embarrassing news (Feaster, 2010; O'Sullivan, 2000; Suler, 2004; Sussman & Sproull, 1999), in general, both daughters and parents felt that a private, in-person encounter was most appropriate given the sensitivity of the information. The privacy of one's home allowed parents and their daughter the environment in which they could strategically regulate information that is known and unknown (Brown &

Rogers, 1991), and express their thoughts and emotions effectively and openly. Although the daughter's decision to disclose the news in person was most often a deliberate attempt to perform preplanned nonverbal and verbal behaviors to control the situation in her favor, it was perceived by her parents as a courageous act, one that demonstrated respect and concern for their feelings, and afforded them physical involvement (the ability to touch their child was a characteristic that was deemed important by parents). Viewing the selection of an in-person disclosure with a self-serving bias is natural (de Dreu et al., 1995), but one that nonetheless seemed to work for both parents and their daughters in this instance.

Although disclosing unwed pregnancy in person may be preferred by many of the participants in this study, this is not to say that other channels used to disclose are ineffective or inappropriate. There are some instances in which a face-to-face encounter is simply not possible, not needed, or should be avoided. If a daughter lives too far away from her parents, fears for her safety, wishes to filter anticipated volatile parental reactions, or does not wish to be completely truthful or meet her parent's expectations, revealing in a private, face-to-face setting could be counterproductive or even dangerous (Barnes, 2003; DePaulo, 1992; Guerrero & Floyd, 2006; O'Sullivan, 2000; Suler, 2004; Surinder & Cooper, 2003; Weisbuch et al., 2010). It may also be the case that an in-person meeting simply is not necessary because that is not the way family members typically communicate with one another. In fact, a few participants (both unwed mothers and parents) were completely satisfied with the news of unwed pregnancy delivered via text message. One parent attributed the mediated channel as the reason for her daughter's openness and honesty. This parent explained that texting was the primary way that she communicates with her children and did not see why this instance would be handled differently.

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One may conclude from these findings that although face-to-face disclosures of unwed pregnancy may be more common across families and rich contexts for interaction tend to be preferred, mediated channels and technologies are not necessarily inappropriate or "ill suited" for the disclosure of unwed pregnancy to parents as early studies suggest (Short et al., 1976). Rather, what is most important, and therefore recommended, is that the unmarried mother deliver her news via a channel that is typical of how her family communicates.

Disclosure Timing

Research indicates that when individuals receive upsetting or unwanted news, they are likely to disclose to loved ones relatively soon (Greene et al., 2003), which explains why most disclosures to parents occurred within the first week of their pregnancy discovery. Although results of this study cannot offer a "best" time for revealing the news, they do highlight a number of risks and benefits that can result from concealing unwed pregnancy, of which salience can be assigned by the discloser.

Findings suggest that concealing pregnancy allows the unwed mother time to process her own feelings about her situation, gather information about available pregnancy alternatives, make informed decisions about her pregnancy outcome, obtain pregnancy confirmation from a doctor, and develop a plan for her future that seems feasible. Parents also preferred not to be told right away and responded favorably when their daughter's disclosure reflected mindful consideration of her situation. However, the implications of revealing too late in conjunction with the documented health risks associated with pregnancy concealment (see Conlon, 2006 for a review) argue in favor of early, planned, unwed pregnancy disclosures. To capitalize on the benefits of concealing pregnancy, the unmarried mother must avoid letting too much time go by.

According to both parents and their daughters, the worst thing an unmarried mother can do is to isolate herself, not disclose her news to anyone, and "go through this whole thing alone" (Sonia, par. 69). This is supported by the literature, which argues that success in all areas (from pregnancy to childrearing) is increased when the mother has a strong network of healthy relationships with friends and family (Elsenbruch et al., 2007; Feldman et al., 2000; Franco & Levitt, 1998; Van Hulst et al., 2011). In every story, the need to disclose and obtain emotional, informational, and tangible support from others was evident. Concealing the news seemed to put additional stress on an already vulnerable unmarried mother. Revealing, therefore, was not only a "talking cure" and relieved the burden associated with concealing (Stiles, 1987), but it opened up the possibility that the unwed mother could receive the type of support (e.g., informational, emotional, financial) she needed from her parents.

Parents also advocated for early disclosures so that they could begin processing the situation for themselves. In cases where trust was broken or feelings hurt, early disclosures allowed more time for the parents and their pregnant daughter to "rebuild the relationship" (Charlotte, par. 91) before the baby came. However, as the literature suggests, more time is not always advantageous. Studies have also shown that late disclosures can be beneficial because they limit interactions and do not allow for the processing of the disclosure (Greene et al., 2003). One mother explained that by the time her daughter told her, she was six months pregnant and there was no time to be upset—"we just jumped right into the process of getting her set up for when the baby was born!" (Sybil, par. 49).

Finally, delayed disclosures resulted in delayed *communal coping*, that is, family members coping with the situation together (Lyons, Mickelson, Sullivan, & Coyne, 1998). As Dana explained, "it kind of puts you back on an even playing field" where family members are

"going through the same thing at the same time" (Dana, par. 132). Communal coping implies that coping strategies will be enacted by the family as a whole, rather than by just one person (Lyons et al., 1998). It was the case for several women that by the time they revealed their news to their parents, they had already begun processing their situation and were excited about their new role as a mother. Communicating their excitement to their parents was not well received by parents to whom the news was not exciting. Essentially, concealing pregnancy functions as a stymie, delaying a parent's processing of the news (because processing has not yet begun). Once the disclosure occurs, however, the family has the opportunity to begin effectively addressing the situation together.

What may be gathered from the results above is that the "best" time for revealing unmarried pregnancy to one's parents varies from family to family. However, the benefits of social support and the consequences of concealing pregnancy for the unmarried mother are clear—should she find herself in a situation where she is not able (for whatever reason) to reveal her pregnancy news to her parents, it is recommended that she reveal to other network supporters or seek out professional services that can provide her with the resources (emotional, informational, or material) she needs. It is also recommended that before revealing her news to her parents, she take enough time to process her own feelings, consider her parents' reactions, and establish a tentative plan for her future. Disclosures of potentially stigmatizing information like unwed pregnancy that are planned and delivered early tend to maximize privacy regulation (Petronio, 2002), enable episode control that can help limit others' negative reactions (Zillman, 1993), and facilitate communal coping (Lyons et al., 1998).

