

The Work and Educational Aspirations of Young Single Mothers in Rural Communities

by

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B.A., University of Victoria, 2001

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ABSTRACT

Little research has focused on the diversity of experiences and outcomes faced by young rural single mothers in achieving their work and educational aspirations. The focus of this study was the stories of these young mothers as understood and voiced by the women themselves. Six participants residing in a rural community on the west coast of Vancouver Island were interviewed using a narrative interview in conjunction with Possible Selves Mapping. Individual interview themes were identified for each participant. Common categories that were identified included work, education, supports, money, becoming a mother, living in a small town, and concerns about violence. The findings indicated that despite the challenges they face, young rural mothers are motivated to better their lives for themselves and their children. Implications for future research and counselling practice are provided.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this Master's thesis to my three beautiful children: Sabrina, Avery and Matisse.

Chapter One: Introduction

Far-reaching impacts of globalization on the world of work have particular implications for young people today. Feller (2003) suggests that, “intense global competition and time-compressed distribution and product development have transformed work roles, job titles, and organizational structures” (p. 265). He posits that many employers now promote a rapid response to delivery and are less patient with workers that are unable to meet these expectations. Despite these increasingly intense demands by employers and industries, acquiring the needed training, skills and postsecondary education has now become the responsibility of the employee (Amundson, 2006; Feller, 2003). Furthermore, although these changes have provided more opportunities for work in different parts of the world and increased diversity in the workplace, it has also been characterized by industrial downsizing and layoffs (Amundson, 2006; Amundson, Borgen, Jorden, & Erlebach, 2004; Blustein, 1997).

Evidently, the world of work today is shaded with ambiguity and unpredictability. As such, the work and career decision making processes of individuals have become more complex and uncertain, particularly in the transitions facing young people. That said, youth will inevitably have to respond to the degree in which globalization will impact their own career development (Feller, 2003). Feller suggests that evolving technology, customer expectations, and ongoing process modifications have created pressure for worker readiness. He further suggests that although employers face a shortage of workers, not all workers are sufficiently prepared to perform the duties required of them. Kerr (2000) suggests that many youth are entering this demanding work force with minimal skills and experience and, therefore, are at an even greater risk of

unemployment during their initial years as members of the labour force. Thus, it is not surprising that youth unemployment has worsened over the past decade (Kerr).

These work challenges are particularly heightened in small towns and rural communities where access, options, education, and support are limited (Marshall 2002; Simmons, Braun, Wright, & Miller 2007). In the face of such employment uncertainty, these young people are torn between remaining in the very communities that promote a sense of belonging and identity, and relocating to larger communities that may offer greater work and educational opportunities (Marshall, Shoveller, Johnson, Prkachin, & Patrick, 2007). These shifts are not only challenging for youth in small communities, but also for marginalized groups that experience additional barriers such as poverty and literacy.

Single mothers in rural communities comprise one group that faces additional economic and social barriers that make it difficult to pursue their work and educational goals. Historically, these young women have been portrayed as multiply disadvantaged—economically, educationally, emotionally and socially (Furstenburg, Brooks-Gunn & Chase-Lansdale, 1989; Leadbeater & Way, 2001, Miller-Lewis & Wade, 2005). Given the increased hardships due to social and economic restructuring, rural adolescent mothers may be even more at risk. Social support becomes a salient feature in much of the research on young single mothers as this helps to mitigate the challenges associated with single parenting (Camarena, Minor, Melmer, & Ferrie, 1998). Given that there are greater opportunities in terms of work and education in larger urban areas, these young mothers face the dilemma of having to leave their community and be separated from their significant social support system.

It is clear that the work and educational pathways for these young single mothers are often fraught with barriers. That said, research on single mothers often fails to speak of the diversity of experiences, as voiced by them, in their pursuit to better their lives. Cook and Owen (2007), maintain that services that view them as a homogenous group are often based on prevention rather than support, thus failing to meet the individual needs of this population. There is some evidence however, indicating that these young women want to better their lives and view motherhood as a positive motivation to do so (Cook & Owen, 2007; Leadbeater & Way, 2001). My interest in this research stems from my past work that involved working with young single mothers as well as my own recent experience, returning to university and living on my own with three children. These experiences have opened my awareness to the complexity and resiliency that young single mothers experience in their attempts to pursue their aspirations.

Focus

While a number of authors have identified general issues related to single mothers in the context of work and education, little research has focused on what young *rural* mothers experience in their efforts to achieve their aspirations. In order to create the necessary services to help these young women achieve their goals, greater insight into their experiences is needed. It is my belief that gaining insight into an individual's world requires that one remains open to all aspects of the individual's story. As such, while understanding the barriers that these women encounter is important, so too is awareness of their strengths and what these women find helpful in their transition to work (Leadbeater & Way, 2001). For example, for some young single mothers, having a child increased their level of interest in education and they began to view its importance in

increasing employment opportunities (Zachry, 2005). Creating an opportunity for young mothers to reflect on the process of achieving their aspirations will provide greater understanding about how they can best be supported in their future endeavours. With respect to the method for obtaining such information, Mattingly & Lawlor (2007) suggest that narratives can play a key role in helping to illuminate the world of the individual.

Thus, my research question is:

What stories do young single mothers in rural communities tell with respect to work and educational aspirations?

It is my intention that the results from this study will encourage and promote additional research as well as resource development and support strategies to better address the needs of this diverse population, rather than services based solely on the negative stereotypes inherent in much of the existing literature. Leadbeater and Way (2001) assert that “focusing on the insurmountable needs of the mythical adolescent mother of three or more children who has a ninth-grade education and lives on welfare in substandard housing means less attention is given to the obstacles that threaten to derail working adolescent mothers” (p. 2). The complexity of this demographic warrants a greater understanding of their experience. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore the stories of these young rural mothers as understood and voiced by the women themselves.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

In this chapter I will provide a review of selected literature relevant to this study. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) will be described as the theoretical framework for this investigation and particularly for the concept of *possible selves* (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Other areas addressed include the changing nature of the world of work and the implications of these changes for youth, including rural youth. The plight of young single mothers is then considered. In examining this group, I address the implications of motherhood on work and educational development. Some literature reveals stereotyped and rather negative views of these young women; other authors challenge these views. A complex picture emerges of the barriers and supports these women typically encounter and of the services that have been created in response to their needs. There are similarities and differences for rural young moms.

Social Cognitive Career Theory

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) evolved from Social Cognitive theory, as posited by Bandura (Lent, Hackett, & Brown, 1999). SCCT provides a theoretical framework to understand the complexity and adjustment that youth encounter in their own career development (Brown, 2002). SCCT links with constructivist assumptions about the capacity of humans to greatly influence their own development and environment (Brown). SCCT is a heuristic model that emphasises the linkage between three variables: self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals (Lent et al., 1999; Lent, Hackett, & Brown, 2000). More specifically, Lent and his colleagues describe self-efficacy as an individual's confidence in their ability to perform a set of tasks. They suggest that the sources of one's self-efficacy beliefs arise from personal mastery

experiences, vicarious learning, and physiological and emotional reactions. Bandura & Locke (2003) contend that self-efficacy beliefs affect an individual's motivation and perseverance in the face of challenges as well as the choices they make during significant decisional points. In addition to one's expectations of performing capabilities, outcome expectations or consequences of behavioural efforts also become important. Lastly, SCCT refers to the importance of goals, such as secondary graduation or post-secondary schooling. According to SCCT, an individual's career development is influenced by the interaction of these variables with other aspects of the person and their environment (Lent et al., 1999; Lent et al., 2000).

SCCT suggests that success during the school-to-work transition is influenced by six developmental themes during an individual's school years: formation of self-efficacy beliefs, interest development, interest-goal linkages, the translation of goals into actions, general employability skills, and the supports and barriers encountered in the pursuit to achieve aspirations (Lent et al., 1999, p. 297). SCCT hypothesizes that a person's career interests will more likely form into goals that he or she will act on when they perceive optimal environmental conditions characterized by supports and few barriers (Lent & Brown, 1996). To illustrate, many youth in my rural community were successful in pursuing their goals after high school. Despite the geographical challenges of attending postsecondary school, several youth were supported by the community in the form of community grants and scholarships to offset some of the associated financial barriers. In contrast, some youth with disabilities had difficulty accessing support services locally to address their special needs. While rural youth (or any youth) may encounter barriers in

achieving their goals, it is important to recognize and build on their existing strengths and supports.

Possible Selves

In a social-cognitive framework, self-knowledge becomes a key factor in one's ability to reflect on future directions while considering individual context. Markus and Nurius (1986) describe one domain of self-knowledge as *possible selves*. These *possible selves* represent the hopes, dreams and fears that individuals have had in the past as well as those aspects of their selves in future. An individual's set of *possible selves* can be understood as "the cognitive manifestations of enduring goals, aspirations, motives, fears and threats" and can "provide the specific self-relevant form, meaning, organization, and direction to these dynamics" (Markus and Nurius, p. 954). Markus and Nurius contend that self knowledge or possible selves become important motivators to select future behaviours. An individual's *possible selves* can be said to derive from a number of salient factors in life including the individuals' sociocultural and historical context, media influences, and the individual's social experience (Markus & Nurius, 1986). *Possible Selves* are relevant to life and career development because people's work and educational aspirations are significantly influenced not only by personal variables, but also by their social environmental context.

A number of researchers have applied the concept of possible selves in exploring factors related to life and work choices (Cross & Markus, 1991; Marshall, 2002; Marshall & Guenette, 2008; Shepard & Marshall, 1999). Lee and Oyserman (2007) explored the possible selves of low-income single mothers. The authors asked low income mothers connected to the welfare system to describe their possible selves in the coming year.

Pervasive themes in mothers' possible selves included jobs, caring for children and making ends meet (p.16). One significant finding was that being in a job training program does influence the likelihood of having possible selves in the caregiving, job, and mental health domains. To this end, immediate social context was associated with content of possible selves, more so than demographic or global work-family variables (p.1). Lee and Oyserman (2007) suggest that in order for possible selves to have an impact on outcomes, they must be "cued in relevant contexts, linked to strategies, and balanced, that is, include both possible selves to work toward and feared selves to strive away from" (p. 4). Moreover, Kapil's (2009) study that explored the self concept, possible selves, and a sense of community for rural youth, found an important link between a high estimation of capability for accomplishing a future hoped-for self and a high rating of self-concept.

The Changing World of Work

As economic globalization increases, so does the transformation of work and the individual experience of career for people around the world (Savickas, Van Esbroeck & Herr, 2005). Changes in the world of work pose additional dilemmas for young people as they make the transition from school to work. Amundson (2005) summarizes these changes to include: an increased pressure for productivity; increased reliance on temporary positions; greater work/life complexity; and a need for continuous education. More specifically, employers and industries are putting more demands on employees to produce rapidly, however the responsibility to gain the necessary skills to do so is placed heavily on the employees (Feller, 2003). Feller refers to the *emerging diamond-shaped* workplace that rewards employees that demonstrate the ability to accept broader responsibilities, innovation and agility (p. 264). Furthermore, he suggests that workers

earn their value through their ability to contribute to a company's core mission rather than obtaining degrees and titles. This shift is coupled with advances in technology that have required workers to acquire greater technological skills (Amundson, 2006; Feller, 2003).

More reliance on jobs that emphasize technology has had a significant impact on resource-based industries that are typically major employers in rural communities. For example, computer-directed machines are replacing workers in sawmills and processing plants. Subsequently, many of these changes have resulted in downsizing, layoffs and job dislocations (Amundson et al., 2004; Blustein, 1997). In B.C, people face numerous challenges as a result of closures in the fishing, forestry and mining industries with subsequent implications for secondary employment in retail and businesses (Halseth, 1998; Marshall, 2002). The pressures and demands reflected in the broader literature on the changing world of work are also reflected in the literature on rural communities. Most notably, small rural communities that rely heavily on a single industry have been particularly affected by these changes (Halseth). In his report on a study of economic restructuring in three rural BC communities, Halseth suggested that although many residents have faced this restructuring through acquiring education and skills upgrading, there are still many limitations to their capacities to cope with these complex changes. Feller further states that, "It is one of the ironic aspects of economic restructuring that corporate sponsorship of employment skills upgrading occurs in conjunction with the need for a broader set of technical, computer, and management skills within a downsized workforce." (p. 208).

Research has indicated that youth entering the workforce are even more disadvantaged and at risk for unemployment and social exclusion than their adult counterparts (Kieselbach, 2003; Mitchell & Betts, 2002). For increasing numbers of young people between the ages of 15 and 24, the transition from school to work is characterized by uncertainty and insufficient skills and experience (Kerr, 2000). Although there is evidence that evolving technology and employer demands require young people to become skilled and adaptable, youth are provided with little information on how to approach their career choices (Feller, 2003). He suggests that of those youth that transition from high school, few depart with the “agility, self-reliance, critical thinking and problem solving capabilities as well as the character traits needed to adapt to a future demanding lifelong learning and the personal accountability needed for its direction” (p. 263). It would appear that many youth are faced with the daunting and complex task of trying to negotiate their career choices in a changing and uncertain world of work with little direction.

According to Stats Canada (2003), the rate of youth unemployment was 13.8% in 2003. Although the BC labour force statistics for 2008 (Data Services, 2008) indicate that youth unemployment dropped to 7.8%, the adult unemployment rate at 3.8% for ages 25 years and older was still significantly lower than that for youth. In a report prepared by the Ministry of Skills Development and Labour (2003), fewer youth were found to be participating in the labour market. Rather, it was noted that there had been a dramatic increase in post-secondary participation among youth 20-24 attending college or university, as well as an increase in the number of high school-aged youth in school. There were fewer high school drop-out rates than two decades ago. That said,

approximately 18 percent of youth 25-29 were not in the market place and had fallen out of the work force at important transition points through teen and early adult years. The authors suggested that this delayed entry into the labor force, even on a temporary basis, presents challenges to transitioning into work at a later time. They reported that many of the *soft skills* such as team work and attitude that employers are seeking are skills gained on-the-job rather than in a classroom setting. Thus, understanding the broader picture of how young people negotiate and prepare for this changing world of work can be further illuminated by exploring the contextual process inherent in their career development.

Rural Youth and Work

The context of rural life has particular supports and challenges related to young people's educational goals. Barriers that youth in rural communities encounter include geographical challenges such as limited access to employment opportunities, fewer career exploration resources, limited range of job opportunities, and limited post-secondary possibilities (Ali & McWhirter, 2006; Henderson, 2005). Employment in rural communities has been noted for having lower wage jobs with fewer hours and fewer benefits in comparison to urban areas (Simmons et al., 2007). In his study on education, training and rural living for youth, Henderson (2005) found that, although some youth indicated they were hopeful to find employment in their community, the most highly qualified young people intend to leave their community for greater educational and employment opportunities. Those youth choosing to leave indicated several reasons for not feeling hopeful about attaining work locally, for example specific job opportunities were lacking and that there were few highly skilled or highly paid jobs.

Despite these apparent barriers, however, rural life is not all challenges. There are several positive aspects of the environment that influence decisions to remain or leave and many benefits inherent in rural communities. In her study on rural youth, Hedlund (1993), found that young people perceived more advantages to living in a small community. Feelings of identity, belonging, safety and connectedness were notable themes in the lives of these young rural youth. Crockett, Shanahan, & Jackson-Newsom (2000), maintain that rural communities have been characterized by strong social ties that may help to increase the integration of youth into the community with a sense of social responsibility and security. Further illustration of this strong connection can be found in the words of the participants in Kathy Harrison's rural youth survey (2005): "I really like this community because I like the fact of how friendly and how close we are" (young woman, age 20) and "It is nice and small and everybody knows everybody" (young man, age 14). Major supports for rural youth identified in Harrison's study, included family and community connections, community identity, resilient spirit and supportive adults.

The above researchers highlight the dilemma that rural youth face in their transition to the world of work. Do they stay in the very place that promotes a sense of belonging or leave for possibly greater economic prospects with no guarantees? Young people in these communities appear to be very aware of the implications of these shifts, and as a result see their ability to create optimal futures as challenging and uncertain (Crockett & Bingham, 2000; Shoveller et al., 2007).