Presence of Others

Both unwed mothers and their parents gave great consideration to whether or not a third party should be present at the disclosure. Although third-party mediation has been fairly effective in helping people negotiate difficult disclosures (Donohue, 2006), and one family did consider involving their pastor out of fear for how the unwed women's father might react to the news, there is a common perception among participants that revealing unwed pregnancy is a "private family matter" (Lola, par. 5). Perhaps this is because the family is often viewed as a protective environment in which members can test out their ideas, attitudes, beliefs, and positions before revealing them to the public (Berardo, 1974; Burgoon, 1982).

Only sisters and unwed fathers participated in the disclosure with the unmarried mother and her parents. The fact that no brothers were involved in the conversation with their parents is predictable: among sibling pairs, sisters report greater closeness, exchange more advice, and have more intimate disclosures (Rocca et al., 2010; Spitze & Trent, 2006; Tucker et al., 1997). Having sisters present when the disclosure was made had several benefits: they provided the unmarried mother with psychological support that at least one family member was on her side, and they helped initiate and/or facilitate the conversation with parents. Parents did not seem to mind if a sibling was involved in the disclosure; however, they did report being in favor of a sibling's presence if it made their daughter feel supported.

Parents did, however, express strong opinions about the presence of the baby's father. Although it is known that the relationship between the unwed father and mother is a critical factor in predicting paternal involvement (see Johnson, 2001 for a review), it may also be the case that his relationship status with the unwed mother's parents is (and should be) predictive of his presence at the disclosure.

Results suggest that the male partner's desired level of involvement and his relationship with the unwed mother's parents are both factors to consider when deciding whether or not he should attend the disclosure to her parents. A male partner who wants to be highly involved and has good relations with her parents is more likely to be wanted at the disclosure by her parents than a male partner who does not want to be involved or does not have a good relationship with her parents. Parents appreciated seeing their daughter supported and were reassured that she may not have to approach pregnancy alone. However, parents were also put in a position where they were required to respond to the pregnancy news spontaneously. They wanted the opportunity to express their emotions freely and often found the unwed father's presence to be restrictive, not allowing them to respond in the way they felt they needed. To the extent that the parent's reactions were negative, perhaps restriction was precisely what the unmarried mother had in mind.

This discussion indicates that family disclosure boundaries surrounding unwed pregnancy tend to be tightly held, and access may be granted to non-family members (e.g., the unwed father or a third-party mediator) only under certain conditions (e.g., fear of volatile parental reactions or a partner's desire to be involved). Due to the complexity of family disclosure boundaries and the fact that children learn privacy and disclosure rules from their parents (Petronio, 2002), it is recommended that the unmarried mother consider her own family's privacy rules when determining if non-family members, like the unwed father, should participate in her pregnancy disclosure. How sensitive information has been disclosed among family members in the past may provide her with additional insight regarding whether or not it is considered appropriate to involve others in her disclosure.

Content of Disclosure

The unmarried mother's goal in her disclosure to her parents was to inform them of her pregnancy, delineate her plan for the future, and uphold a favorable image. It was a cathartic event to the extent that it relieved the burden of concealment; however, the conversation often lacked breadth and depth of information and centered on general or logistical concerns, such as what the unmarried mother planned to do about her pregnancy or if her insurance would cover her. The surface-level content may speak to the unwed mother's ability to determine what is appropriate to reveal upfront, as well as her parents' acknowledgment of her adult status and right to regulate certain information (O'Connor et al., 1996).

The conversational approach taken by the unmarried mothers highlights their negotiation of needs for both autonomy and interconnectedness, or their independent and interdependent self (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Most of the unmarried mothers were primarily concerned with image and/or relational threats (fearing parental disappointment or relationship damage), so their disclosures tended to reflect both competitive and cooperative behaviors. They communicated in ways that created boundaries, established their authority, and presented themselves as capable, confident adult woman, but also offered apologies, expressed remorse when necessary, and appeared largely receptive of their parent's advice.

The combination of competitive and cooperative behaviors during the disclosure also seemed to appease their parents. Parents wanted their daughters to be both autonomous and dependent, and emotional and vulnerable while also in control—an interesting feature of the parent-adult child relationship, which captures the term "adult child" well. As Chapter 4 explains, disclosing unmarried pregnancy is a turning point for parents and their children, a time

when the child moves from child to adult, which may explain why unmarried mothers portray (and parents want to see) a blend of these two identities in the disclosure.

Most research indicates that cooperative behaviors are positively associated with relational satisfaction, while competitive messages are considered inappropriate and ineffective (Canary, Cupach, & Serpe, 2001). However, it appears that Fincham and Beach's (1999) speculation that a curvilinear relationship exists between competitiveness and relational satisfaction, or that too little or too much competitiveness leads to poorer outcomes, may be correct—at least in this instance. Findings suggest that successful disclosures of unwed pregnancy consist of a combination of cooperative and competitive behaviors expressing both autonomy and interconnectedness. The overwhelming majority of women in this study had a self-face orientation, which suggests that adult women's revelations of unmarried pregnancy to their parents may be one situation that evokes more independent-based decisions and actions. It is therefore recommended that unmarried mothers enact behaviors that acknowledge family values and demonstrate concern for their parents in their assertions of their independence.

Implications of Research

Given the needs and concerns of families who experience unwed pregnancy, there are several ways in which the current research can be used. It is necessary to frame the limits of the study and explore avenues for future research, while highlighting the practical implications for unmarried mothers, parents of unwed parents, mental health professionals and interpersonal communication researchers.

Limitations of the Study

Restricted scope. Generalizations from this research—much like all research—are limited by the inclusion and exclusion criteria used to select subjects. Participants in this study

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self-selected and were required to be (a) female, between the ages of 19 and 35; (b) unmarried, at least 18 years old at the time of her pregnancy discovery; (c) the disclosure to parents must have already taken place; and (d) no more than 5 years have past since their revelation to their parents. All pregnancies were unintentional and the conversation with parents was considered a "difficult conversation." The findings presented in this dissertation are based on a sample of U.S. women who met the restricted criteria and were willing to participate. Results may be different for unmarried mothers who refused to participate or did not meet particular criteria. Suggestions for best practices for reveal pregnancy to parents may be most useful to other unmarried mothers who reflect similar demographics and familial characteristics.

Although this study targets a particular group of unmarried mothers, the composition of the sample is useful because it forces us to view unwed pregnancy from the perspective of families for whom this experience is less common and perceived as particularly difficult or problematic. It forces us to move away from prescribed forms of identity of the "typical" unwed mother who is young, less educated, of lower socioeconomic status, Black or Hispanic, and responsible for a myriad of social problems such as unemployment, poor health, school drop-out rates, and increased juvenile crime (Perry, 1995; Shattuck & Kreider, 2013). Instead, this study reminds us that unwed pregnancy is not limited to a particular race, age, religion, or socioeconomic status, nor is it limited to a particular set of identity or behavioral concerns. To suggest that it is collapses the uniqueness and complexity of this experience and makes it appear as if a "one size fits all" best practices schema for navigating unwed pregnancy is possible.

It is also important to consider (a) the recruitment strategy for obtaining parent volunteers, and (b) that many of the parents of unmarried mothers were not interviewed. Because parent were recruited via snowball sampling and asked to take part in the study by their

daughters, they composed a limited and potentially biased sample. Obtaining parent volunteers relied on a parent-child relationship (i.e., that the pregnant woman's relationship with her parent was good enough to refer him/her to the study). The results presented may be different for parents who refused to participate. For example, one may speculate that a parent who refuses to participate feels guilty or embarrassed about some aspect of his/her reaction to the news and wants to protect her/his own face by keeping that information private. It may also be the case that a parent who refuses to participate no longer has a relationship with his or her daughter due to this experience. However, because parents of unwed mothers are a difficult population to reach (which is supported by the parents of 14 families who refused participate), using the unmarried mothers as an aid to obtain parent volunteers was a helpful strategy.

The literature surrounding talk about unwed pregnancy would benefit from studies that were able to contribute more parent perspectives as well as insight into why parents may be so reluctant to participate in interviews. Although all 32 mothers said that their parents "would be happy to participate" and "would love the opportunity to share their side of the study," only 20 parents opted in when approached by their daughters. In fact, when I first revealed the focus of this research to my own parents, my mother seemed skeptical that I would be able to get any parent participants to talk to me at all. Because her generation grew up during a time when unwed pregnancy was less common and accepted (Taylor, Funk, & Clark, 2007), she felt that parents would be too embarrassed to share their story with me. Other parents reflected similar sentiments in their interviews fearing judgment from others regarding their reaction to the news and their ability to be a good parent. For example, Miriam was reluctant to share her story with me because she "let anger take control her" and felt guilty for rejecting her child upon first learning of the news. When I asked Sadie to describe how she felt sharing her story with me, she

explained that she never would have done it if her daughter did not tell her I was "okay" and "could be trusted." She continued,

> You have to think about our age group. We were raised under a different set of standards, and you are asking me to talk about something that's embarrassing and I carry shame with. It's a reflection of us as a parent. I hope you don't need a large sample size, otherwise you are gonna be doing this study for a minute!" (Sadie, par. 131).

The fear of revealing the news to a family member of an older generation did not stop with the parent of the unwed women. In the parent narratives, I found support that they were also nervous to reveal their daughter's pregnancy news to their own parent. Due to this embarrassment, future researchers may want to consider alternative ways that older generational members (who grew up during a time when unwed pregnancy was rarer and more stigmatized) can contribute their narratives. For example, mediated channels such as email or pen and paper may provide parents with the anonymity they need to feel comfortable telling their story. Further, a few parents mentioned a desire to talk to other parents who were in similar situations. An anonymous online forum set up for parents of unwed daughters may also be one avenue that generates more insight into the parent perspective.

Up until this point, parent interviews have been discussed in terms of their limitations. Although limited in quantity since some parents opted out, one of the strengths of this study is that in many circumstances both unwed mothers and their parent(s) were interviewed. There is much to be gained from obtaining multiple accounts of the same interaction, particularly those that are generationally defined. First, sense making occurs between people, so observances from various points of view provide a more complex and problematized notion of the encounter. When viewed together multiple accounts can point to discrepancies in the narratives that can lead

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to interpersonal conflict and distress (Kellas, Willer, & Kranstuber, 2011). For example, one discrepancy refers to the unmarried mother's facework strategy of expressing happiness and excitement about her pregnancy. It was a strategy intended to generate excitement and happiness in her parent; however, data from the parent narratives revealed that this strategy tended to be negatively received and was interpreted as a lack of seriousness on the pregnant woman's behalf. Another identified discrepancy pertains to the unmarried mother's attempt to take responsibility for her situation. Although her intention was to prevent her parent from feeling burdened by her pregnancy, her parents interpreted her behavior as not recognizing that her pregnancy would affect other family members as well. From a methodological standpoint, obtaining multiple narratives is beneficial for verifying one person's account of the encounter with another, which adds validity to findings (Weber, Harvey, & Stanley, 1987). From an applied perspective, multiple accounts identify perceptual differences, which can aid communication researchers and mental health professionals identify strategies that can avoid them.

Second, this study brings together multiple perspectives that critique and expose contested discourses surrounding what it means to be unwed and pregnant and the social constructions that influence individual behavior. The media often debate whether or not unmarried pregnancy is socially stigmatized today (e.g., Nelson, 2010). This either/or scenario presents an artificial range of choices suggesting that there are only two possible alternatives (i.e., it either is or is not stigmatized) and one choice is clearly more accurate. Findings suggest, however, that both choices are correct—unwed pregnancy is both stigmatized (typically from older, more conservative populations) and endorsed (typically from younger, less conservative populations). Therefore, a new discourse should be ignited focusing on how identity work and the experiences of the unwed mother are implicated as a result of the pregnancy occurring during

a time when traditional pathways to parenthood are being challenged and the prescribed identity of the single mother is destabilized. I address this further in a later section (see Directions for Future Research) and argue that during times of social change, identity becomes more difficult to manage due to the varied responses with which our behavior may be met.

      Memory and recall. Another limitation pertains to the retention interval between the time of the event and the time of the interview and memory effects. There is debate among researchers about narrative truth and how the passage of time influences memory and recall. Some researchers argue that the greater the emotional impact, the less likely one is to forget it (Cannell, Miller, & Oksenberg, 1981; Neter & Waksberg, 1964; Sudman & Bradburn, 1973). Cubelli and Della Sala (2013), on the other hand, argue that "flashbulb memories" are just like other events: they are not remembered well. Still other researchers have argued that the longer the interval between the time of the event and the time of the interview, the less likely one will remember it (Gillund & Shiffrin, 1984).

      Although the retention interval spanned up to five years since the disclosure to their parents occurred, the criterion for inclusion was based on whether or not the women reported feeling "close in time" to the event. In fact, when asked this question, the participants explained that because this event was such an emotional event for them, it did not matter how much time had gone by—they were "never going to forget it." Although it is possible that participants may have forgotten aspects of their experience, as in any study that requires participant recall, a study truly invested in the perspectives of the participants must afford agency to the participants and allow them to determine whether or not they can recall their experience. In addition, the focus of this study was on sense making, where the understanding and interpretation of the narratives was deemed more important than an accurate depiction of reality. In other words, narrative truth

becomes pragmatic truth (Bochner, 2002), important to the extent that it reveals the reality and meaning for the individuals telling the story (Kellas et al., 2011).