Young Single Mothers and Work

Challenges for emerging adults and young adults in the new world of work have additional implications for particular groups such as young single mothers. Although

there has been a steady decline in Canada since 1994 teenage childbearing is still prevalent (Dryburgh, 2007). According to Statistics Canada (2004), there were 32,035 pregnancies to youth under the age of 20 in Canada, 14,186 of which resulted in live births. Moreover, teenage mothers, especially between the ages of 15-17, are most likely to be single (Dryburgh, 2007). It has been noted that provinces with high rates in teen births have a large number of Aboriginal residents (Rotterman, 2007). According to the Office of the Provincial Health officer for BC (2007) the percentage of teenage mothers in 2004 was 16.3 for the Aboriginal population compared to 2.4 for other BC residents. More specific to this study, according to the British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency (2004), most rural communities in British Columbia have higher teenage fertility rates compared to urban areas. This is consistent with Warner-Smith and Lee's (2001) findings that young rural women were more likely to have had at least one child compared to their urban counterparts. The five highest local health areas with statistically significant teenage fertility rates in 2004 were: Bella Coola, Agassiz-Harrison, Peace River North, Kootenay Lake and Vancouver Island West (BC Vital Statistics, 2004).

Some authors have noted an emphasis on moral and social judgements related to young single mothers. McDermott & Graham (2005); Leadbeater & Way, (2001) and Smith (1995) contend that much of the research on mothers under the age of 20 characterizes the situation as a social problem. These young women have been stereotyped and marginalized as being poor, as victims of difficult social circumstances, and as school-drops outs (Leadbeater & Way, 2001). They have been criticized for having a reliance on the social security system and being unable to provide for themselves (Lall, 2007; Leadbeater & Way, 2001). Melhuish & Phoenix (1988) maintain

that teenage mothers are often described as being irresponsible and problematic which only increases the degree of stigmatization they encounter.

In their study, Whitley & Kirmayer (2007) found that mothers 25 years and under experienced exclusion and stigmatization. These mothers reported feeling “unaccepted and devalued” for being a younger mother. Interestingly, participants in this study did not attribute stigma to staff of mother-child groups or medical professionals. Rather, it was often older women, the general public and occasional family members who were contributing to their negative experiences. This is consistent with Hanna’s (2001) study on teenage mothers in which some health care professionals were seen as helpful, in contrast to families and friends. Whitley & Kirmayer speculated that the stigma experienced by their participants could be associated with the larger North American values that associate success for young women with career and educational achievement. Leadbeater and Way (2001) ask, “Is teenage parenting a social problem that is fuelled by increased demands for a more educated and skilled labour force?” (p. 5). Regardless of the reasons, there is no denying the feelings of discrimination, frustration and exclusion that many of these young mothers endure in light of these negative stereotypes.

A number of researchers (Hanna, 2001; Lall, 2007; Zeck, 2007) have found that many young single mothers have difficulty with attaining education and economic wellbeing. Young mothers are at higher risk for dropping out of school and are less likely to find stable employment (Meadows-Oliver & Ryan-Krause, 2007). Some young women who are pregnant or have given birth have been forced out of the mainstream educational system and as a result may be alienated from society with poor employment or life prospects for the future (Lall, 2007). Lall suggests that there is pressure from some

schools for pregnant girls to leave because of health and safety reasons and the fear of responsibility if these women had an accident. Additionally, she contends that some schools make few concessions for these young mothers which leave them with little choice other than to remove themselves. Luong (2008) argues that these women will have greater difficulty finishing high school because of the needed time taken off for pregnancy, recuperation and childcare.

Thus, teenage motherhood seems to be associated with reduced educational opportunities which seem to have serious ramifications for the economic wellbeing of these young women. Luong (2008) suggests that the idea that teenage motherhood has been particularly correlated with lower academic achievements may influence their involvement in the workforce as well as their income levels. Barriers to attaining post-secondary education put them at risk for low income given that low-skilled jobs tend to pay less. Luong found that women who were teenage mothers, on average, had after-tax income of \$40,300 compared with \$47,300 for adult mothers (p. 10).

Youngblut, Bolten, Brady, Brooten and Thomas (2000) state that some previous research suggests that young mothers approach the idea of employment and education with a negative attitude. However, others have found that having a child engendered a sense of responsibility in young moms and a desire to provide a better future for themselves and their children (Smith, 1995; Youngblut et al., 2000; Zachery, 2005). Youngblut et al. (2000) found that, despite common beliefs that stereotype these young single mothers as avoiding work, many of them desire to be employed. This was well articulated by one participant who stated: "Well, I want to have a job and I want to work. Not just for the children, but for me. And to just be stable. You know, not to rely on

[government] assistance every month when I could get paid every two weeks...” (p. 5).

This sentiment is consistent with the finding from Zachery’s (2005) study that motherhood increased many participants’ interest in education and may have encouraged them to re-evaluate the importance of schooling in their lives. One young mother in this study stated: “I want to better my education for my kids, and myself...because I’m their role model and they’re only gonna learn from what they see from me” (p. 2566).

It has also been noted that young mothers have been largely portrayed as a homogenous group when this is not the case (McDonell, Limber, & Connor-Godbey, 2007; Meluish & Phoenix, 1988; Furstenburg et al., 1989). For example, while some young mothers have had no desire to return to school after graduation, others aspired to professional training and graduate school. In their study on teenage mothers, Leadbeater and Way (2001) found that the aspirations of some young mothers “grew in proportion to the guarantees and securities these jobs hold for them and their children” (p. 7). For some mothers, parenting did not necessarily change their aspirations as much as it did encourage them to reassess their goals rather than abandon them (Blinn, 1990; Camarena et al., 1998).

The following discussion of barriers and supports illustrate the range of experiences within this diverse group. Some of these barriers and challenges involve negotiating multiple roles, financial constraints, partner relationships, and childcare. Valuable supports include family, mentors, knowledge, and social programs.

Barriers and Challenges

Single mothers have many roles and responsibilities to juggle. They may encounter mental and physical strain in their attempt to balance parental obligations and

responsibilities with their own individual needs. In Youngblut's (2000) study, one mother stated:

If I have homework, I have to wait until he goes to sleep at night to do it. Or cooking...as soon as I get in, I have to cook. I have to wash on certain days. You know, where I will just tire or stress myself out. But at home, it's just...like I said, it's something that I will have to, you know train my body to get used to. And I have been trying to do that (p. 5).

A few of the mothers in this study expressed that being employed would not only provide a stable income and environment for themselves and their children but also set a good example for them. It becomes clear, however, that being a caring mother while having to negotiate multiple roles, such as mother, homemaker, and student, does not come without various stressors which affect the mother's ability to achieve her own goals. It has been my experience working with young single mothers that the stress associated with meeting the demands of children and employers is often compounded with feelings of isolation. Having strong social supports becomes essential in trying to meet the sometimes conflicting demands associated with multiple roles of single parenting.

A large barrier that these young women face is financial constraints. Meluish and Phoenix (1988) suggest that mothers under the age of twenty are "more likely than older mothers to be working class, unmarried and financially dependent on the state" (p. 295). Caring for themselves and their children with minimal or no financial support from others influences what they can or cannot do on a number of levels (Meluish & Phoenix, 1988; Youngblut et al., 2000). Financial constraints influence the care-giving environment they can provide for their children, and also the level of stress associated with lack of money

or poor housing (Meluish & Phoenix, 1988). Moving in with family to alleviate some of these financial concerns may only increase their stress in other areas. While multigenerational living arrangements can help these young mothers acquire more education and reduce the likelihood of poverty, it can also create conflict associated with a division of household responsibilities as well as a desire for privacy and autonomy (Kalil & Danziger, 2000; Leadbeater & Way, 2001).

Living with a partner can ease financial burdens. However, for others, becoming involved in a partner relationship only complicates things and could potentially take away from their sense of independence (Leadbeater & Way, 2001). Moreover, many young mothers experience domestic violence in their intimate relationships (Leadbeater & Way, 2001; Larson, 2004). The young mothers who did leave their abusive relationship in Leadbeater and Way's study, were more likely to be working than those women that stayed. Much of my own work with young single mothers, many of whom were fleeing abusive relationships, involved advocating and finding resources to assist these women in sustaining their basic needs such as food and housing on their own.

Financial constraints manifest not only with respect to the cost of living and housing but also with regard to childcare. Lall (2007) found that, in addition to a lack of support with juggling a workload and parental obligations, young teenage mothers reported trouble with accessing services or training provisions because of lack of childcare services. In Youngblut's (2000) study, child care was found to be the biggest obstacle for young mothers on their journey into the workforce. Those who wish to become employed or pursue an education may have to contend with the issue of accessing, paying for and arranging care for their children (Kalil & Danziger, 2000; Stiles, 2005).

Childcare can be particularly difficult to obtain and coordinate in the late evening, which limits work opportunities (Youngblut et al., 2000). Safety also becomes an issue for these mothers in finding providers that they trust. In Leadbeater & Way's study, one mother stated:

I want to go to school for X-ray technician...It's like delayed, 'cause my problem is, every time I want to get involved into something, I always have to sit back and wait, because the only one that I trust with my kids is my mother. So I wouldn't, you know, it's like hard trying to trust people with your kids. Most of the time when I get jobs and stuff I have to leave the jobs (p. 97).

Participants in this study believed that affordable and convenient daycare would help facilitate their ability to achieve their work and educational aspirations.

Supports for Young Single Mothers

What is consistent across the research on both urban and rural young mothers is the importance of support to their future developments (Camerana et al, 1998). Social support has been shown to increase not only a positive parental attitude but also influence mothers' confidence in their ability to pursue a career (Kissman, 1990). Support for these women can take many forms.

Family relations can be a valuable source of support. McDermott and Graham (2005), suggest that kinship can provide emotional, financial and practical support as well as provide a safety net in times of crisis (p. 73). These authors further suggest that kin relations can become safe places that, for some, are places free of stigmatization. As mentioned previously, it has been my experience that family supports became a large

resiliency factor for many of the rural women with whom I worked. Family was often a source of childcare, financial support and emotional comfort.

Zippay (1995) found in her study that the use of mentors was a valuable source of support for young mothers. Of the 20 participants, 19 of these young mothers expressed positive comments with regard to having a mentor. Seventeen of these participants also said their mentor had influenced their educational plans because they provided them with information and encouragement regarding higher education. One mother in this study stated:

I saw that she [mentor] had a good job and got paid good and I realized that college is important. You can go high with it [college]. No one in my family ever went to college and I had never really known that (p. 62).

Participants in this study reported that mentors also helped with problem-solving, building self-esteem and perseverance. As one mother put it: “She said, “Stay in school, keep going. You can do it even if you have a daughter. You are doing a good job and you should be proud of yourself” (p. 62). This study suggests that mentors can be a positive influence for young single mothers in supporting both their practical and emotional needs.

In addition to supports, knowledge also becomes a key factor for young mothers in achieving their work and life aspirations. In one study by Stiles (2005), knowledge was the second major theme next to supports. The need for knowledge referred to the need to learn not only about how to take care of themselves and their children in terms of nutrition or healthcare. Participants in this study also referred to self-care knowledge as

the need to learn about formal education, relationship skills, financial planning, time management, and stress management. One mother in this study observed:

I like learning things, but when you are tired and stressed out about other things other than school, like stress from not getting enough sleep or my family problems, stuff like that, it is hard. That is the only problem I have (p. 332).

Similarly, McDonnell et al. (2007) noted the importance of education around substance use, healthy behavioural alternatives and life skills development, particularly problem solving. Knowledge in the above-mentioned areas appears to be important factors in a young mother's ability to pursue her aspirations.

A number of programs have been developed to promote educational and employment attainment for young single mothers. Philliber, Brookes, Lehrer, Oakley, & Waggoner (2003) identified several successful programs that offered a variety of supports, including prenatal education, life skills training, counselling, and home visits. These programs were found to be helpful in promoting educational attainment and employment (Philliber, et al., 2003). McDonnell et al. (2007) reported similar findings in their outcome study of the Pathways Teen Mother Support Project. Young mothers in this project received services that included case management, support groups, family group decision making, life skills education and training, and leadership development. Results showed that the treatment group “had fewer pregnancies; performed better academically and graduated with higher rates; reduced their marijuana use; were less impulsive; improved their problem-solving beliefs; and had more social support, especially from family members” (p. 840).

Leadbeater and Way (2001) suggest that “adolescent mothers may benefit from specific services tailored to their needs, rather than all needing comprehensive services” (p. 173). Cook and Owen (2007) and McDonnell et al. (2007) also suggest that intervention and prevention should address and support the individual and varying needs of this group. McDonnell et al. contend that “individualized planning is critical in responding to the varied needs of pregnant and parenting teens, implying that interventions will need to reach broadly into the community to include a range of community organizations that are central to teens’ lives” (p. 842). Programs designed around their needs have been found to increase their chances of continuing their education and experiencing higher levels of success (Zachry, 2005). To illustrate, Zachry found that educational achievement rested on the importance of a supportive and organized school environment in helping pregnant teens achieve (p. 2594). The young women in this study discussed how having teachers that were both supportive and encouraging, helped them to remain in school. Programs that support young women with the difficulties of caring for a child and continuing with school can increase their confidence and feelings of hopefulness about achieving their goals for the future.

Rural Single Mothers and Work

Young mothers in rural communities face additional challenges of being relatively isolated which may limit their supports and resources (McDonnell et al., 2007). For example, they may only be able to access additional training if they were willing to relocate to a different community (Camaren et al., 1998). Relocating may involve distance from family and community networks that could be important sources of support for both mother and child. It has been my experience working in a rural community that

family and community networks become a large factor in young mothers' ability to overcome obstacles associated with single parenting. For many of those with whom I worked, accessing post secondary programs necessitated both a move of significant distance from their supports and required funds that they did not have. In contrast to the few formal resources for training and education within our rural community, the family and community supports were rich. In their study on young rural mothers, Carmarena et al. (1998) found that "although a number of significant findings are evident in these patterns of reported support, perhaps most important is the general discrepancy between supportive persons available before pregnancy and for motherhood as compared to aspirations and goals" (p. 133). It would appear that more understanding of these discrepancies and of what young rural mothers perceive to be helpful and hindering in achieving their aspirations is needed. Camarena et al. state that little research has explicitly focused on the dynamics surrounding adolescent parenting in a rural context.

Summary of Chapter Two

The changing world of work, characterized by unpredictability and uncertainty, has many implications for youth today. More specifically, rural youth face challenges with limited access to resources, options and education. Young single rural mothers, in particular, are one group that encounter unique challenges in the context of work and education. Combining work or education with parenting poses challenges in the most optimal circumstances. It is a complex balance of multiple roles and obligations. Young single mothers in rural communities could be at a particular disadvantage given the nature of their circumstances characterized by decreasing financial resources and formal supports. It is clear that young mothers are not a homogenous group and require support

that can address their unique needs. Despite the challenges these young women face, they desire to better their lives for themselves and their children. Some have been able to access considerable support to help achieve their goals. Understanding the will and self-determination of many young single mothers to improve their lives, can help reduce the stigma some may encounter.

This review of the literature reveals that most of the information on young single mothers focuses on urban women. There is a gap in what young rural mothers, in particular, perceive as helpful or hindering in their attempt to pursue their goals. The purpose of this present study, therefore, was to elicit the stories of young rural single mothers so that we can better understand how to support them in achieving their work and educational hopes for the future.

Chapter Three: Methodology

My research question focuses on the work and educational experiences of young single mothers and requires in-depth data, thus, a qualitative approach was employed. Mason (1997) writes that conducting qualitative research requires one to be mindful of the mutable contexts in which the research takes place (Mason, 1997). In this vein, although my study was developed systematically, I avoided using a rigid structure in favour for a method that remained flexible to the unique context of my participants and setting throughout the research process (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Mason, 1997). Mason describes qualitative research as being “grounded in a philosophical position which is broadly ‘interpretivist’ in the sense that it is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced or produced” (p. 4). Furthermore, it has been suggested that qualitative research is conducted by individuals “who subscribe to the interpretive epistemology”, thus focussing on the “different social realities that individuals in a social situation construct as they participate in it” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005, p. 14).

Researcher Self Location

Before commencing my Masters degree at the University of Victoria in 2007, I spent several years working on Vancouver Island in the Tofino/Ucluelet area. Having been born in this area, I bore witness to the myriad of changes that these communities endured in the face of economic restructuring. A large number of residents faced unemployment as a result of the diminishing forestry and fishing industries. Many left the community as a result. For several years, I had worked for a non-profit community agency and provided support and advocacy for women. Among this group of women

were young mothers, many of whom were struggling to provide for themselves and their children with few resources, diminishing employment opportunities and inadequate or unaffordable housing. Much of my work involved supporting these young women to mitigate the stressors laden in economic uncertainty and having to raise their children with few resources.

Interestingly, my own decision to move to Victoria to pursue my Master's degree required a move without my husband who had to remain in Ucluelet to maintain economic stability for our family. My desire to pursue my educational aspirations involved a move from my rural community with my three daughters, essentially as a single parent. I have experienced my own challenges with attempting to juggle multiple roles as student and mother. Although leaving my community meant greater access to certain resources and opportunities for both myself and my children, I cannot negate the invaluable and treasured supports that I had to leave behind. This support came from a magnitude of avenues ranging from family, neighbours, even grocery store clerks that fostered a sense of belonging and safety. Living on campus in family housing has, however, provided opportunities to meet other women who share elements of my journey. Despite the varying individual and environmental contexts, there appear to be common denominators in our attempts to fulfill our goals. Issues with time, childcare, finances, and few supports become dominant themes. I have brought to this research insight, gained both personally and professionally, into the supports and barriers many young single mothers in rural communities face in their pursuit to promote positive outcomes for their future.

It is also important to note that the nature of my narrative interviewing required a certain degree of relationship building with my participants. As such, the skills that I have acquired as a counsellor-in-training became an important aspect of that quality of my research data. It is my belief that interpersonal skills such as active listening and empathy, worked to create the environment of safety and trust needed for these young mothers to tell their story (Moradi, Subich & Phillips, 2002).

Narrative Inquiry

I chose a narrative inquiry approach as a way to gain insight into my participants' social realities. Josselson, Lieblich and McAdams (2003) delineate two major principles of narrative inquiry. The first is that "narration is a major way in which people make sense of experience, construct the self, and create and communicate meaning" (p. 79) and the second is that "personal narratives, no matter how unique and individual are inevitably social in character" (p. 79). By listening carefully and intently to the narratives of young rural single mothers, it is possible to ascertain how they make sense of their experiences and construct meanings with regard to their situation (Josselson, et al., 2003). Moen (2006), suggests that narratives are a way to capture the individual's experience as well their context. After reviewing literature on the topic of single mothers it would appear that there are few reports of the experiences of young single rural mothers. Given that these young women may have unique experiences with regard to achieving their aspirations, in contrast to their urban counterparts, a narrative inquiry into their experiences could prove beneficial. Riessman (1993) suggests that the primary way that people make sense of their experience is by casting it in a narrative form (p. 4). Using a

narrative mode of inquiry could elicit important information about these young rural women's experiences.

Information about members of a group can be generated through the narratives of individuals (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Holstein and Gubrium (2003) suggest that interviews can provide a way to “generate empirical data about the social world by asking people to talk about their lives” (p. 3). Bauer (1996) describes the narrative interview, in particular, as being “a form unstructured, in-depth interview with specific features” (p. 2). He contends that many traditional models of interviewing adopt the question-answer format and as such tend to emphasize themes and topics related to wording and ordering the questions. However, by doing so he argues that the data will reveal more about the interviewer's structures and ideas rather than the participants' views of the issues being studied. In contrast, Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk (2007) suggest that in the narrative interview “the agenda is open to development and change depending on the story being told” (p. 464). They further suggest that facilitating this space requires the researcher to be an effective listener who views the interviewee as a “storyteller rather than a respondent” (p. 464). Understanding the participants of this research thus focused on the stories they told about their lives.

Generating the Stories

Reissman (1993) suggests using an interview format that is less structured so that greater control is given to the participants. Narrative interviews for this study began with an open ended question framed in a way that opened up the topic rather than focusing on specific information (Reissman). I asked my participants, “Tell me the story of your experiences in regard to work and education since becoming a mother”. Encouragers and

probes such as “Can you tell me more about that?” and “What happened next?” were used to facilitate the story telling process. Open questions regarding supports and barriers were asked when the participant did not include these areas in her narrative.

Riessman (1993) suggests that some investigators use visual aids to elicit narratives (p. 54). Thus, in this study, a Possible Selves Mapping technique was used in conjunction with the narratives to enhance the stories told by these young women. Possible selves refer to the way that individuals conceive themselves in the future and include positive *hoped for* and negative *feared* future images (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Marshall & Guenette, 2008; Oyserman, Brickman & Rhodes, 2007). By inviting participants to identify their hopes and fears of the future via a possible selves map, participants were encouraged to explore factors that were impeding or supporting their ability to achieve their aspirations in a concrete fashion (Marshall & Guenette, 2008). Marshall and Guenette (2008) utilize seven steps in their Possible Selves mapping process. I used five of these steps to assist my participants to reflect on their future goals in light of their stories already told, the last two action-oriented steps were omitted due to time and exploratory focus of the interview. The process was as follows:

1. Create a possible selves brainstorm map by brainstorming hoped for and feared selves (see Appendix D for examples);
2. Group and name the hoped for and feared selves;
3. Debrief and explain the brainstorm map;
4. Identify most wanted hoped for selves and most feared selves, and
5. Transfer the brainstorm information to a Possible Selves overview map (see Appendix D for examples)

Having used possible selves mapping in other research, I was confident that I could utilize this strategy to enhance the narratives of my participants.

The interviews ranged from an hour to an hour and a half. I first conducted a pilot interview with a local volunteer to check the timing and narrative process. The interviews were audio-taped using two recorders and I took brief notes during the interviews.

Additionally, I made notes immediately after each interview and transcribed all of the interviews myself, thus allowing me to become very familiar with the data.

Participants

Participants for this study were 6 single mothers between the ages of 18-23 who resided in a small coastal community in British Columbia. This sample size was small enough to generate thick descriptive accounts of these women's experiences yet large enough to provide a range of experiences. With respect to location, I chose an area where I am familiar with the local community agencies that would be a source for recruiting participants. I did not know any of the participants personally. In an effort to protect the anonymity of my participants, I have chosen not disclose the name of the town where I conducted my research. With respect to participant age, although much of the literature refers to the experience of teenage mothers, I believe it is important to consider the experiences of young mothers past age 19 because there seems to be a significant change in childbearing over the past few decades. Currently, delayed childbearing is considered to be the norm in Canada, with approximately 50% of births in Canada being to women over 30 years of age and over (Whitley & Kirmayer, 2007). Thus, mothers that are having children in their early twenties are considered to be engaging in *early childbearing* (Whitley & Kirmayer, 2007). Whitley & Kirmayer suggest that along with

changing fertility patterns come changes to the dominant discourse regarding what is normal and appropriate with regard to motherhood. In addition, since the focus of this study is on post-secondary education and work, which typically is a major focus of young people in their early twenties, it was important to hear from the voices of young mothers beyond the teenage years.

Participants were not restricted by ethnicity, education, or employment status. Of the six participants interviewed, three were of First Nations descent; however, they did not discuss any cultural factors associated with their work and educational aspirations, so their interviews were not analyzed separately or differently. As the investigator of this study, I contacted the primary administrator of a community service agency to obtain their support to assist in the recruitment process (see Appendix B-Information Letters). Once potential participants were identified, I made contact with them and provided a brief background to the research study. I explained the purpose of the study and answered any questions that arose. To honour the unique contexts of these young women, the interviews were conducted in a mutually agreed upon location and at a time that was convenient to the participant. A consent letter was provided at the time of interview (See Appendix C-Consent Letters). Participants were given a small honorarium (\$15.00) and compensation for any childcare expenses incurred for the interview.

Analysis

Riessman (1993) suggests that narrative analysis “takes as its object of investigation the story itself” (p. 1). However, it was my intention to conduct an “analysis of the narrative” rather than a “narrative analysis” (McCormack, 2004). That is to say, I used the narratives of my participants as data and analysed their stories for themes

(McCormack, 2004). In my study, this process included listening to the audio-taped interviews, making notes, reviewing maps, transcribing the interviews, reading, and re-reading the transcripts (Creswell, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). In order to treat the interviews in a holistic and integrative manner, I combined the data obtained from the entire narrative interview, including the possible selves mapping section and their overall impressions. Analysis then proceeded using a thematic text reduction procedure in which the data was "chunked" to first form descriptions and broad themes, then more specific subthemes (Creswell, 2008). Throughout the analysis, I was mindful of the participants' context when identifying themes. For example, support was sometimes described in a childcare context and sometimes it was in an educational context. Being mindful of the participants' context meant that I had to broaden theme content to include diverse contexts. I employed the following analysis steps (see table 1 for an illustration):

Step 1: Listened to the interview tapes and made notes

Step 2: Transcribed the tapes verbatim

Step 3: Outlined main ideas for each participant

Step 4: Made additional notes on each section of the transcript

Step 5: 'Chunking' produced a reduced transcript

Step 6: Identified broad themes, using colour coded words and phrases (such as a supportive daycare). Text segments were labelled with code words or phrases. The codes were then examined for overlap and redundancy, and revised.

Step 7: Identified main themes and quotes within the text to support these themes

Step 8: Identified more specific sub-themes

Step 9: Created a thematic “map” for each participant with themes and subthemes

Step 10: Across Participant Analysis – read all transcripts again. Look at within participant thematic maps to identify common thematic categories across all six participants

Step 11: Created an across participants category map with sub categories.

5. Chunking the Transcript	6. BROAD THEMATIC DESCRIPTION	7. Theme	8. Subthemes
<p>P: And her daycare was just a few blocks away so it was easy. I could just walk to her daycare when I needed and I was still breastfeeding at the time. I could just walk up there at lunch.</p> <p>...and my mom was really helpful and she was able to watch her when I went to work and the support was actually really good. I like my mom alot and my dad..</p>	<p>CONVENIENT DAYCARE FACILITY</p> <p>PARENTS HELPED WHEN SHE WENT TO WORK</p>	<p>Childcare</p> <p>Support Systems</p>	<p>Close childcare</p> <p>Family</p>

Table 1: Illustration of Analysis Steps

Creswell suggests that the presentation and discussion of findings can vary widely from one study to another (p. 262). To acknowledge the particular voices and experiences of the six participants as well as identify commonalities among them, I have chosen to separate within-participant analysis from across-participant analysis. In Chapter 4, I first

present the within participant themes with participants' thematic maps. Chapter 5 describes the results of the across-participant analysis with discussion of relevant literature. The amount of overlap between the within and across participant analysis would make discussion in both chapters too repetitious.

Data Credibility

In qualitative inquiry, a number of authors have proposed processes and techniques to address the issue of what quantitative researchers term *validity* (Creswell, 2008; Whitemore, Chase, & Mandale, 2001). To address authenticity or credibility, I have used triangulation and member checking (Creswell, 2008). Triangulation involves examining varied information sources and finding evidence to support data themes. I drew on multiple sources of information, such as interview transcripts, notes and possible selves maps. Member checking involves asking participants in the study to check the accuracy of accounts. I was sure to paraphrase carefully during the interview and check that my interpretations with participants for accuracy. I also attempted to contact each participant after the analysis process to further check if my analysis and interpretations were fair and representative. Unfortunately, I only heard back from two of the six participants. With those I did reach, I discussed the themes that I identified within their stories and asked if they thought these themes were reflective of their experiences. Both participants agreed that the themes adequately represented the stories they shared during our interview.

Reflexivity is also important in the authentication process. Gall, Gall & Borg (2005) refer to reflexivity as, "the researcher's analysis of their own role as constructors and interpreters of the social reality being studied" (p. 314). I kept a reflexivity journal

throughout the research process to foster my ability to be self-critical and seek integrity at each stage of the inquiry (Whittemore et al., 2001). For example, my journal helped me to be continuously aware of how my experiences or the interaction between myself and the participants may have influenced the research process. As a student and mother of three, I could relate to various barriers and challenges the participants expressed during the interview.

A Final Thought Regarding Researcher Subjectivity

In addition to the commitment, rigour, and intention that I have brought to this study, I bring an interest that goes beyond the academic and professional realm. My own experience as a young mother living without my husband, in transition from a rural to urban area in an attempt to pursue my goals, continues to motivate my inquiry. However, I am also aware of the importance of recognizing that these same experiences carry some risk for influencing or shaping the outcome of this study. On occasion during the interview, I caught myself probing in areas that resonated for me in my personal journey. During the analysis process, it was important for me to be aware of this lens so that I did not miss the supports these women encountered and the undeniable level of optimism they held for their future. Cottle states that, “..we run the risk of making the story of the Other become what *we* wish or need it to become, not necessarily what *he* or *she* wishes or needs it to become.” (2002, p. 536). The encounter between myself and my participants required a sense of responsibility to both myself and my participants (Cottle, 2002). Therefore, it has been with responsibility, awareness, and curiosity that I have approached this research.

Chapter Four: Within Participant Findings

In this chapter I present the results of the within individual participant analysis. For each participant, there is a brief bio-sketch followed by their thematic map and a discussion of the themes identified in each participant's interview. I have included each participant's brainstorm and possible selves map in Appendix E. The thematic maps were created using the broad themes identified in the analysis of each individual participant interview. Each broad theme is represented in a rounded rectangle shape and includes arrows pointing to the corresponding subthemes.

I will include quotes in the presentation of the findings to support the themes that I identified as well as to capture the voice of my participants (Creswell, 1998). I have chosen to italicize participant quotes to highlight and signify their voices. I have kept them largely verbatim to include "their words" in the thesis. Some minor editing has been done for clarity and to improve reliability. To respect the anonymity of participants, I chose pseudonyms in place of their real names. In some cases, I have chosen not to discuss too much information regarding the fathers of the participants' children or other potential identifiable issues due to the sensitive nature of the information and concerns about confidentiality.

Lisa

Lisa is an 18 year old single mother of one. She and her two year old child live with her parents while she currently pursues post secondary education. Lisa has completed her grade 12 and now faces challenges pursuing college without the flexibility she received in an alternative program during high school. Lisa dreams of becoming a neurosurgeon and would like to move to a larger city yet has concerns about the support systems she will leave behind. Her hopes to travel one day have changed since having a child. She now envisions travelling with her child when she is a little older rather than on her own. I identified five main themes in Lisa's interview: Becoming a mother, Education, Support Systems, Money, and Childcare.

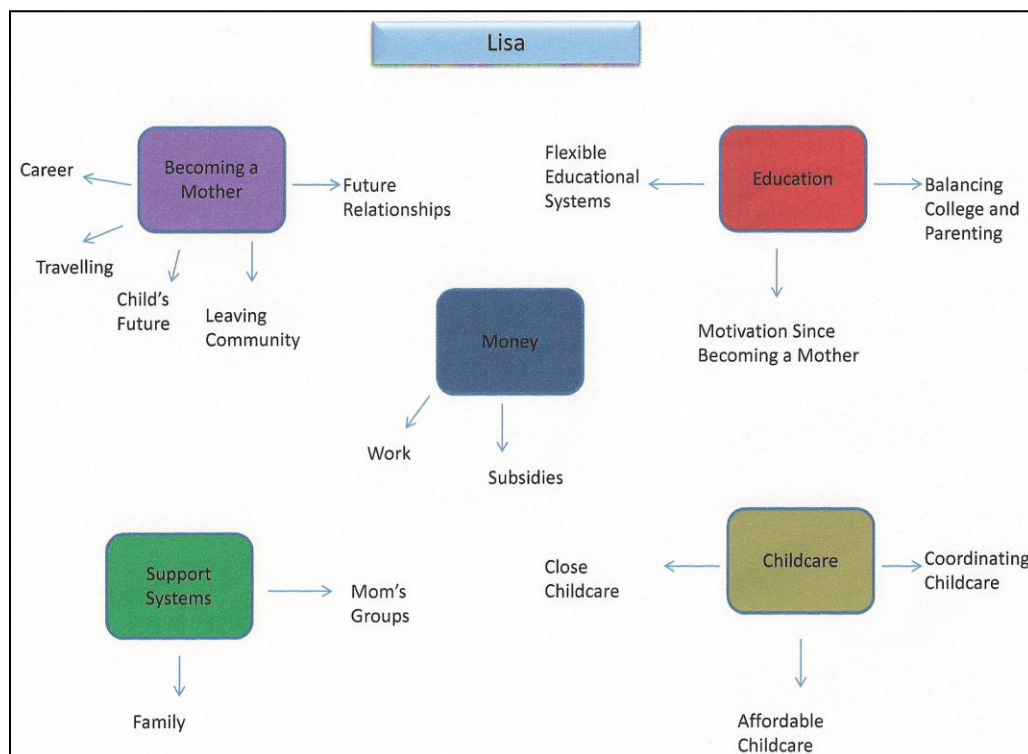


Figure 1: Lisa's Thematic Map

Lisa's Themes

Education

For Lisa, having a flexible educational program contributed to her ability to finish grade 12. The alternative school that she attended after her child was born provided the structure needed to finish her academic requirements yet responsive to her needs as a young mother. Lisa expressed the difficulty of pursuing college without similar flexibility:

I'm having a few struggles...just because it's so hard...I went to an alternative school and it wasn't all that structured where I could learn, like, the full, like, Bio12...

Negotiating the roles of student and mother was also evident in her story. Lisa states:

It is hard because the people I study with will go home before we go to study group and they'll study before study group where I'll spend time with [child]...I can't really do much about it because...then I just stay up really late and wake up and do it over again.