The question remains, however, if the stories of the unwed mothers and parents will change over time. How dynamic are their stories and if they do change, how do they change? Does a story that ultimately results in a positive outcome eventually get rewritten to reflect a more positive past? The fact that many women reported a negative past in lieu of a positive outcome suggests that they are not rewriting their story to match the present. However, an interesting line of research examining collective remembering as it pertains to historical context would argue that they are not rewriting their past *yet*. In one study examining men's wartime experience, Gimbel (1992) found that individuals may alter their memories in order to present a consistent story with current attitudes—a positive change in one's story is related to a positive current evaluation of the event. Another study, by Liu and colleagues (2009), asked students across 12 countries a series of open-ended items to assess representations of world history (e.g., "If you were to give a seminar on world history, what 7 events would you teach as the most important and how positively or negatively do you regard each one?"). Findings from both studies suggest that an individual's memory changes as the historical context changes. In other words, not only does the past weigh on the present, but the present weighs on the past (Gimbel, 1992; Liu & Hilton, 2005). Therefore, it is worthwhile to point to the usefulness of long-term retrospective data and consider if the unwed mother's narratives will change as society's definition of family and marriage change.

Directions for Future Research

Identity management during times of change. There is little doubt that current societal attitudes surrounding unwed pregnancy are more accepting than in decades past. One may

question, then, the importance of pursuing studies focused on unwed pregnancy identity work. If relational definitions and sequencing and timing norms are shifting, one might assume that unwed women report less fear of stigmatization, fewer identity concerns, and find it easier to manage their identity. Unfortunately, it appears that the opposite may be true.

Currently, unmarried mothers are likely to encounter a number of varied responses to their news of pregnancy: people who criticize their behavior, others who are excited, and still others who fall somewhere in between. The uncertainty tied to which response they will encounter, confounded by conflicting internal messages regarding how they should feel about their own situation, seems to complicate their identity management efforts. As norms are challenged and more options are presented to the unmarried mother, it becomes important to understand how societal attitudes in flux implicate her ability to manage her desired identity. Future researchers would do well to examine a number of identity threats during moments of social change; it is when traditional points of connection fade and people no longer fit neatly within prescribed categories that the options available to them become varied, resulting in greater uncertainty with respect to how identity "should" be managed. It appears that the difficulty in decision-making may be exacerbated during times of social change, and individuals may need the most assistance.

Unwed fathers. A focus on eradicating the stigma of unwed motherhood often comes at the expense of overlooking the expectant father and a lack of understanding regarding his role in the pregnancy process (Alio et al., 2011). This is in light of recent findings from the Census Bureau that report a nine-fold increase in the number of single-father households since 1960, and a Pew Research survey that deems fathers as important for caregiving (not only financial) purposes (Livingston, 2013; Pew Research, 2013). Women with limited paternal support tend to

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have increased risk of preterm birth, low infant birth weight, and infant mortality, as well as increased risk for fetal growth restriction (Ghosh, Wilhelm, Dunkel-Schetter, Lombardi, & Ritz, 2009; Misra, Caldwell, Young, & Abelson, 2010). Essentially, at paternal support may mitigate the effects of stress on pregnant women that result in poorer birth outcomes. For this reason, researchers such as Alio and colleagues (2011) have called for equal consideration to be given to the paternal role during data collection processes.

Results of this study support the call for more research on the communication between the expecting unwed father and his pregnant partner. and the significant impact he has on her pregnancy decision-making—most notably in this study, his ability to change her mind regarding whether or not to keep the child. Out of the 32 women that participated in this study, half sought out the unwed father first for emotional and practical support to aid them in coping with their situation. According to Webb and Dickson (2012), two primary pillars of effective coping with a difficult situation include: *making sense of the situation* and *expanded disclosure with relational others*—both of which the unwed father plays a key role.

Future of unwed pregnancy. As the number of non-marital births continues to rise (Ventura, 2009), more research will be needed on non-marital pregnancy. Since attitudes towards unmarried pregnancy appear to be generationally influenced, one might wonder if the problem of intolerance will cease to exist with the increasing age of unwed mothers. Many scholars seem skeptical since morality is not the only reason why unwed childbearing is so greatly criticized. In addition to marriage conceptualized as a social, moral, or religious institution, marriage is also an economic institution, a "powerful creator of human and social capita" (Scafidi, 2008, p. 2). According to a report from the Institute for American Values, the public cost of family fragmentation (i.e., divorce and unwed childbearing) is substantial—costing U.S. taxpayers over

$112 billion annually (Scafidi, 2008). However, studies tend to oversimplify the situation by adopting the causal assumption that costs to society stem from family structure and the effects that unwed childbearing has on poverty. Although this assumption has been well documented and accepted, a distinction needs to be made between non-marital births that are unplanned and those that are planned (Finer & Henshaw, 2007; Huang, 2005; Musick, 2002) as well as those that are born to single mothers parenting alone and those who are rooted in supportive families and communities. Although two-thirds of non-marital births are unintended (Zolna & Lindberg, 2013), which may account for why a majority of the literature focuses on unintentional unmarried births, the literature would also benefit from research that examines women who plan their non-marital pregnancy and find themselves among supportive networks. If a central argument against adult unwed childbearing is an economic one, isn't it the case that two people in a committed relationship or a single mother with supportive family members help her compensate for financial deficiency? Perhaps rather than focusing our attention solely on family structure, we should focus our research method and supportive interventions on the status of the unwed mother's family and friendship relations and the degree to which she is connected to community, such as her neighborhood and religious affiliation.

Studies focused on the familial implications of unintentional unwed pregnancy, such as the current one, may offer practical recommendations to families who find moral fault in out-of-wedlock childbearing. However, those studies, including this one, may reinforce "matrimonia," or the glorification of marriage (DePaulo, 2006), enshrine the nuclear family, and suggest that there is something inherently wrong with single motherhood. Such studies inextricably link motherhood to marital status (or coupling), positioning patriarchy as the crux of understanding family development and interpersonal interactions surrounding pregnancy. Even the term

"unwed" pregnancy contributes to singlism (i.e., the marginalization and stigmatization of single people), imposes a view of life transitions, interests, and pursuits (like raising children) via the guise of matrimony. This perspective is misguided given that Americans are spending more of their adult years unmarried than married, and there are fewer American households comprised of married parents and their children than of people living solo (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Still, academic discourse, media representation, and cultural conversations reflect a marital tone, conceptualizing men as "indispensible to the definition of family" (Perry, 1995, par. 23), particularly when children are entered into the mix (DePaulo, 2011). The narratives in the current study promote a similar sentiment as many parent participants pushed marriage on their unwed pregnant daughter, even when they were not fond of a romantic partner and recognized serious problems in the relationship. Such findings have dangerous implications and speak to how deeply ingrained the nature of patriarchy is in our culture, suggesting that the solution to unwed pregnancy problems is found in marriage, regardless of relational quality. Preserving the male's centrality in the family becomes more important than enabling women to raise children without husbands or leave partners who are physically or emotionally abusive (Perry, 1995).

Moving forward, I agree with previous warnings that the traditional family development model is fading and relational definitions and stages are shifting (Richman & Cook, 2004). Currently, scholars refer to the dating scene as a "hook up culture" (Bogle, 2008), where engaging in intimate interaction is the primary means among young adults for initiating sexual and romantic relationships (not the other way around), the median age for first marriage is the highest ever (U.S. Census, 2011), and women are expected to have lives of their own outside the confines of caretaking (Carter & McGoldrick, 2005). Such conditions are not exactly propitious for adhering to conventional family sequencing norms (or avoiding unwed pregnancy for that

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matter). For years, future research has been calling for more attention to be given to contemporary configurations of the family arguing that a family defined by marriage may be less relevant than a committed relationship. Perhaps it is time to consider under what circumstances a committed relationship is less relevant than an individual who is better off without the current partner.

Practical Implications of Research

Support groups for adult unwed mothers. Only 3 of the 32 women who participated in this study were active participants in a support group for adult unwed mothers. According to the remaining participants, this was not due to their unwillingness to join a program, but rather their inability to find one that supported their unique needs. Claudia, one of the parent participants, explained that she and her daughter could find "support groups for teens and 40-year-old divorcees" (par. 106), but not for a 20-year-old "in their economic class" (par. 105). Claudia's comment brings to light two important concerns: (a) the importance of taking into account demographics such as race, class, and education with respect to how families make sense of unwed pregnancy and receive support; and (b) the concern that available support groups may not be meeting the needs of current unmarried mothers.

We live in a class-stratified society, where class influences the choices we make and the meaning we give to our experiences. The way in which families will encounter and negotiate crisis is class-specific, contributing to what they perceive as a challenge in the first place as well as what they perceive as possibilities for moving forward and acceptable ways of navigating a dilemma (Kliman & Madsen, 2005). For example, Perry (1995) argues that the question of choice—whether becoming a single mother is a matter of liberation, desperation or carelessness—varies with respect to demographics, affecting how women make decisions

regarding their pregnancy. More specifically, some women (mainly poor, less educated, minority women) may remain unmarried because of a shortage of marriageable men, while others (primarily White, educated and middle to upper class) as a response to the sexism of marriage (Perry, 1995); still others (e.g., 30+ year old Israeli women without male partners) may choose single motherhood, acting as conscious moral resisters who refuse to remain childless (Linn, 2002). With the changing demographics of the unwed mother, support groups must be developed to meet the challenges experienced by a variety of demographics and associated values, addressing problems of racism, poverty, and patriarchy.

The question, then, becomes: what does an effective support group for the diverse group of unwed mothers of today look like? Via my Google News Alert I was made aware of a support and social group for unwed mothers (from adolescent years through 30s), which I believe could serve as the prototype for the type of group needed by contemporary unwed mothers. The group's purpose is to give unmarried mothers and their children a safe place to give and receive support (i.e., informational, tangible, and emotional) via group interaction, counseling, education, and social bonding. Every week, members meet for two hours for a different experience: (a) *topic night*—a specific topic is taught or discussed (e.g., disclosure of pregnancy to others, pregnancy dos and don'ts, parenting skills); (b) *open night*—women share their feelings, ask for advice, and receive encouragement; (c) *social night*—opportunity to play games, talk, watch movies, take kids to a playground; (d) *"more" night*—discussion of beliefs, meaning of life, faith/bible, why we are here; and (e) *night x-press*—involving arts/crafts/activities workshops. Weekend trips (e.g., going to the beach or zoo) as well as getting together for dinner are also common during the week.

After familiarizing myself with the format of this program and their monthly calendar, it became obvious how this program helps to satisfy two common needs found in the narratives. The group provides a context in which friendships can be established with other unwed mothers who share their experience as well as important pregnancy information that the women may not be getting from other sources (especially if they encounter disapproving parents or are currently in the concealment phase of pregnancy). Both of these areas are critical for maintaining a healthy, successful pregnancy.

However, results of this study also reveal that unmarried mothers may be hesitant to reveal their pregnancy news to others right away, suggesting that an in-person support group may not be an avenue that they pursue early on for emotional or informational support. Instead, mediated forms of communication, may be better suited for helping the unwed mothers disclose their news to their parents because of the anonymity they can afford. Based on the sequencing of events presented in Chapter 4, I recommend two outlets via which pregnancy information for unwed mothers could be effectively disseminated: (a) online pregnancy information sites, and (b) pregnancy tests.

Upon first noticing a pregnancy symptom, a missed period or "not feeling normal," many of the women in this study went directly to the Internet for an explanation. A Google search for "pregnancy symptoms" results in a number of websites such as WebMD, Baby Center, Mayo Clinic, and American Pregnancy equipped to provide the women with credible information on whether or not they could be pregnant. Congratulatory messages biased towards women who are trying to conceive and how to move successfully forward with a wanted pregnancy dominate web sites. Unfortunately, this is at the expense of overlooking the unwed mother, who may experience feelings of dread (rather than excitement) as she reads through the list of early signs

of pregnancy. Therefore, I recommend that the managing editors of pregnancy sites (a) assess whether the resources they are providing are helpful to various types of pregnancy scenarios— not only the married women attempting to conceive—and (b) add web links to resources that provide a more balanced array of informational support (e.g., for women who are single or married and those who do and do not want to continue with pregnancy). Helpful links might include: (a) webpages offering advice on how to reveal pregnancy to others (e.g., when the information is perceived as either good or bad news), (b) search options for online and local in-person support groups for unmarried mothers, (c) a "crash course" on behavioral changes necessary for a pregnant woman, (d) a list of questions that help unwed mothers assess their current situation (e.g., Does she have tangible and emotional support from friends and family? Is the unwed father involved? How does she plan to manage work or school? Does she have health insurance?), and (e) various pregnancy alternative options should the individual wish not to continue with pregnancy.