Balancing college and parenting has become a daunting task. Despite these challenges, Lisa noted that having a child increased her motivation to finish school. Lisa remarked:

...before I had her I probably would say I didn't care about school and I just thought, whatever, I'll just grad in five years after my grad year but after I had her...well when I found out I was pregnant I was like, k, I'm not going to school

for that long after so when I was pregnant I stayed in school till I was a good eight and half months.

Lisa's attitude and perspective about school changed dramatically once she had a child. Pursuing her education seemed to shift in importance as she understood its necessity in obtaining a good paying job to foster a good quality of life for herself and her child.

Childcare

Not surprisingly, childcare has played an important factor in Lisa's work and educational pursuits. Lisa identified that having childcare close to her school was helpful. The flexible alternative program that she attended allowed her to walk to her child's daycare when she needed to. Lisa was able to continue breastfeeding without compromising her educational goals. Not only was the childcare center close, it was also affordable. Lisa received childcare subsidies while she attended the alternative program. She noted that although she is now working while attending college and has to pay a small portion per month, she is still able to take her daughter to the same childcare used in the alternative program. Lisa identified that one challenge has been coordinating childcare. She receives support from her parents who help with transporting her daughter to daycare, however, this poses difficulties when there are multiple schedules involved. The following quote illuminates these challenges:

...and my mom and dad will pick up [child] from daycare because I don't go to school or I go to school until like four or five, sometimes like way later than that... but like on Thursdays and Fridays my dad's working so I still have to leave class like a half an hour early in order to get her from daycare and it's hard...

Lisa's story illustrates the inevitable challenges that can arise as a single mother, despite a strong family support system. There are times when she has to leave class early or miss study groups to pick up her child. In her case, school is sometimes compromised by the demands of childcare.

Support Systems

Two systems that Lisa recognized as being a valuable source of support have been her family and a local young mothers' group. Her parents have been particularly helpful with regard to childcare. Lisa commented:

...and my mom was really helpful and she was able to watch her when I went to work and the support was actually really good. I like my mom a lot and my dad.

It was clear throughout Lisa's narrative that her parents have been an incredible source of practical and emotional support for her and her child. Although she expressed gratitude for her family, she also noted the challenges that can arise when roles overlap:

...she's getting pretty close to my mom now which is kinda sad because she won't let me put her to bed some nights. She wants her nana to put her to bed but it's only a year and the first semester of school is really hard. After that it will be a lot easier.

It would seem, in this case, that having a reliance on family with regard to childcare may have implications for parental attachment.

Lisa also attended a young mom's group. The group provided her with the opportunity to gain knowledge and support with regard to single parenting. Lisa

expressed that she learned important information about health and safety for her child and participated in activities that promoted parent and child interaction such as cooking with her child. Knowledge of self-care and parenting appears to help relieve some of the stress that could impede her ability to focus on her aspirations.

Money

Lisa noted that the importance of financial security was amplified when she found out she was pregnant. Having a child created financial awareness concerning childcare needs, government subsidies, and post-secondary costs. She states:

I was only fifteen when I got pregnant and I never really thought about daycare and going back to school...it was kinda a scare to me, honestly, because having just her dad pay for it and pay for everything else...I didn't know the government gave you money based on your income.

As a Metis woman, Lisa has received government funding for childcare as well as funding for post-secondary school. In addition to these resources, Lisa has juggled work during the summer months.

...then last summer of '08 I got a fulltime job in the summer. I worked for the chamber of commerce...Looking back on it now it was pretty hard to be away for such a long time from her.

This quote suggests that Lisa felt positive about working to obtain financial security, yet experienced feelings of discomfort because of having to leave her child for long periods of time.

Becoming a Mother

Having a child motivated Lisa to pursue her work and educational goals. Hopes for the future such as travelling, future relationships or moving out of her parent's house, do not come without serious consideration for her child's needs. For Lisa, moving to larger city where she can pursue her dream of working at a hospital posed some difficulties. She commented:

...all my family is from here and its kinda hard 'cause we're so close and I have support here and I guess I'm just used to it.

Additionally, the idea of becoming a neurosurgeon seemed daunting, considering the length of time it would take to achieve such a goal. Despite this, however, Lisa is still committed to working towards her aspirations.

Becoming a mother not only affected Lisa's outlook on her own future-she also has to think about her child's. Her own experience when younger has influenced the hopes and fears she has for own daughter. She expressed:

I just want the best for her and I don't really want to be working at like a minimum wage job. I want to be able to give her whatever she wants and to be able to put her in the sports that I had. Because I was able to have, not everything I wanted, but was able to go and do hockey and track and all that.

Lisa explains that she fears her child will follow a similar path and become pregnant at an early age. She acknowledges the challenges she has encountered with having a child at a

young age and hopes that her child will pursue her aspirations before having children of her own. She states:

...I don't want her to turn out like me. Well, like, that sounds horrible...but well I was like 14 or 15 when I got pregnant...I want her to know that there's alternatives...and kinda explain to her to pursue her dreams a bit more, like, be able to do it before having a child.

Lisa's hopes and fears for her child illustrate the degree to which she has thought about her own life process since becoming a mother. What was clear throughout her story was how motherhood has influenced her commitment towards education, future work, and her desire to be a positive role model for her child.

Kari

Kari is 23 year old single mother of two children aged 3 years and 15 months old. She is currently enrolled in an alternative school where she is pursuing her grade 12. Kari was one of the oldest participants in this study. Prior to returning to school the second time she worked at a fish plant. Ultimately she hopes to provide an emotionally healthy life for herself and her children as well as meet their basic needs. Kari hopes to become a nurse and afford a home of her own, yet is concerned about her ability to achieve these aspirations. Kari's main themes include: Education, Support Systems, Work, Fear of Failure, and Money.

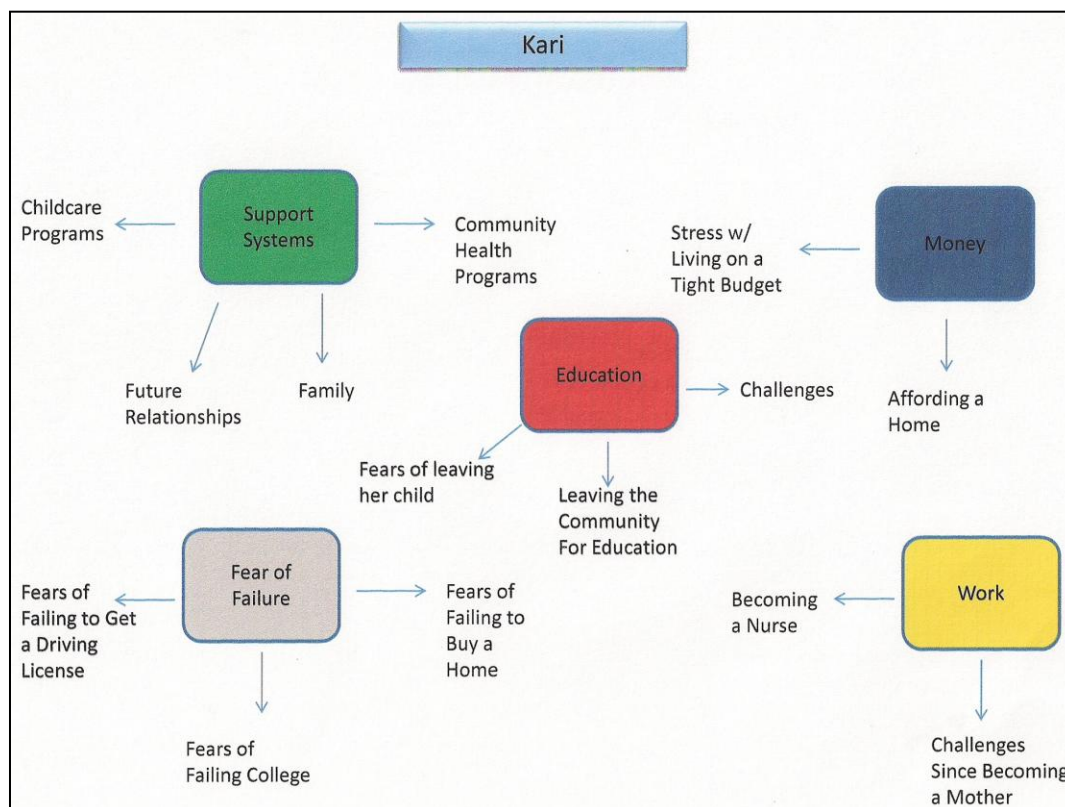


Figure 2: Kari's Thematic Map

Kari's Themes

Education

Kari expressed her challenges with continuing her education as a mother.

Combating morning sickness and fatigue made it difficult for Kari to finish school.

Well when I first started going to adult ed at the hospital...I was pregnant and it was going okay [at first]. I was like 19 and I had morning sickness and I was tired all the time so I didn't finish. I was supposed to go back after I had my son but just wanted to stay home.

It was not until her cousin informed her of an alternative education program that offered childcare, that Kari reconsidered pursuing her goal to finish school.

I wanted to go back to school and I tried again just before I got pregnant with my daughter...once again I didn't finish it just because I was tired and wanted to sleep all the time and finally, I heard from my cousin. She moved back and she told me they had a daycare for moms who wanted to go back to school...

Kari expressed that initially it was difficult being away from her children while she attended classes but that her worries have since subsided.

The first day was hard because it was [child] first day at daycare so I was looking at the time and wondering if she was okay...I phoned her at lunch break and she was fine...

Kari reported that her transition back to school has gone well and has been able to keep up with her academic requirements.

...but it's going good the school work...I am already half way through and it's only my third day here.

Kari plans on finishing school so that she can go to college and become a nurse. She would like to go to University in a larger town but leaving her community would be difficult. Because of this, Kari has opted to pursue her education at a local community college.

Support Systems

Kari identified three main sources of support: childcare, family and community health programs. Finding childcare relieved many of her worries with regard to going back to school. The alternative school that Kari currently attends allowed her to access the nearby childcare program sooner than anticipated. Kari noted:

...there was a long waiting list at the [childcare]center but because I was a young mom going back to school I was bumped up and I got accepted right away...so that was very helpful because I was worried...

For Kari, having accessible, affordable and flexible childcare influenced her perceptions and decision about returning to school.

Kari also noted the important role her family has played in her ability to achieve her goals. Her family living nearby has helped her with additional childcare so that she can take time out for herself when needed and complete everyday tasks such as a laundry. For Kari, family includes not only her mother but also her grandparents.

...my grandpa helps me out a lot. This morning he gave me a ride because I was running behind. And he buys the kids juice and stuff like that.

Kari's story highlights the importance of receiving support for basic household tasks that are added to her parental obligations. Relieving some of the stress associated with day-to-day activities helps alleviate some of pressure experienced when pursuing work and education.

Community health programs such as parenting classes and mothers' groups have also been a source of support. Moms' groups were an opportunity to network with other mothers and their children and to gain skills and knowledge related to parenting, health, and life skills.

I used to go once in a while...it was kinda of neat because there was a whole bunch of kids that my kids could play with. And every Wednesday they have healthy eating.

Additionally, the community health unit where her children could get immunized was conveniently located nearby. Otherwise, Kari would have had to travel back to the First Nations reserve to access certain services, and that would have created issues with time and transportation.

Work

Kari identified various challenges with regard to working. Many of these challenges were inherent in being a single mother. Being away from her child for long

hours combined with fatigue associated with parenting, made it difficult to continue long hours of work at a local fish plant.

And I think when [child] was about 6 months old when I tried to go back to work...well I worked at the fish plant. They were long hours 12 hours shifts...I did a good month of work and I missed him too much 'cause the hours are so long and I would get home and was very tired, so I quit that...

Despite her initial challenges with work, Kari expressed her desire to obtain a career in nursing.

I can't wait to go to college and start my career...I want to go in the nursing field.

Her excitement about pursuing a career is not without fears that she will be able to achieve her goals given the demands of parenting. The interplay of demands as a mother, student and employee and the importance of balancing these demands were evident for Kari.

Fear of Failure

In her interview, Kari spoke about her fears of failure. She feared that she would not be able to buy a home in the future, get her driving license, or succeed at college. Kari reflected on her past experiences with failure, her beliefs about herself, and how failing may impact her future:

...failure is a big one because, actually, if I do nothing and if I fail that kinda puts everything on hold...

I've tried to get my license three times. I took the test and I failed so I kinda don't want to go and take it again 'cause I'm worried I'm going to fail...and another thing is that I'm worried it's [school] going to be overwhelming and I am going to fail. So if I fail then I have to figure out a whole other career path... I'm worried about going through the course and I guess failing it 'cause I'm good at the work and stuff but when it comes to tests and stuff I fail them all the time so...that's probably what will get me in the end but hopefully I can get through it.

Her past experiences of failure have influenced how she perceives her abilities in the future. Lent et al. (1999) suggest that “the most robust source of self-efficacy beliefs is personal mastery experience...failure experiences tend to diminish self-efficacy” (p. 299). Despite Kari's optimism and determination, her fears of failure can add to the challenges she faces as a single mother.

Money

Kari identified the struggles she encounters financially in her attempt to provide for herself and her children with minimal support. Having to survive on a tight budget creates stress. Although Kari receives family maintenance payments, she has to declare this on her social assistance claim. She emphasized the importance of budgeting in her circumstances so she can ensure her basic needs are met and her rent is paid. Money is not only a concern for present day life but also for her future. Kari hopes to someday own her own home but is uncertain this will happen given the costs and her current situation. Financial concerns affect much of what she believes she can or cannot do with regard to the future. What is clear in Kari's narrative interview and Possible Selves map

is the tension that she experienced with striving towards future goals while challenging self-perceptions and fears.

Jennifer

Jennifer is an 18 year old single mother of a 17 month old child. She currently lives with her family and is attending grade 12 at a local alternative school. Jennifer hopes to acquire a good paying job when she finishes school so that she can contribute to a college fund for her child and live on her own. Jennifer's story highlights the tension that she experiences with receiving family support while maintaining a sense of independence and identity as a mother. Her story is also one filled with motivation and determination to better her life for herself and her child. Additionally, it provides insight into how external factors such as concerns about violence can create more stress to an already stressful situation. Jennifer's main themes as shown in Figure 3 include: Changes since becoming a mother, Concerns about violence, Supports, Education, and Family.

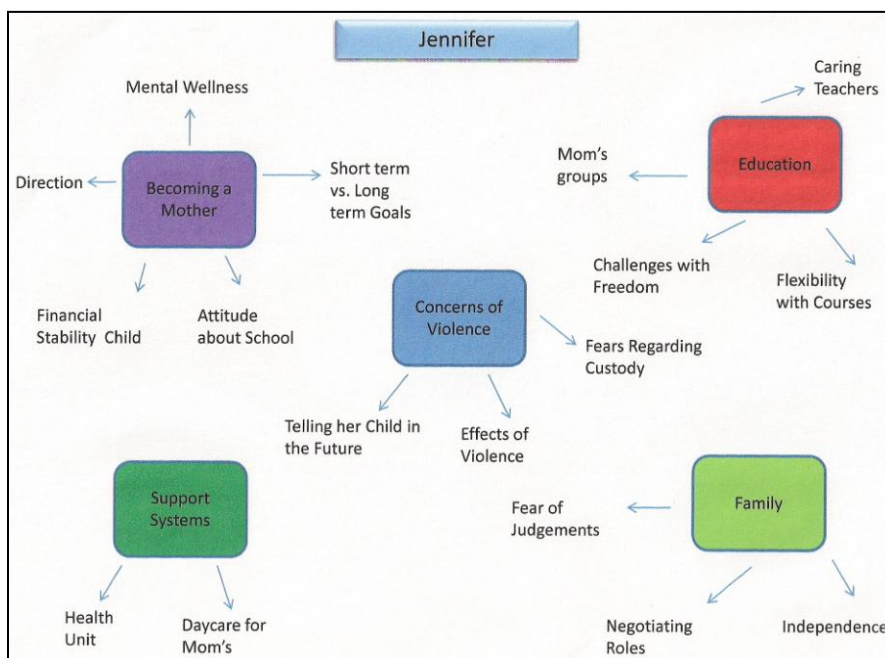


Figure 3: Jennifer's Thematic Map

Jennifer's Themes

Becoming a Mother

Throughout the interview, Jennifer commented on how becoming a mother provided direction in terms of work and educational goals. She expressed her desire to provide financial stability for her child and, as such, has created short term work goals to achieve this.

...I didn't really know where I was going or if I was going to go to post-secondary schooling. But now that I have had [child], I have had to look at that I need more than \$8 an hour.

...that's pretty much what kicked me in the butt is looking at him and going like, hmm, you don't need to live in grandma's house for the rest of your life.

Jennifer also spoke to her desire for mental wellness. She had been prescribed anti-depressants for postpartum depression. Jennifer desires to be happy with her life without having to take medication. Becoming a mother has encouraged her to look at all aspects of her life and how it may impact her child in the present as well as the future. Jennifer expressed:

Happy... just you know...content in my own shell with my own life and happy... proud that I am doing what I need to do... 'cause when I was depressed I felt kinda like I was in a fog all the time. No matter if [child] was being great or not I was still very upset...I just want to be [happy]...without having to try...just simply okay with my life and happy about it...I am going in the direction that I want to

go. I don't want to be unhappy and get to the point where I feel that it's all [child]'s fault because I didn't get to do anything. Because it has nothing to do with him, it was my own choices.

Jennifer's story suggests that having a child has created a sense of maturity and responsibility in her life. Her story also demonstrates a holistic view of life, taking into account the need for emotional, mental and financial balance. Jennifer is mindful of not only how work or education may impact her and her own child's future but also how it impacts her mental wellness.

Concerns about Violence

In her possible selves mapping process, Jennifer spoke of her fears about violence and how the violence in her previous relationship has influenced her fears for the future. She described feelings of apprehension about custody, future contact with her former partner, and having to explain these circumstances to her child in the future. In addition to the numerous stressors Jennifer experiences in her attempt to pursue her goals as a single mother, the concerns about violence emerged:

I think about this [violence] all the time. Especially the one to do with the biological father just because of everything that happened, it really does scare me that he will come back around...

For Jennifer, fears of basic safety add a constant stressor to the other challenges she faces as a young single mother.

Supports

Supports have become critical for Jennifer in the face of her aforementioned concerns about violence. A major source of support has been her child's daycare. The proximity of the daycare and the alternative school allowed her to leave class when she needed to see or nurse her child. This was a very positive experience that facilitated her staying in school. Jennifer also noted the importance of having good communication with the day care staff:

...with the daycare I am very happy. They give you a communications chart at the end of the day where you fill them out. They talk to you and you tell them when they ate last and everything...Then at the end of the day they tell you what they did, when they ate, when they got changed...

Jennifer also highlighted the support she received from the community health unit. There she was given assistance with prenatal and postnatal care as well as food vouchers. Furthermore, she received support from an outreach worker that helped with transportation to and from appointments. Support presented in varying forms for Jennifer and offered unique and equal benefits.

Education

The flexible education program has been important for Jennifer in enabling her to finish her grade 12. She expressed that, although there are some challenges with freedom such as needing to manage her time wisely to complete assignments, having flexibility with course requirements was helpful.

LAF class, which is language arts...we will have movies or something and instead of doing an assignment you can do an assignment on the movie because it's all educational...and then you can get credit towards your English that way and. ..

I really do enjoy the 'your own pace' because I am a very quick worker...

Jennifer identified a sense of intrinsic motivation that comes from completing school on her own terms rather than having others impose expectations on her to complete.

... I do definitely think this style of school works a lot better as long as the children are motivated themselves.

As part of the school program, Jennifer attends a group for young moms. Here, Jennifer has acquired cooking skills, parenting resources, and gained support from her peers. She stated:

...actually it's really nice to know...we talk about our own experiences and there are so many different things that other teenage moms go through, so it's a way different outlook...

Jennifer expressed that her past experiences in school had not been very positive. She noted the importance of having caring, supportive teachers who were sensitive to her unique situation and how this support has helped her to continue to pursue her educational goals:

...no I enjoy the form here. It's very calm and relaxed and the teachers work with you a lot better and they do care more about where you're going. So I enjoy that a lot more...

Family

Jennifer noted the importance of family support. Initially, she was hesitant to tell her parents about her pregnancy, for fears they would be judgmental. She noted that telling her parents about the pregnancy was perhaps the greatest hurdle she had to face.

...the biggest hurdle had to be with my parents...telling them and them getting used to the whole situation.

Although her family has been a source of support for her and her son, Jennifer acknowledged the challenges of negotiating roles as a mother and daughter in the same household. She stated:

...sometimes they interfere. They aren't used to the fact that I'm mom so they kinda gotta deal with the way that I do things...It's always toeing around the boundaries with that...

Jennifer expressed the importance of gaining more independence as a mother. She stated that, although she would like to move out of town one day, it was more important first to achieve some sort of independence from her family. One way of achieving some independence would be to get her own place in town.

Sara

Sara is a 20 year old single mother of a two year old child. She currently lives on her own and attends a local alternative school. Sara's goals are to graduate from high school, go to college, open her own bakery and own her own home. Sara expressed fears of losing her child to foster care or not living long enough to see him graduate or have children of his own. Sara's challenges as a single mother are compounded by an injury and few support systems outside of school. She spoke about the importance of enjoying and surviving each day despite her fears and challenges. It was clear throughout Sara's interview that she was still coping and healing from various circumstances. Thus, her interview was very emotional. Her interview illustrated in Figure 4 include: Support systems, Becoming a mother, Education, and Concerns about violence.

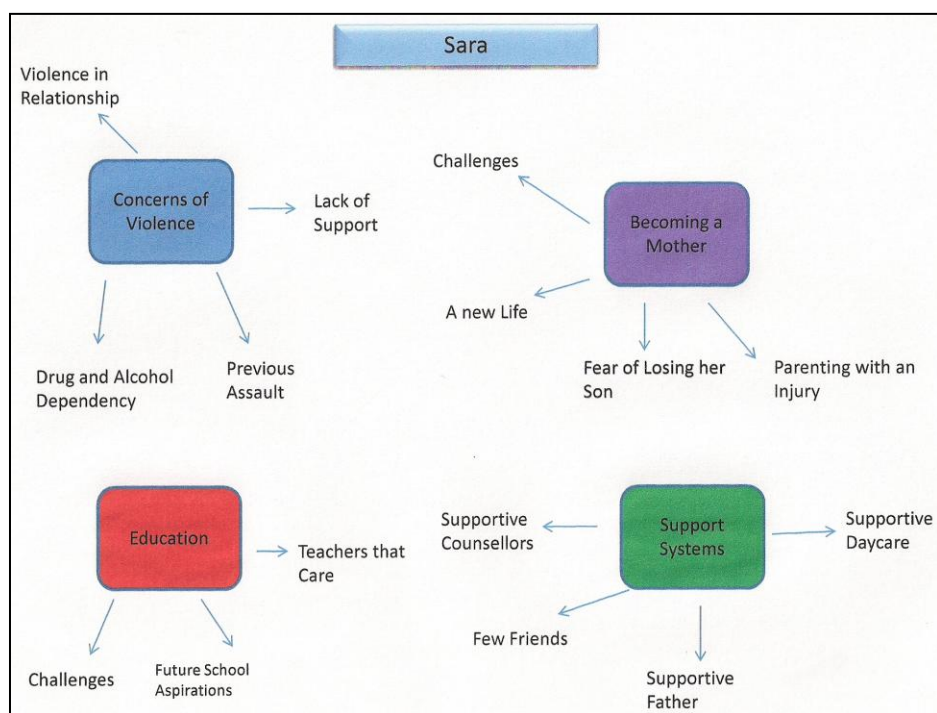


Figure 4: Sara's Thematic Map

Sara's Themes

Support Systems

Sara spoke of the significant supports she has received from teachers and counsellors at the alternative program.

I was letting my ex visit my son and I didn't know what to do because my ex was teaching my son how to punch me and bite me and pull my hair...I was real mad about that and I didn't know how to deal with it. So I came to school and I was asking some of the teachers how I could deal with it...They give advice because they have kids too and they understand...yeah, I enjoy having someone to talk to...Besides school, I don't have anyone to talk to.

She stated that she has very few social supports in her life, therefore, the ones she receives at school have become very important and influential. She shared:

I think I would be pretty lost without my support here.

Sara has relied on support from counsellors, a supportive daycare, and her father. However, she feels stress now that her father has moved out of the family home. Her father helped with transportation, childcare, and everyday tasks such as cooking.

I was living with my dad but my dad got his own place. I relied on my papa for lots of stuff...it's just this month that he moved out...it's really different because he helped with baby and he helped with cooking and helped with some of the cleaning... I have to do everything

Additionally, Sara described how the loss of key friendships has impacted her. She described one key friend, whose friendship helped make the transition into motherhood easier. For reasons unknown to Sara, the friendship ended. Becoming a mother has stressed the importance of supports in Sara's life.

Becoming a Mother

Sara has the added stress of parenting with an injury. She speaks of the challenges she faces of wanting to do more physically with her son but is restricted because her injury. The injury prevents her, at times, from lifting him or running with him.

I always wish I could do more with my son, like I play with him and everything I can do... but I would much rather be able to bring him out for a walk and walk around with him and let him walk and run around. But it's like after [the injury] I couldn't, and the pain was so bad...some days I can't even get out of bed it hurts.

Despite the hurdles she faces on her own, Sara spoke of the positive changes in her life since becoming a mother. Her fears of ever losing her son and falling back into unhealthy patterns were reflected in the possible selves part of the interview. A common thread throughout Sara's interview was how having a child "saved her life". Despite the challenges she faces as a single mother with few supports and an injury, having a child has provided her with the opportunity to start a new life:

...he saved me. He was my angel that was sent to save me. But there's not one day that I regret having him... 'cause there is always a reason for everything...He was sent to me for reasons. ... 'cause I know if I didn't have him I would be an alcoholic and probably into heavy drugs. But now...I don't worry about that I

don't feel there's a need to go out and drink all the time or go out and do drugs. I love sitting there and being a mom and staying clean and enjoying every day of life with my son.

Education

Sara noted the importance of having a flexible educational system for young mothers. She spoke of the guidance she received not only from the teachers at the alternative program she attends but also from the school counsellors. Sara described an educational environment that supports her academic goals while taking into account her particular personal context.

I really enjoy coming to [alternative program.] It's a good school. My teachers are great and they give me advice.

For Sara, it was important to receive support both personally and academically without feeling pressured or judged. She stated:

It's a great feeling being able to come here even if I am just doing school work... the next day I'm having a hard day, I can just sit and talk to someone. They don't judge me or give me crap.

Although she has received a great deal of support at her school, Sara expressed that she has encountered challenges with her course work for a number of reasons.

I just don't like reading though...I'm not a very good reader. My eyes twitch and when I try to read something and I'll skip something and I will have to go back and read it over.

...haven't gotten a lot of a school done but when I'm motivated and not in so much pain I get a lot of work done.

Despite these challenges with school, Sara is optimistic that she will finish and continue onto to college one day. She shares:

I know I will graduate and I know one day I will go to college.

Concerns about Violence

Concerns about violence were noted as an additional stressor for Sara. Part of the challenges that she faced were related from past issues of abuse. Sara shared her story of being assaulted in the family on more than one occasion and the lack of support she received from her mother when she decided to report the abuse. She shared:

...She was mad because I pressed charges against him and I was, like, well I did the right thing...I was, like, if you want to be mad you go ahead and be mad but I did what was right to me...I wouldn't be able to live with myself if I didn't press charges and tell the truth about what happened.

Sara also experienced abuse by her child's father and became isolated from supports.

I was never allowed to talk to people, and when I did things would get real bad...

To cope with the violence she endured, Sara turned to drugs and alcohol. Although, having a child motivated her to change her coping strategies and pursue a healthier way of life, she still experiences concerns about violence.

I was letting my ex visit my son and I didn't know what to do because my ex was teaching my son how to punch me and bite me and pull my hair.

She now receives supportive counselling to help her continue to make healthy choices so that she can better her life for herself and her child. She stated:

I had been going to counselling for a while, 'cause I knew I had problems, I had just lost my mom, I was sexually assaulted and I had a baby.

Although Sara's circumstances were complex, the degree in which she has worked to make positive changes in light of her situation was clear.

Erika

Erika is a 20 year old mother who lives on her own with her two children while pursuing her grade 12 at the local alternative school. Regarding possible future goals, she described her desire to balance a career as a psychologist or doctor with her interests in martial arts and art. Erika's hopes for her future, however, were met with uncertainty. Stressors in the form of money, housing, and concerns about violence cast a shade of doubt on her ability to keep moving forward. Despite these stressors, Sara noted her desire to push through current challenges and remain optimistic about her future. She is originally from the mainland and is working towards moving back to her home town where she will be able to access more supports. Erika's themes outlined in Figure 5 include: Housing Issues, Work, Education, and Concerns about Violence.

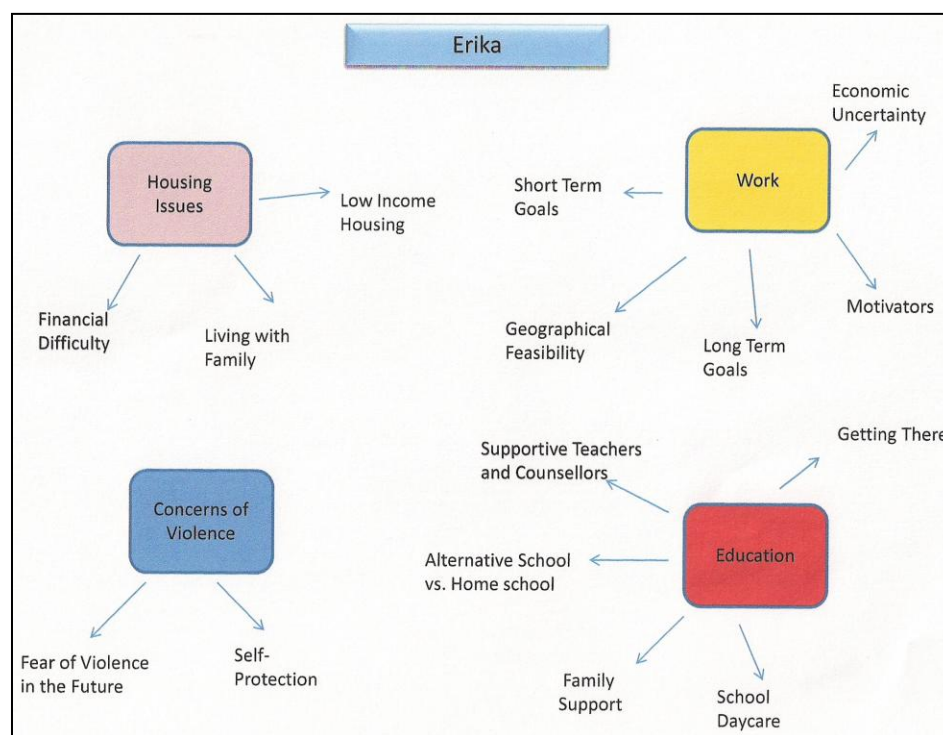


Figure 5: Erika's Thematic Map

Erika's Themes

Housing Issues

The first theme identified in Erika's story was housing. When Erika and her partner had their first child, they lived with her partner's grandparents and later with her family. Eventually they were able to get a place of their own though they struggled financially. She stated:

Well, we struggled financially and together. So it was hard because we were in a bachelor's pad. And then about a year later when [child] was one, we moved to a two bedroom place and that was pretty good. But the rent was crazy, it was \$650.00 and it was hard for us...

They were accepted into low income housing and they had their second child. Although their housing situation improved, the couple separated. Erika currently has a place of her own with her two children

Education

With regard to future educational goals, Erika would like to one day pursue a degree in psychology or medicine. In the meantime, she hopes to complete a certificate program in medical transcription after graduation. Currently Erika attends an alternative program to finish her grade 12. Before this, she did courses through correspondence. She noted a huge difference in her ability to focus on her school work since starting in the alternative program and enrolling her children in daycare. Erika has found that her family has also been a great source of support in working towards her academic goals. The

largest hurdle that she has identified with regard to education is actually “getting there”. Erika described difficulties of getting two children to daycare.

I guess the hardest thing right now is taking the bus to drop them off at daycare because I don't have a double stroller or anything like that, so it's really hard.

For Erika, the prominence of logistical factors, such as transportation, can hinder her ability to pursue her educational goals.

Work

For Erika, work aspirations are divided between short term and long term goals. Once she has graduated, she hopes that a short certificate program will allow her to become employable. Erika expressed that once her children are in school, she would like to pursue her long term aspirations to become a doctor or psychologist. Factors that have had an influence on Erika's long term work goals include feasibility of being able to work towards her degree in psychology or medicine in BC; economic uncertainty on a larger scale; and her ability to “not give up”.

...same with the psychologist...I think I could more so if the course is in BC which is why it's more likely...

...well because of my kids right. I don't want to move them around.

...I call it [economic]depression, basically I'm scared that the economy might drop after everything that's going on right now and inflation going up and all that...it kind of scares me, I don't really know what to do if that happens...

...a lot of people have big dreams when they are younger they end up not going through with them...I wouldn't be too happy if I gave up.