A second outlet via which information can be disseminated to unmarried mothers includes at-home pregnancy tests. Because at-home tests are private, convenient, and cost effective, all but two of the women reported taking an at-home test at some point during their pregnancy to determine their pregnancy status. Including a pamphlet inside pregnancy test kits is a great opportunity to provide unmarried mothers with important information regarding their unique situation (again, because they may not be getting this information from significant others due to concealing their pregnancy). To help avoid presenting the women with biased information (e.g., prochoice versus prolife messages), the pamphlet could simply encourage women to seek out online pregnancy advice about their options, discuss the importance of telling a supportive

confidant, offer guidelines for telling unsupportive others, and suggest next steps for navigating their pregnancy (e.g., foods to eat, necessary medical supervision).

Dissemination of findings. One of the primary objectives of this research was to provide unwed mothers with a list of guidelines for disclosing their pregnancy to their parents. Although the results of this study have been returned to the participants who requested them, they are not well timed to aid them in their own disclosure scenario—unless of course they find themselves in a similar situation in the future. However, as supported by the disclosure literature, confidant selection is often determined by assessing who has knowledge of a particular subject and can provide sound advice (Petronio, 2002). Therefore, it is my hope that if other unwed mothers seek out the women who participated in this study, they can pass along the findings of this study.

In addition to returning the findings to study participants, I believe that researchers have an ethical obligation to disseminate key findings to as many people as possible, especially to other individuals and institutions in the affected surrounding community. Therefore, my plan to disseminate results includes the following steps: first, I plan to disseminate key findings via scientific publication by presenting at conferences and submitting manuscripts to family communication journals. Second, I plan to put together a fact sheet and research summary document of salient findings for mental health professionals in the area, online pregnancy support groups (e.g., CaféMom), and UNC's Women's Center and parent support organizations. Fortunately, my participant recruitment strategy has already put me in contact with many of the organization leaders who are looking forward to seeing my results. Third, I plan to contact UNC's Office of Research Communications, which is responsible for informing the public about research activities on campus. I have generated a list of various media outlets via this department that I can submit information about my study. For example, *Contact Magazine*, a news magazine
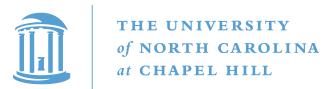
for the School or Social Work produced by the communications department, seems to be one outlet that may be interested in my findings.

Finally, as explained in Chapter 3, I set up a Google News Alert to inform me of articles that pertain to the subject of unwed pregnancy. Having saved all of the articles that were emailed to me, I now have a list of all major online news outlets and contributing authors who are interested in unwed pregnancy trends. My plan is to email several of these authors, inform them of my research, and hope that in my work will spur an idea for an article that can help others in need of guidelines for disclosure.

Not knowing what to say or how to say it can become overwhelmingly burdensome when the information we have to share may not be received well by those whom are loved ones. As pathways to parenthood further diversify and the rise in non-marital births continues, more families will continue to face this difficult disclosure. Knowing the communicative choices that are available and the ramifications that particular choices may have, families may be provided with the tools they need to negotiate this conversation successfully.

APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

OFFICE OF HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS
Medical School Building 52
Mason Farm Road
CB #7097
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-7097
(919) 966-3113
Web site: ohre.unc.edu
Federalwide Assurance (FWA) #4801

To: Jennifer Cronin
Communication Studies

From: Non-Biomedical IRB

Approval Date: 2/13/2012
Expiration Date of Approval: 2/11/2013

RE: Notice of IRB Approval by Expedited Review (under 45 CFR 46.110)
Submission Type: Initial
Expedited Category: 7.Surveys/interviews/focus groups,6.Voice/image research recordings
Study #: 12-0157

Study Title: Speaking the Unspeakable: Adult Children's Revelations of Unplanned, Unwed Pregnancy to Parents

This submission has been approved by the IRB for the period indicated. It has been determined that the risk involved in this research is no more than minimal.

Study Description:

Purpose: To examine how unplanned, unwed pregnancy is revealed, perceived, and conjointly made sense of within the family in order to identify more and less effective means of disclosure and conditions that impinge the revelation process. Research questions include: why are certain revelation strategies chosen; how are strategies interpreted by parents; why do parents respond to the information as they do; how are parents' reactions interpreted; and how do disclosure and response behaviors shape perceptions of unwed pregnancy.

Participants: Unmarried mothers and their parents. **Unwed mothers:** between the ages of 19 and 31; at least 18 years old at the time she discovered her pregnancy; parent(s) have already been told about the unmarried, unplanned pregnancy; it has been no more than 3 years since she found out about her pregnancy. **Parent**: There is no inclusions criteria for the unwed mother's parents (other than, of course, being the parent/guardian of the unwed woman).

Procedures (methods): Short questionnaires and in-depth, audiotaped, semi-structured interviews in which participants are asked to discuss their experience with the disclosure of unwed, unplanned pregnancy. Interviews analyzed via the constant comparison method in which each interview is transcribed, coded, and then compared to other interviews.

Regulatory and other findings:

This research meets criteria for a waiver of written (signed) consent according to 45 CFR 46.117(c)(2) only for subjects who complete interviews by phone; these subjects will provide verbal consent.

Investigator's Responsibilities:

Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to submit for renewal and obtain approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without IRB approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in automatic termination of the approval for this study on the expiration date.

Your approved consent forms and other documents are available online at http://apps.research.unc.edu/irb/eform_routing.cfm?masterid=100354&Section=attachments.

You are required to obtain IRB approval for any changes to any aspect of this study before they can be implemented. Any unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects or others (including adverse events reportable under UNC-Chapel Hill policy) should be reported to the IRB using the web portal at http://irbis.unc.edu.

Researchers are reminded that additional approvals may be needed from relevant "gatekeepers" to access subjects (e.g., principals, facility directors, healthcare system).

This study was reviewed in accordance with federal regulations governing human subjects research, including those found at 45 CFR 46 (Common Rule), 45 CFR 164 (HIPAA), 21 CFR 50 & 56 (FDA), and 40 CFR 26 (EPA), where applicable.

CC: Lawrence Rosenfeld, Communication Studies

APPENDIX B: NARRATIVE INTERVIEW SCRIPTS

Interview Script for Unmarried Mothers

I. INTRODUCTION OF RESEARCHER AND PROJECT

Hello, my name is Jen Cronin and I am a graduate student in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of North Carolina. I am currently working on my dissertation that focuses on understanding difficult conversations between parents and their children. Specifically, the conversation I am interested in is revealing unwed pregnancy to parents. Based on my own family's experience with unmarried pregnancy, I have learned that telling parents that you are unexpectedly pregnant can be challenging. Family members have told me that a "how to" guide for telling your parents and what to expect would be helpful. So, the goal of this project is listen to your story and gather advice from you about what you did, said, thought, and felt. I want to know: what worked well? what did not? what would you do differently? Ultimately, I want to take what I learn from your narrative to help families better manage this conversation.