Erika identified that her early experiences of receiving inadequate support has motivated her to pursue work in the helping field. She shared:

...the specialist, I'm not exactly sure what he was, but he hardly talked to me... he prescribed me drugs and I was very upset because that's not at all what I was expecting. I was expecting something...that he would actually talk to me and help me solve the problems I was going through not just give me drugs. So I decided I'm going to do a better job than he did.

Additionally, Erika has identified how having children has also motivated her to better her work situation.

Well now I don't just have myself to work for, I have to work for their future as well. Gives me motivation to work towards.

Concerns about Violence

Compounding her dual obligations of providing for her family and pursuing her educational program is her fear of potential violence. She stated:

...and violence, I guess just going through a break-up and stuff...I just can't help but be a little bit worried.

...basically scared that my ex boyfriend, his dad might snap and do something crazy.

Erika wasn't sure what do about her fears, but she has been receiving support from a counsellor.

Lara

Lara is a 20 year old mother of a three year old child and is pregnant with her second child. She is taking grade 12 courses at the local alternative school and has also completed a few first aid certificates. Lara hopes to pursue her goals in early childhood education so that she can one day work in a daycare. In Lara's interview, shown in Figure 6, I identified the following themes: Education, Work, Becoming a mother, Living a small town, and Concerns about violence.

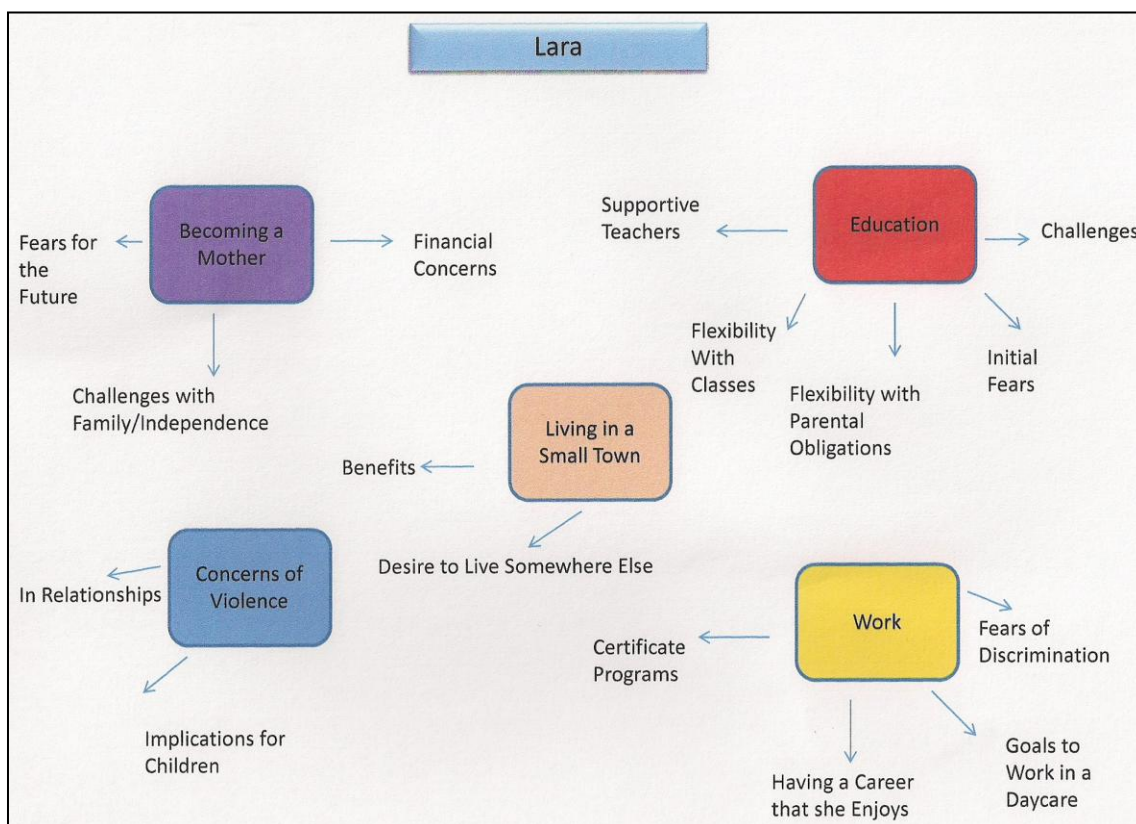


Figure 6: Lara's Thematic Map

Lara's Themes

Education

Lara described initial fears about returning to school as a mother. The idea of leaving her children at daycare aroused feelings of apprehension. She was also concerned that her preoccupation for her child's safety when he was not with her would interfere with her ability to concentrate in school.

And I was also scared that I was going to get into my schooling and be scared the whole time...I wouldn't be able to get anything done.

Lara said that what helped with this transition back to school was the flexibility of being able to go and see her child when she needed. She described having a good relationship with the daycare staff which helped put her concerns to rest and allowed her to focus on her school work. With regard to school itself, Lara expressed that having supportive teachers that were mindful and sensitive to her role as a mother was helpful.

They would understand when I would go up to the daycare and go see my son.

And I would still get a lot of work done, and they were supportive of that too.

One of the challenges that Lara identified with returning to school was having to catch up from the time she missed when having her first child. She felt the added pressure of having to get caught up and in a timely manner. However, she also demonstrated motivation in carrying through with her academic goals despite varying setbacks. In addition to her school work at the alternative program, Lara has successfully completed a couple of certificates related to first aid.

Work

Currently Lara is working on completing another first aid certificate. Lara hopes that her first aid certificates will help her to become more employable. Work was a major theme in Lara's possible selves exploration as well as her narrative interview. She identified that the most important aspect of work in the future is having a job that she enjoys. That said, there are times when Lara experiences doubts about entering the workforce:

...there's times when you have doubts about things and there's times when you're up and all ready to go out and look for the job because you think you've already begun. But at the same time you think the opposite after a while because you go and apply for a job and they say you need this certificate so your doubts are all back.

These doubts were compounded with fears of being discriminated against when she applies for work.

Well, it's hard to get a job like get in a really good field, like ECE [Early Childhood Education]. I can do that but I would have to start my own, because not many people would hire me because I have tattoos...a lot of people aren't hiring any more with people who have tattoos.

Additionally, Lara's narrative interview and Possible Selves map suggest that her concern of being a single mother of two who relies heavily on family support, might compromise her ability to obtain a job that she enjoys rather than one she *needs*.

Becoming a Mother

Lara's story highlighted the challenges she experienced with gaining independence as a mother. She was 16 when she had her first child. Although her grandfather was a support for her and her child, she experienced challenges with gaining independence from her family and gaining custody of her child. These initial challenges were resolved once she and her child were able to establish a home on their own.

He [grandfather] said I'm not under the ministry's care and your son's not under the ministry's care so... you have to get your own place and be stable and straighten up and you will be able to get your son back. So that's what I did...as soon as I got my own place he gave me my son back which was pretty cool.

One difficulty that Lara has experienced as a single mother living on her own is finances. Lara expressed her desire to be off income assistance, the difficulty of not getting financial support and the pressure of making ends meet.

...it gets me worried, 'cause I already have a five year old...I can't stay on income assistance my whole life right? And as hard enough as it is, paying bills and what not...

Lara fears that she will continue to be a single mother in the future and that she will continue to have to meet these stressors on her own.

Concerns about Violence

Concerns about violence were prevalent in Lara's narrative. She was the recipient of abuse in a past relationship and expressed concerns she had about a recent boyfriend.

I ended up leaving him because he was abusing me when I was holding my son and I don't put up with that. And the father of this child I'm not scared he is going to do that, but he has a short temper too.

Lara acknowledged the challenges she faces in protecting her children from being exposed to violence but fears the implications of her children not having fathers in their lives.

I will make the choice and leave him, which would be good but at the same time it won't, because neither of the children will have their father in their life.

Lara's story illustrates the complexity involved with being in an unhealthy relationship. Despite her recognition of the perils inherent in remaining, leaving a current unhealthy relationship evokes the fear of being a single mother of two children.

I had my son for a year before I told his father to leave...Even with just the one child it was hard, so with two it's going to be even harder...I think it's most likely to happen because of everything that's been going on right now.

Living in a Small Town

Lara identified the dilemmas of living in a small town. One of the benefits was the convenience of being able to walk to get around rather than having to spend money taking the bus.

In a small town, I actually like it because it's a lot easier to get around you don't have to walk so far to get somewhere...and you don't have to spend thousands of dollars on bus passes.

While living in a small town has the advantage of proximity to support systems and resources, Lara still wishes to partake in the experiences that lie beyond her community.

Another hope is to move out of [town]. Well, since I told you I have lived here pretty much my whole life I need to explore...since I am going to be taking my son with me, it would be great for him too.

Summary of Chapter Four

In this chapter, the themes identified within each of the individual narratives were described and illustrated with the participant's actual words. Each of the stories provide insight for understanding the unique and complex experiences these young women have undergone in their pursuit to achieve their goals as single mothers living in a rural community. Chapter four demonstrates that young single mothers are not a homogeneous group-anything but. Despite the variations, there are strong interlocking themes uniting them all. These common themes identified in the across participant analysis will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Five: Across Participant Findings

In this chapter I present the results of the across participant analysis. While each interview highlighted the individual experiences of the participants, there were many commonalities that were evident. There were also some points of divergence, such as one mother who was currently enrolled in post-secondary school while the other participants were still completing high school. One mother expressed that she had been receiving support from her child's father while the others did not make mention of this. Additionally, Concerns about Violence was not identified by six participants.

Across the participants, I identified seven commonalities described by all participants -- see illustration in Figure 19. I have called these *data categories* to distinguish them from the within participant *themes* presented in chapter 4 although there is considerable overlap. I will discuss each category and link the findings to the literature. I have chosen to begin with a discussion of *Becoming a mother* because having a child has influenced the other aspects of their lives. Furthermore, I have chosen to discuss education before work because work goals often flowed from their descriptions of educational experiences and aspirations. Although not identified by all participants, I have included "Concerns about violence" as a category because it was significant for a majority of the participants (4 of 6).

Data Categories

1. Becoming a mother
2. Education
3. Work
4. Supports

5. Money
6. Living in a small town
7. Concerns about violence

There were more specific sub-categories associated with each of the categories. These are also depicted in Figure 7 and discussed in this chapter.

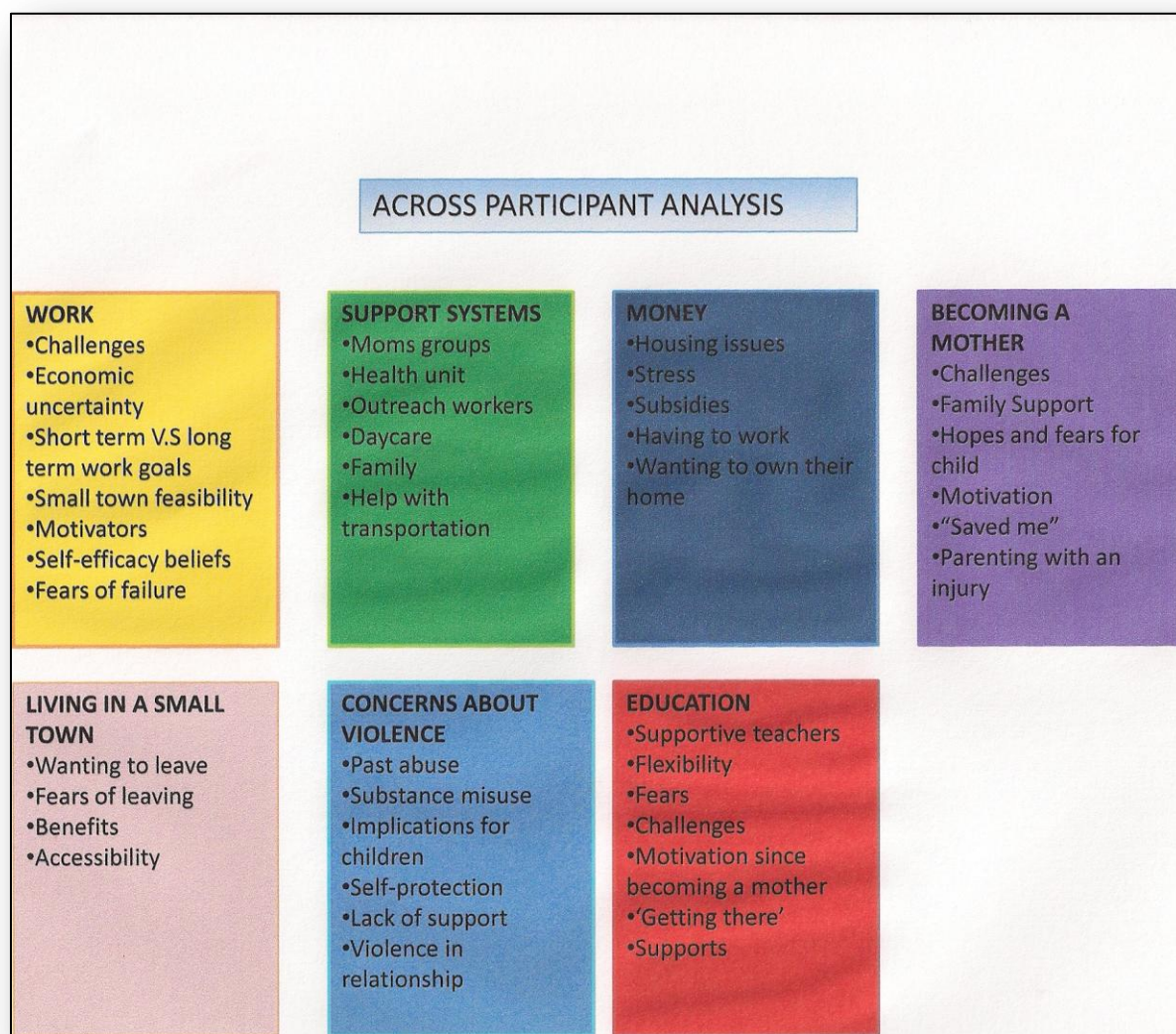


Figure 7: Across Participant Analysis Categories and Sub-categories

Becoming a Mother

It was clear in the stories that their lives changed dramatically when these young women became mothers. Issues that were not as apparent before having children, such as finances and childcare, became major stressors. Some of the stressors of being a single mother were unique to each participant. For one, parenting with an injury made many tasks of parenting even harder. For another, transporting her children to and from daycare so that she could attend school was challenging. In every case, participants relied on family in some aspect or another to assist with the challenges of single parenting.

On the other hand, becoming a mother has been a positive and motivating experience that has changed their hopes for the future. Despite the challenges they faced as single mothers with regard to money, work and education, it was clear they had become more motivated to better their lives as a result. In all cases, participants expressed how having a child “saved them”. One mother expressed with emotion:

He saved me. He was my angel that was sent to save me.

Some, who had no or little interest in school prior to having children, recognized the importance of finishing their grade 12. They were motivated to pursue their education so that they would not have to struggle with a low paying job and risk not being able to support the lifestyle they hoped their children would someday have. One mother stated:

Well this one [Possible Self] is money because...I want to experience life a lot more than I was able to. Like, my parents did bring us to Disneyland and stuff but I want to be able to give him that opportunity sooner, at a younger age, when he would enjoy it more. I want to have him a college fund because I do have them

and I am very glad I do. I don't have to worry about grants or bursaries or anything so that's very nice...a good paying job because I don't want to have to sit there living pay check to pay check for my child, I would like to have money in the bank and if there is an emergency.

As suggested by Carmarena et al. (1998), there is a greater sense of urgency for the life choices of the adolescent parent as their priorities begin to shift to the futures of their children.

Thus, findings from the present study are similar to those of Zachery (2005) & Smith Battle (1995) whose participants reported that having a child engendered a sense of responsibility and desire to be a positive influence for their children. Elements of hope, responsibility and motivation have been strong for the mothers in this study. Though some previous literature appears to have focused or emphasized the social problems and liabilities associated with this population, these participants are hopeful about their futures and looking for assistance to be productive members of society. The impact of their rural residence, however, is not that clear and still needs further investigation.

Education

All of the women spoke to their desire to finish their education. Philiber et al, (2003) stresses the benefit of programs designed to promote educational attainment and employment for young mothers. Moreover, Luong (2008) stresses that lower academic achievements influence young mother's involvement in the workforce as well as their income levels. All participants were currently or had been enrolled in an alternative school program. Results from the present study support Zachery's (2005) claim that

educational achievement is fostered with a supportive and organized school environment. Lall (2007) argues that inflexible school structures are one reason that teenage mothers leave school. The most common thread across participants with regard to education was the importance of flexibility. The young women spoke to the value of being able to leave school when they needed to see or breastfeed their children. Lisa who was enrolled in a post secondary school program noted the challenges she now faces with time and work load, being in an educational system that does not have such flexibility. She expressed:

I put [child] in dayare when she was two months old care so I could finish my grade twelve and I went to [alternative school] where it was more lenient on time. I was able to come and go when I wanted but still kind of have that structure.

She adds:

Looking back on it now...it was pretty hard to be away for such a long time from her... but it wasn't that much compared to now when I'm in college and see her probably a good six hours a week...before, I'd probably see her a lot longer than that.

Though a couple of participants noted the challenges with having the freedom to work at their own pace, the open structure of an alternative program was a supportive feature in their ability to continue with their educational goals. Oyserman (2008) maintains that it is difficult for youth to create school-focused possible selves when they believe these possible selves to be incongruent with other important aspects of their self concept or if they live in social contexts that fail to provide strategies for attaining their school-focused possible selves (p. 270). One participant shared:

Well I kinda got kicked out in grade 9, at the end of grade 9, and I enrolled at [alternative school] after they let me back in at grade 10...and then I enrolled at [a different school]...I really do enjoy working at your own pace because I am a very quick worker so...I enjoy the form here. It's very calm and relaxed and the teachers work with you a lot better...they do care more about where you're going so I enjoy that a lot more.

For these young women, attending a school that provided a flexible structure and a supportive environment promoted the attainment of school-related goals.

All of the participants noted the importance of having caring and supportive teachers and counsellors within their school. Similar to Zachery's (2005) study on the experiences of teen mothers, participants expressed that the support and encouragement they received from their teachers influenced their educational experience. For these young mothers, this type of non-judgemental support helped them to stay in school. Sara commented:

my teachers are great and like they give me advice... I came to school and I was asking some of the teachers how I could deal with it [problem with her ex]...I enjoyed it because they give advice because they have kids too and they understand.

She added:

It's a great feeling being able to come here...the next day I'm having a hard day, I can just sit and talk to someone. They don't judge me or give me crap...some days

I feel like I'm not being a good mom...even though I know I'm a good mom, some days I feel like I haven't been good.

It would appear that these teachers and counsellors acted as mentors for the participants. Zippay (1995) describes a mentor as “a teacher, sponsor, role model, or coach” (p. 52). She further suggests that a lack of such support can impede career development. As described by the young women in the present study, having supportive mentors available can provide information and resources that may not exist in their personal networks.

Work

All six participants spoke about their hopes and fears with regard to work. All wanted to work and had specific goals for the future. Woven across the stories was the divide between short term and long term work goals. Short term work-related goals referred to completing grade 12 and gaining certificate programs or training, so that they could become employable in a relatively short period of time. Erika noted:

...after I do school I want to do my medical transcription course and then once the kids are school aged, I want to go to University.

The participants had long term work goals as well such as becoming a nurse or a psychologist. However, they had to consider factors such as geographical feasibility of training/university or the ages of their children before considering long term goals. In their study on the possible selves of young low-income mothers, Lee & Oyserman found that even in the context of work goals, the responsibility for their children was of central importance. Meeting the basic needs for themselves and their children required

participants to look at work choices that offered a good chance of gaining employment quickly. Jennifer remarked:

...right now I'm not looking at what I really want to do for a career it's more what's going to bring me money to support him and give him a good life.

Honestly, I have no clue what I want to do for the rest of my life, but I will have to figure that out down the road.

Lee and Oyserman (2007) found that single mothers who were enrolled in a job training program were able to speculate on a wider range of possible selves than mothers who were not. Supporting young mothers to secure and maintain adequate employment may help to alleviate financial concerns, foster financial independence, and increase their mental wellness. Leadbeater and Way (2001) found that working mothers tended to be less depressed and less stressed than non-working mothers.

Consistent with Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), having self-efficacy beliefs was a major factor when the participants considered their future work prospects. Though all the young women stated that having a child motivated them to better their lives and pursue goals, they also expressed doubts and uncertainties about not being able to achieve these goals. For example, Erika had doubts that she would actually follow through with her work goals. Kari voiced fears of failure regarding many of her endeavours. Lara worried that discrimination would hinder her ability to find employment. Lent and his colleagues (1999; 2000) suggest that young people's progress and success in their career development is influenced by self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and goals. SCCT further suggests that self-efficacy is linked to personal

mastery and vicarious learning as well as to emotions. For one mother, failed past attempts at tasks influenced her confidence with her current educational endeavours. For another participant, a greater sense of possibility for her future work was fostered with each certificate she acquired. Lara noted:

That's when you really start to think, 'cause, like, the finishing school, I never thought I would be able to get that done because of everything that's happened, and now everything changing because I'm getting all of these certificates and I'm back at school.

Simmons et al. (2007) suggests that strong social connections can also influence one's perceived sense of mastery and ability to handle difficult situations. The present participants commented that teachers, family and counsellors were significant in helping them to achieve their aspirations. These findings emphasize the importance of having mentors and others to help facilitate a greater sense of self-efficacy, thereby influencing their ability to access greater work and economic opportunities.

Support Systems

Not surprisingly, formal and informal support systems were a large factor in the lives of the participants. Perhaps the most common support system they spoke of was childcare. All of the participants had accessed the daycare that was close to the alternative program and was subsidized if they were enrolled in school. The lack of safe and affordable childcare has been shown to be a significant obstacle for young mothers pursuing work or education (Youngblut et. al., 2000; Lall, 2007). The women in this

study expressed that having access to an affordable safe daycare reduced their initial anxieties about returning to school.

Lara shared:

Well, at the beginning I had doubts 'cause after I had my son for the first two months, I didn't go back to school...I just stayed at home and I was even scared to bring him to daycare because I wasn't used to leaving him by himself... but it was only mainly for his safety.

Stiles (2005) found young mothers' perceived needs included both support and knowledge about taking care of themselves and their children. For many of the mothers in this study, the community health programs were a great source of support for resources and knowledge about health care and parenting. For Jennifer, community outreach assisted with transportation to and from appointments.

I went to the prenatal courses as well as the postnatal ones. So you get the \$10.00 voucher for food and stuff when you go once a week and they are very helpful...one of my support workers is one of the ladies in the group and she drove me to more than half of my doctor's appointments. So she was really, really good 'cause the guy I was with wasn't particularly good at being a father.

Kissman (1990) noted the importance of supportive peer structures with adolescent decision making. In my study, mother's groups were noted as a place to receive resources and gain support from peers.

Actually it's really nice to know...we talk about our own experiences and there are so many different things that other teenage moms go through. So it's a way different outlook...people will donate clothes for either us or the children

Findings from this study support the contention that young mothers benefit from support services and groups that offer knowledge about parenting, decision-making skills, and skills to resolve conflicts between their needs and the needs of their children (McDonell et. al., 2007; Kissman, 1990).

Family support was mentioned in every story in one form or another.

Unfortunately, because of varying circumstances, the fathers of the participant's children were not a significant support for most of the young moms in this study. Thus, support from family was particularly important. Some families provided housing or financial support. All noted that family helped with providing childcare. These findings are consistent with McDermott and Graham's (2005) study that found kinship to be an important source of emotional, financial, and practical support; a resource that would not be available if they had lived elsewhere (p.73). However, having family close for support also meant challenges in gaining independence and negotiating the roles of mother and child. One mother shared:

So I want...not mom, grandma and everyone in the house I want to be mom and if there's dad figure there and [child] I don't want to have to have everyone meshed in one home because I can't afford to do anything else.

Thus, although living with family can help these mothers obtain more education, reduce poverty, and receive support, it can also be source of additional stress (Kalil & Danziger,

2000). Similar to other authors who suggest that moving in with family can create tension, the participants in this study noted the challenges they experience when striving for independence while depending on family for childcare and/or housing (Kalil & Danziger, 2000; Leadbeater & Way, 2001). Unfortunately, because of varying circumstances, fathers of the participant's children are not a significant support for most of these young moms.

Money

Money was noted by all the participants as an added barrier in their pursuit to achieve their goals. Studies in the literature suggest that financial constraints played an important factor in how young moms approached their future (Meluish & Phoenix, 1988; Youngblut et al., 2000). Interestingly, findings from Larson's (2004) study on teenage motherhood and parenting stress suggest that economic strain did not have an influence on parenting stress, indicating that at least some young mothers are able to tolerate financial challenges. Most of the participants in my study relied on government subsidies to offset financial distress and help with housing and childcare. While it is clear that government subsidies are helpful, many of the mothers express a strong desire to not have to rely on income assistance forever.

...it gets me worried 'cause ya, I already have a five year old and I can't keep on...I can't stay on income assistance my whole life right? And as hard enough as it is, paying bills and what not.

Jennifer added:

And then needing financial help..I don't want to be, you know, on welfare or any of that kinda stuff, I don't agree with a lot of it.

Some participants had expressed the desire to one day own their home but were doubtful they would be able to achieve this considering the financial challenges to just meet their basic needs. Many of the participants received little or no financial support from their child's father. Though many were receiving subsidies, there was little money left after the cost of food and housing. One mother stated:

...gets stressful...maybe because I'm on assistance...so I get the family maintenance and I have to declare it on my welfare, so I have to budget it so I have enough money for rent at the end of the month.

The cost of living elsewhere also became a factor for those who desired to someday leave their community for work, education, or other opportunities. As Melhuish and Phoeniz (1988) suggest, financial constraints places limits on what young mothers can or cannot do, and increase their level of stress. It is important to acknowledge this stressor and connect young mothers with budgeting education and various funding sources to help alleviate these financial concerns. That said, it is also important to recognize the desire of these mothers to be able to manage financially on their own. They will need to be supported to find ways to achieve this.

Living in a Small Town

The present participants described many benefits of living in a small community. Some women commented on the convenience of getting to and from appointments. For many, it was the strong support networks that encouraged them to stay. Although some expressed interest in living somewhere else either for school or work or to simply try something new, this possibility included some hesitation. One mother noted:

All my family is from here and it's kinda hard cause we're so close and I have support here and I guess I'm just used to it.

For these young women, the social ties and supports created in their small town were greater than the barriers of living elsewhere. Similarly, Simmons et al. (2007) contend that the rural community plays an essential role of social support for rural residents.

Camaren et al. (1998) posit that little research has explicity focused on young parents in rural communities. They suggest, however, that these young people face barriers in accessing training and resources. Some of the present participants stated they were able to access programs, at the local community college to help them achieve work and educational goals. Jennifer stated:

So now I'm looking into actually going into residential care [training program]... It's just something quick and easy to get into because it's only about a five and half month course when its full time...if I want to retrain eventually down the road I can...\$20 bucks an hour would be nice just to start at.

Although many have to leave their community for university or specialized training, these findings would suggest that the work and educational opportunities for young single mothers in rural communities may not be as limited as suggested in some literature.

Concerns about Violence

In her study on parenting stress among young single mothers, Larson (2004) found that over half of the mothers reported experiencing violence. Similarly, Leadbeater and Way (2001) found that forty one percent of the young mothers in their study had reported that they had experienced violence in their intimate relationship. In the present study, concerns about violence were identified by four of the six participants. Their stories demonstrated the impact of having been exposed to violence or fear of violence in their future. Some feared their children would someday be exposed to violence. One participant recognized how violence affected her challenges with substance use.

[after the assault and pressing charges]..all I wanted to do was drink and smoke pot and smoke my cigarettes.

For these young mothers the fear of violence or working through past experiences with violence was an added stressor in their lives. For this reason, it is important these environmental stressors be addressed. Some participants found it beneficial to seek support from counsellors to address their concerns. Moreover, these findings suggest that working towards long term education and work goals may be impeded by this added stressor. For many of these mothers, a major focus remains on the basic needs of safety and sustainability for themselves and their children. Markus and Nurius (1986) postulate that possible selves emerge from the individual's particular social and historical context. Similarly, the hopes and fears of the participants in this study were greatly influenced by

their personal and social environmental context. For those women that lived with current or recent situations involving violence, short term goals seemed more attainable.

Summary of Chapter Five

This chapter provided a discussion of the common data categories identified across the six participant interviews. The findings provide some insight into the needs of young single mothers in rural communities with respect to their work and educational aspirations. These findings illustrate both the challenges these women face and the supports they have utilized to mitigate these challenges. What is clear in both the within and across participants analysis, is the level of optimism these young women hold for their future despite the adversities they have experienced.

Chapter Six: Conclusions

In this chapter I provide a summary of the major findings and a discussion of what I believe to be the limitations of the study. I will then delineate important implications for research as well as implications for service providers, educators and counsellors who are involved in supporting young single mothers in rural communities to achieve their work and educational aspirations.

Summary of Major Findings

Findings from this study provide us with understanding of the supports and barriers experienced by several young single mothers in a rural community in their pursuit to achieve their goals. Most notably, these young mothers seem to have benefited overall from the combination of formal and informal support systems. Despite the challenges that can emerge with meshing roles, family provided support with childcare, housing and day-to-day activities. Mothers' groups and community support services provided peer support as well as access to resources and transportation. Participants noted the supports they received in an alternative educational system. At an alternative school, they had access to counsellors and teachers that considered their needs, unique to their individual context. Having flexibility with course work and being able to leave school when they needed to see their children without compromising their work became an important factor in their decision to stay in school.

With regard to barriers, these young mothers noted the challenges they experience with finances and meeting the basic needs for themselves and their children. Many relied on government subsidises to meet their basic needs; all received at least some form of

financial subsidy. Lee and Oyserman (2007) contend that low-income mothers in the transition from welfare to work face numerous challenges that may interfere with their educational goals. They suggest that the demands of parenting and work leave little time for education despite its value in attaining adequate employment.

The women also noted the tension created from concerns about violence in their intimate relationships. Although not often addressed specifically in studies investigating educational and work contexts, the fear of ongoing or future violence is a very real barrier to education or work success. This gap warrants further investigation.

Living in a small town revealed both helpful and hindering factors. Living in a small community offered supportive networks, with convenient accessibility to support services. Though some mothers desired to one day leave their community to access more work and educational opportunities, many were making progress towards their goals without having to leave. What was most notable in this study was the degree to which motherhood encouraged these young mothers to re-evaluate their goals and priorities and fostered a will to better their lives.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. The first concerns the size of the rural community where I conducted the interviews. Although the town was relatively small compared to urban areas, it did offer programs and support services. I originally planned to interview participants from three varying communities of differing population sizes. I had greater difficulty recruiting participants in the smaller communities. Some potential participants that fit the demographic for my study resided on a First Nations reserve. Since I had not received ethical board approval to conduct my study on a reserve, I was

unable to interview these participants. Interviews from other or smaller rural areas could yield different results.

In addition to having similar regional backgrounds, all of the participants were enrolled, or at one time had attended, a local alternative school that has a good program for young mothers. As such, many of the mothers felt supported in their future endeavours and received the needed flexibility to stay in school while meeting the demands of single parenting. As a researcher, I would be curious about the experiences of single mothers who had not attended such a school and how they would describe their supports and barriers with regard to achieving their work and educational goals. In addition, all participants had family close by who provided support in a number of ways.

Using a narrative inquiry honoured the voices of young mothers in rural communities, however, it may have also added some pressure for these young mothers to “tell a good story”. The open-ended, unstructured format involved in a narrative interview did pose some challenges in keeping the interview focused on the research question. With respect to the narrative analysis that identified data themes and categories through text reduction, this may have detracted somewhat from the wholeness and authenticity of the experiences expressed by the participants themselves.

Because the aim of this study was to hear the in-depth individual experiences of young single mothers the number of participants is small. A larger sample size would provide a greater diversity of experiences. Despite these limitations, however, the study offers important information to future research as well as to service providers who seek to support young rural single mothers in their pursuit to achieve their goals.

Implications for Research

The Social Cognitive Career Theory framework was appropriate for this study-it provided an understanding of the way these young mothers thought about their goals for the future. SCCT stresses the link between self-efficacy, outcome expectations and goals (Lent et al., 1999). It was evident that participants who demonstrated strong self-efficacy beliefs combined with positive outcome expectations, had set realistic achievable goals and felt confident in their ability to achieve these goals. In contrast, participants who did not describe strong self-efficacy beliefs combined with negative outcome expectations, expressed uncertainty with regard to the goals they had for the future. SCCT also emphasizes the relevance of contextual factors in an individual's work and educational development. To this end, the supports and barriers these young women encountered were relevant in understanding their hopes and fears for the future. More specifically, all of the women noted important support they received that allowed them to pursue their education. The barriers associated with leaving their community became important factors when considering work and educational opportunities elsewhere. Future research could address these supports and barriers in more detail, and investigate how they link to self-efficacy beliefs. In addition, explorations across multiple rural communities would provide more diverse data for comparison.