II. CONSENT FORM AND QUESTIONNAIRES

In-person interview: Hand participant consent form, describe contents, confirm that it is ok to audiotape the interview, and reassure confidentiality. Hand participant list of Mental Health and Wellness contacts in the area and stress that the interview can be stopped at any time. Give participant questionnaire. Have her fill it out. Upon completing both forms, proceed to narrative interview.

Telephone interview: Make sure consent form and demographic questionnaire have been obtained. Ask if participant has any questions. Upon agreement, proceed to narrative interview.

III. UNMARRIED PREGNANCY DISCLOSURE STORY

I want you to recall the conversation you had with your parents when you first told them that you were pregnant. I would like for you to think about this event like you are telling me a story. So, be sure to describe to me the characters involved, the setting, and plotline in the order in which the event occurred. Please begin your story with the moment you found out you were pregnant (what you thought, felt, and did), describe how you told your parents, and what happened as a result. I can give you a minute to think if you like.

Give participants a few minutes to think if necessary. Take notes on areas that may need clarification.

IV. QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION

If any elements of the story need clarification, ask the participant to provide further detail. Make sure that the following topic areas are covered:

- Disclosure enactment choices (e.g., mode, setting, timing, with/out partner) and why
- Facework strategies: biggest concern, desired image, and what was done to project that image; preventative and remedial strategies
- Timing: how long it took to reveal the information to parents
- Outcomes: how the revelation has changed the relationship

- Emotions: reactions to pregnancy, parent's interpretation of disclosure choices
- Past experience: ever had to disclose "sensitive" information like this in the past?
- How did parent react?
- Advice: what she would do differently?

V. CONCLUDE INTERVIEW AND THANK SUBJECT FOR PARTICIPATING
Ask participant for parent referral and contact information. Explain that nothing said during her interview will be discussed in the interview with parent.

Interview Script for Parent of Unmarried Mothers

I. INTRODUCTION OF RESEARCHER AND PROJECT

Hello, my name is Jen Cronin and I am a graduate student in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of North Carolina. I am currently working on my dissertation that focuses on understanding difficult conversations between parents and their children. Specifically, the conversation I am interested in is revealing unwed pregnancy to parents. Based on my own family's experience with unmarried pregnancy, I have learned that learning of your daughter's unmarried pregnancy can be challenging. So, the goal of this project is listen to your story and gather advice from you about what was said, thought, and felt during that conversation. I want to know: what worked well? what did not? what would you do differently? Ultimately, I want to take what I learn from your narrative to help families better manage this conversation.

II. CONSENT FORM AND QUESTIONNAIRES

Make sure consent form and demographic questionnaire have been completed and collected. Ask if the parent has any questions. Upon agreement, proceed to narrative interview.

III. UNMARRIED PREGNANCY DISCLOSURE STORY

I want you to recall the conversation in which your daughter first revealed to you her pregnancy. I would like for you to think about this event like you are telling me a story. So, be sure to describe to me the characters involved, the setting, and plotline in the order in which the event occurred. Feel free to begin your story with any additional information you feel is relevant to your story. I can give you a minute to think if you like.

Give participants a few minutes to think if necessary. Take notes on areas that may need clarification.

IV. QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION

If any elements of the story need clarification, ask the participant to provide further detail. Assure parent that these questions are standard have nothing to do with what was disclosed in the daughter's interview.

IV. CONCLUDE INTERVIEW AND THANK SUBJECT FOR PARTICIPATING

APPENDIX C: SAMPLE FLYER FOR RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

**VOLUNTEERS WANTED FOR A RESEARCH STUDY ON
UNPLANNED, UNWED PREGNANCY**

Study Title: Adult Children's Revelations of Unwed Pregnancy to Parents

PURPOSE:	This goal of this study is to better understand difficult conversations between parents and children—how families negotiate the disclosure of unwed pregnancy. Results of this research may provide practical advice to unmarried mothers and their parents for how to best handle this conversation
ELIGIBILITY:	In order to participate, you <u>must</u> meet the following criteria: • female, currently between the ages of 19 and 35 • unmarried and at least 18 years old <u>at the time</u> you discovered your pregnancy • already told your parent(s) about your unmarried, unplanned
WHAT'S IINVOLVED:	A brief questionnaire and an in-person or phone interview (about 1.5 hours) with the researcher. You will be asked to describe the conversation you had with your parents when you told them you were pregnant.
BENEFITS:	By sharing your story you may gain an understanding of the event and offer advice to others, which will help prepare them for this difficult conversation with parents.
CONTACT:	If you are interested in participating, please contact the primary researcher, Jen Cronin, at jcronin@email.unc.edu. If you know someone who may be interested in participating and meets the above criteria, please share this information with her.

Unwed pregnancy study
Contact: Jen Cronin:
jcronin@email.unc.edu

Unwed pregnancy study
Contact: Jen Cronin:
jcronin@email.unc.edu

Unwed pregnancy study
Contact: Jen Cronin:
jcronin@email.unc.edu

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jcronin@email.unc.edu

Unwed pregnancy study
Contact: Jen Cronin:
jcronin@email.unc.edu

APPENDIX D: SAMPLE EMAIL/INTERNET ANNOUNCEMENT
FOR RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

Subject line: Participants needed for research study on unmarried pregnancy
Hello. My name is Jen Cronin and I am a graduate student in Communication Studies at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I am currently working on my dissertation research, which aims to understand difficult conversations between parents and their children.

The goal of this project is to learn how families negotiate the disclosure of unwed pregnancy and to provide practical advice to unmarried mothers and their parents regarding how to best handle this conversation. I am specifically looking for women who have disclosed a pregnancy outside of marriage to their parents and who meet the following criteria:
- female, currently between the ages of 19 and 35
- unmarried and at least 18 years old <u>at the time</u> she discovered her pregnancy
- already told her parent(s) about her unmarried, unplanned pregnancy
- no more than 5 years have elapsed since she found out about her pregnancy

Participation in this study will involve filling out a brief questionnaire and engaging in an in-depth interview with me where the unwed mother simply tells me about her experience of disclosing pregnancy to parents. Everything disclosed during the interview will only be used for research purposes and will be kept strictly confidential.

If you meet the above requirements and are willing to participate, please email me at jcronin@email.unc.edu or call 770.401.1742.

If you know people who might be willing to participate and meet the above requirements, please tell them about my study and ask them to contact me via email: jcronin@email.unc.edu or call 770.401.1742.

Thank you for your help,

Jen Cronin

APPENDIX E: SURVEY OF DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS

Unwed Pregnancy Questionnaire *(for the <u>Unmarried Mother</u>)*

Part I. The following questions are designed to help me know who you are and to allow me to describe my sample for this study. **All responses will be kept confidential**.

Please read each question carefully and type an X in appropriate box or write in your response.

1. How old are you? _____ years old

2. How old were you when you discovered your unmarried pregnancy? _____ years old

3. What group do you belong to?
   [ ] White (non Hispanic)
   [ ] Black/African American
   [ ] Asian/Pacific Islander
   [ ] Hispanic or Latino
   [ ] American Indian/Alaskan Native
   [ ] Other (specify):_____

4. What is your current marital status?
   [ ] Married
   [ ] Divorced
   [ ] Widowed
   [ ] Separated
   [ ] Never married
   [ ] Member of unmarried couple

5. Generally speaking, do you consider yourself to be:
   [ ] Conservative
   [ ] Moderate
   [ ] Liberal

6. What is the highest grade or year of school you completed?

   [ ] Never attended school or only attended kindergarten

   [ ] Grades 1 through 8 (Elementary)

   [ ] Grades 9 through 11 (Some high school)

   [ ] Grade 12 or GED (High school graduate)

   [ ] College 1 year to 3 years (Some college or technical school)

   [ ] College 4 years (College graduate)

   [ ] Graduate School (Advance Degree)

7. What, if any, is your religious preference?

   [ ] Protestant

   [ ] Catholic

   [ ] LDS/Mormon

   [ ] Jewish

   [ ] Other (specify): _____

   [ ] No preference, religious

   [ ] No preference, nonreligious

8. What do you expect your 2012 family income from all sources before taxes to be?

   [ ] Under $25,000

   [ ] $25,000 - $39,999

   [ ] $40,000 - $49,999

   [ ] $50,000 - $74,999

   [ ] $75,000 - $99,999

   [ ] $100,000 - $124,999

   [ ] $125,000 - $149,999

   [ ] Over $150,000

9. What is your current occupation? _____

10. How did you hear about the study? _____

11. Indicate below (by checking the appropriate box) the extent to which you were nervous about revealing your pregnancy to your parent(s):

Extremely   Fairly   Not at all
 Nervous   Nervous   nervous

 [ ]   [ ]   [ ]   [ ]   [ ]   [ ]   [ ]   [ ]   [ ]

Unwed Pregnancy Questionnaire *(for the Parent of Unmarried Mother)*

The following questions are designed to help me know who you are and to allow me to describe my sample for this study. **All responses will be kept confidential**.

Please read each question carefully and type an X in appropriate box or write in your response.

1. How old are you? _____ years old

2. Are you:
    [ ] Male
    [ ] Female

3. What group do you belong to?
    [ ] White (non Hispanic)
    [ ] Black/African American
    [ ] Asian/Pacific Islander
    [ ] Hispanic or Latino
    [ ] American Indian/Alaskan Native
    [ ] Other (specify):_____

4. What is your current marital status?
    [ ] Married
    [ ] Divorced
    [ ] Widowed
    [ ] Separated
    [ ] Never married
    [ ] Member of unmarried couple

5. Generally speaking, do you consider yourself to be:
    [ ] Conservative
    [ ] Moderate
    [ ] Liberal

6. What is the highest grade or year of school you completed?

[   ] Never attended school or only attended kindergarten

[   ] Grades 1 through 8 (Elementary)

[   ] Grades 9 through 11 (Some high school)

[   ] Grade 12 or GED (High school graduate)

[   ] College 1 year to 3 years (Some college or technical school)

[   ] College 4 years (College graduate)

[   ] Graduate School (Advance Degree)

7. What, if any, is your religious preference?

[   ] Protestant

[   ] Catholic

[   ] LDS/Mormon

[   ] Jewish

[   ] Other (specify): _____

[   ] No preference, religious

[   ] No preference, nonreligious

8. What do you expect your 2012 family income from all sources before taxes to be?

[   ] Under $25,000

[   ] $25,000 - $39,999

[   ] $40,000 - $49,999

[   ] $50,000 - $74,999

[   ] $75,000 - $99,999

[   ] $100,000 - $124,999

[   ] $125,000 - $149,999

[   ] Over $150,000

9. Have you at any point become pregnant while not married?

[   ] Yes

[   ] No

10. What is your current occupation? _____

11. How did you hear about the study? _____

APPENDIX F: ANALYSIS CODING TOOL

Disclosure Enactment Features Coding Tool

Code Label	Code Description	Coded Data Example
Mode	Channel through which information is revealed (e.g., face to face, telephone, via third party)	"Even though I was away at college, this was a huge deal so I felt it best for me to tell them in person."
Context	*Timing*: When information is delivered (e.g., how long after mother learns of her pregnancy, after parents have exposure to partner)	"Christmas was coming. We didn't want to ruin it. That really affected when I told my family. I waited until after the holiday…after they all had time to get to know her."
	Setting: Physical and social setting in which information is revealed (i.e., public versus private)	"I took my parents to their favorite restaurant. I figured if we were around lots of other people, they couldn't freak out that much!"
Content	Verbal or nonverbal features of the message (e.g., breadth and depth, directness, conversational approach)	"I just told her straight out. I didn't need to sugar coat it or sit her down or anything. We are really close."

Face Negotiation Dimensions Coding Tool

Code Label	Code Description	Coded Data Example
Self-face Concern	Concern for one's own image when one's own face is threatened in the conflict situation	"I was most worried that he was disappointed in me and would look at me differently."
Other-face Concern	Concern for the other conflict party's image in the conflict situation	"I was grieving for [my dad]…what he would feel like when I told him."
Mutual-face Concern	Concern for both party's image in the conflict situation or the relationship	"My biggest fear was that I didn't want to create a strain on my relationship with my parents because it was such a good relationship."
Preventative Facework Strategies	Communicative behaviors designed to soften or ward off the occurrence of face loss events that one anticipates will foster an appearance of weakness or vulnerability	"I remember I didn't feel like getting ready. I didn't want to get dressed or anything, but I still remember exactly what I wore just because I wanted to look put together and look like I was doing okay."
Restorative Facework Strategies	Communicative behaviors designed to repair damaged or lost face and occur in response to events that have already transpired	"I was like, you know, I make enough money that I can live on my own. I can stand on my own two feet and I can do this. That was kind of one of the biggest things I wanted to show her—I can do this and you don't have to lecture me about it."

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