In general, there needs to be more research exploring young mother's experiences in rural communities in BC and Canada, particularly more isolated and remote communities. Although commonalities between rural and urban populations exist, the present participants' experiences of particular community supports and barriers warrant further investigation. Diverse experiences have implications for policy development and

community services. Given that half of the participants were of First Nations decent, it would also be important to investigate the role that culture plays in the lives young single rural mothers with respect to work and educational aspirations. In particular, more research is needed regarding working single mothers. Although attending college and still considered “young”, Jennifer had distinct perspectives in comparison to the other participants still completing high school. Transitions to work and post-secondary education offer different opportunities and challenges-little has been investigated regarding these processes for rural single mothers.

Most of the mothers expressed a lack of support from their children’s father. There have been few studies on these young men, a notable gap that warrants attention. Knowledge about the experiences of young rural fathers would provide greater understanding of the complexity of their experiences. As with young rural mothers, research could yield suggestions and strategies to assist young fathers with their own unique challenges in meeting their work and educational goals and facilitate them in becoming greater supports to their partners and children.

I would also be curious to discover how these young women fared in the future. A longitudinal study that followed the lives of young mothers could provide insight into the longer term factors that may help or hinder their ability to achieve their goals. It would be interesting to discover how the women who were enrolled in the alternative school, managed once they had completed the program. For example, what supports and barriers would they encounter in their transition to post-secondary school?

There has not been much in depth research exploring the experiences of young single rural mothers. Walker, Cooke and McAllister (2008), contend that qualitative researchers “seek to discover, describe, and understand the complex nature of human experience in a detailed, naturalistic, and contextualized way” (p. 82). They further suggest that the resulting data are rich and descriptive, allowing for a holistic analysis and understanding. The present study has contributed to our understanding of what young single rural mothers experience with regard to their work and educational aspirations. While there is ample literature on the experiences of young single mothers, there is very little literature on the experiences of young *rural* mothers. Contextually, this study has provided rich descriptions of the supports and barriers they encounter in this process, living in a small community. Interestingly, there are many similarities. Although the sample was limited, the present findings suggest that rural context may indeed engender a level of support that offsets some of the challenges and barriers these young women face.

Meluish and Pheonix (1988) contend that treating young mothers as a single group implies a degree of homogeneity which is unfitting considering the variability that comprises this population. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) suggest that the intention of narrative inquiry is to capture as much as possible the openness of experience. I found that using a narrative inquiry supplemented by visual mapping elicited rich and unique descriptive stories that allowed me to hear the variability of their individual stories.

Researcher Growth

As a researcher I have learned a lot as a result of this process. Using a narrative methodology allowed me to employ my skills as a counsellor, creating an environment of

trust and safety. That said, I also gained insight into the complexity of counsellor and researcher role overlap. The nature of narrative inquiry involves a degree of intimacy between the researcher and participant as we are invited into their experiences via stories. I became aware of how my presence and skills as a counsellor may have impacted the degree in which some participants delved into their personal experiences. While my skills may have enhanced the richness of their stories, it was not without challenges as I struggled at times to keep the focus on the research question. Clandinin & Connelly contend, “the narrative researcher’s experience is always a dual one, always the inquirer experiencing the experience and also being a part of the experience itself” (p. 81).

I gained considerable learning from the challenges of conducting research in a small community. Having been born in a small town, I anticipated challenges, however, there were some unanticipated ones. For example, most of the women I interviewed attended the same alternative school which posed challenges to my efforts to maintain anonymity. I had to negotiate the tensions between honouring the ethical requirements of anonymity while remaining mindful of the need for flexibility. Some participants did not have contact numbers or email accounts which made it difficult to arrange interviews. Despite logistical challenges, I was impressed by the support of service providers in the community who assisted in the research process. From this, I learned the value of relationships to foster positive experiences between researchers and communities.

Implications for Practice

Educators. Education providers who took the individual’s personal context into account proved to be a significant support to young mothers. SCCT suggests, that

understanding the context of people's work and career development requires an examination of "agentic" variables with personal and environmental variables (Lent et al, 1999). In this light, goals, abilities, and self-efficacy combined with the supports and barriers these young women experience become important sources of knowledge when designing programs for young single rural mothers. It is important for educators to be aware of the stressors that young single mothers experience in comparison to their peers. Providing an educational system that is sensitive to the demands of motherhood and flexible in their course delivery would support these women to stay in school and open possibilities for future endeavours.

Community service providers. What is clear from this study is the critical importance that support plays in lives of these young women. Although the community was relatively small, it offered a range of support systems that enabled and motivated these young women to pursue their goals. It is important for community service providers to be aware of the importance of flexible, holistic support. That is to say, young single mothers could benefit from support that considers their needs in all aspects of their lives. This includes knowledge, emotional support, and basic needs as a young mother. McDonnell et al., (2007) stress the importance of program models to be responsive to the multiple needs of teen mothers. The needs identified in this study were voiced by the young women themselves. Stiles (2005) contends that while there are many teen parenting programs, none were found to be based on what the teens themselves view as their needs (p. 328).

Service providers could address the need for more targeted help with exploration of training and work options. Additionally, support services that help explore options for

affordable housing could help foster a sense of independence that these women clearly desire.

Connecting women to mentors or community groups can provide an opportunity for women to gain support from their peers and knowledge regarding parenting and budgeting. Participants in this study also noted the support they gained from groups that offered baby supplies such as clothing, diapers and toys.

Counsellors. Counsellors in this study were noted by the participants for their support. It is important that counsellors recognize and build on young mother's apparent strengths and motivation-this contributes to self-efficacy and hope. There are also some challenges they need help with to address and resolve. In addition to work and educational demands, these young mothers experience additional stressors, such as post partum depression and concerns about violence that may impede their ability to focus on their aspirations. In this light, it is important that they receive non-judgemental, practical and emotional support that addresses these concerns.

What is important for anyone working to support the needs of young moms to remember is the degree of responsibility and maturity that has been engendered from becoming a mother. Larson states, "Adolescent mothers never appear to "grow up" in the eyes of researchers, policymakers, and perhaps even practitioners" (2004, p. 17). Though these young women encounter a plethora of challenges with regard to work and education, they all described a strong commitment to bettering their lives for themselves and their children.

Conclusion

There are many young single mothers in rural communities, since these communities have higher teenage fertility rates as compared to urban areas (B.C Vital statistics, 2004). Young people, in general, face numerous challenges in their transition to work. It is important that young single mothers in rural communities, who might be marginalized or discriminated against, be supported in their efforts to obtain education and employment.

The purpose of this study was to explore the stories of young rural mothers with regard to work and education, as understood and voiced by these women themselves. The experiences described by the six women in this study provided valuable insight into their lives. Their sense of responsibility, as well as their hopes for the future and for their children was inspiring. Their narratives highlighted the unique and individual challenges they face as well as the numerous supports they receive to meet these challenges. Despite these underlying obstacles, the women in this study poignantly illustrate the determination that keeps them moving forward. In this light, it is important that these women be recognized for their countless strengths and will to better their lives. By doing so, perhaps we can all work to alleviate the feelings of exclusion and discouragement that many young single mothers endure.

Oliver (1998), suggests that narrative inquiry has the ability to empower participants as they share the meaning of their experiences with the researcher; and through this process develop their own voices. It is with great privilege, as both a mother

and a researcher, that I provide an opportunity for these young women “to be heard” and offer a glimpse into their rich and complex lives.

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Appendix A

Human Research Ethics Board Certificate of Approval



Human Research Ethics Board
 Office of Research Services
 University of Victoria
 Administrative Services Building - 2nd Floor
 Tel (250) 472-4545 Fax (250) 721-8960
 Email ethics@uvic.ca Web www.research.uvic.ca

**Human Research Ethics Board
 Certificate of Approval**

<u>Principal Investigator</u> Tanya Ward Master's Student	<u>Department/School</u> EPLS	<u>Supervisor</u> Anne Marshall	
<u>Co-Investigator(s):</u>			
<u>Project Title:</u> The Work and Educational Aspirations of Young Rural Single Mothers			
<u>Protocol No.</u> 09-050	<u>Approval Date</u> 17-Feb-09	<u>Start Date</u> 17-Feb-09	<u>Expiry Date</u> 16-Feb-10
Certification			
This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Participants.			
This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol. Extensions and/or amendments may be approved with the submission of a "Request for Annual Renewal or Modification" form.			
 Dr. Richard Keeler Associate Vice-President, Research			

09-050 Ward, Tanya

Appendix B

Information Letter

(date)

Dear (name of service provider):

My name is Tanya Ward and I am a Master's student in Counselling Psychology at the University of Victoria. I am originally from the Ucluelet/Tofino area. My supervisor is Dr. Anne Marshall, in the Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies.

My thesis for this program is centered on the stories of young single rural mothers with regard to achieving their work and educational aspirations. It is my hope that this research will help create services and resources that meet the needs of this population to help them achieve their goals.

I am looking for a total of 6 to 8 participants from the Port Alberni, Tofino, and Ucluelet area. Participants for this study must be between the ages of 17 and 25, reside in or near either of the above mentioned areas and be single mothers. Participants will take part in an in-person interview of about 90 minutes. The interview will involve open-ended questions about their experiences in achieving their work and educational aspirations as a single mother. The interview will take place in an agreed upon place and participants will be offered \$15.00 as an honorarium. I am asking for your help to identify potential participants. Participation for this research must be entirely voluntary – see attached consent letter.

If you are willing to assist me with the recruitment process, please have interested potential participants provide their contact information on the attached sheet. I will collect these from you and then contact them directly.

If you have any questions, please contact myself at (250)893-7730 or tward@uvic.ca or Dr. Anne Marshall at (250) 721-7815 or amarshal@uvic.ca. Thank you. Sincerely,

Appendix C

Consent Letter

**Department of Educational Psychology &
Leadership Studies**
PO Box 3010 STN CSC
Victoria, B.C V8W 3N4 Canada

Participant Consent Form**Work and Educational Aspirations of Young Rural Single Mothers**

You are invited to participate in a study entitled “Work and Educational Aspirations of Young Rural Single Mothers” that is being conducted by Tanya Ward.

Tanya Ward is a Graduate student in the Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies at the University of Victoria, and you may contact her if you have further questions by phoning 250-893-7730 or by emailing at tward@uvic.ca.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Masters degree in Counselling Psychology. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Anne Marshall. You may contact my supervisor at (250) 721-7815.

Purpose and Objectives

While research has identified general aspects of single mothers in the context of work and education, little research has focused on what young rural mothers experience in their effort to achieve their aspirations. In order to create services to help them achieve their goals, more information about their experiences is needed. The purpose of this research project is to hear the individual stories of young single mothers in rural communities with respect to achieving their work and educational aspirations.

Importance of this Research

Research of this type is important because it will encourage and promote the development of resources and supports that better reflect the needs of young single rural mothers.

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a single mother between the ages of 17 and 25, residing in a rural community. Participants in this study were recruited with the assistance of community resources in your community.

What is Involved

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include an audio-taped interview and a mapping activity to explore your hopes and fears for the future. This process will take approximately 90 minutes and will be held in a mutually agreed up location.

Risks

There is minimal risk to you by participating in this research. You may, however, end the interview at any time.

Benefits

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include an opportunity to add to the existing knowledge base on young single rural mothers. This information becomes important to the development of services and supports that can assist young mothers in achieving their goals. Participating in this study will also provide you with an opportunity to explore your future and the ways that you might be able to achieve your hopes and avoid your fears.

Compensation

As recognition of your participation, you will be given \$15.00. If you agree to participate in this study, this form of compensation to you must not be coercive. It is unethical to provide undue compensation or inducements to research participants. If you would not participate if the compensation was not offered, then you should decline.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will only be used with your permission. Should you withdraw from the study at any time, the honorarium is yours to keep.

Anonymity

In terms of protecting your anonymity, a pseudonym of your choice and a code number will be used in place of your name on all transcriptions, maps and files.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality will be protected by not releasing your information to any third party without your prior written authorization to release such information. Confidentiality of the data will be protected by keeping all the coded audiotapes and documents in a locked briefcase. They will then be transferred onto a password-protected computer.

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the form of a thesis presentation, journal articles and academic conferences. You will also receive a brief summary of the research results when completed.

Disposal of Data

Data from this study will be disposed of five years after the time of the interview.

Contacts

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include the researcher, Tanya Ward at (250) 893-7730; or tward@uvic.ca and her supervisor, Dr. Anne Marshall at (250) 721-7815 or amarshal@uvic.ca

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250) 472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
----------------------------	------------------	-------------

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

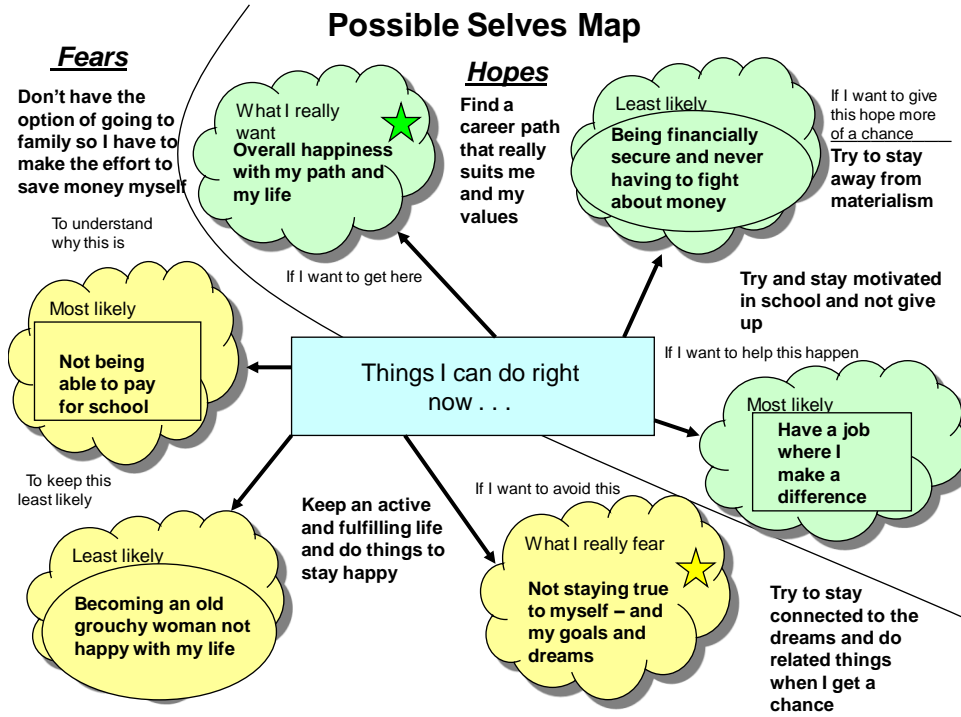
My signature below indicates that I received \$15.00
from _____

For participating in this interview.

Signature _____

Appendix D Possible Selves Mapping





Appendix E

Brainstorm and Possible Selves Maps

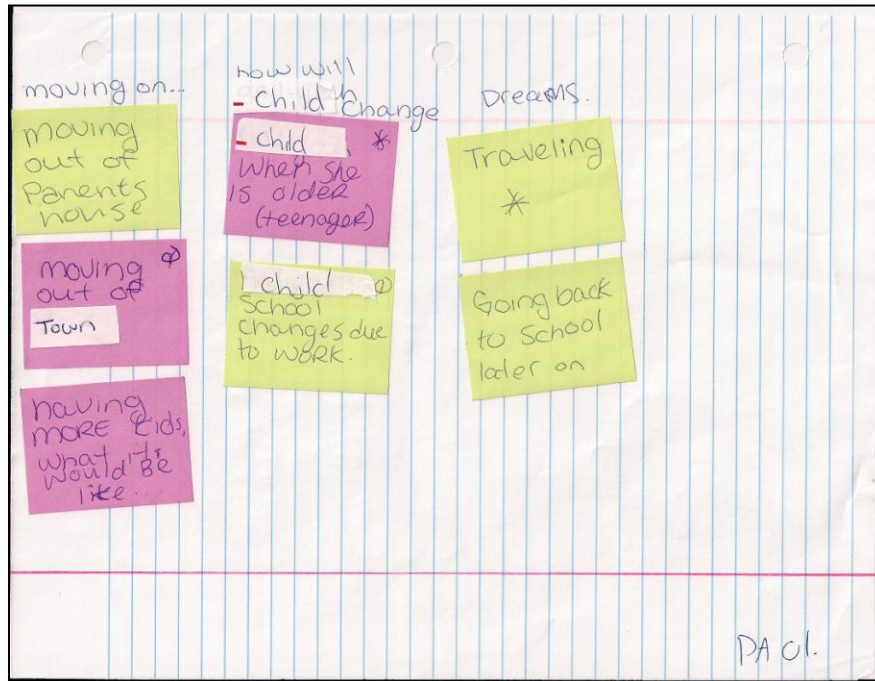


Figure 8: Lisa's Brainstorm Map

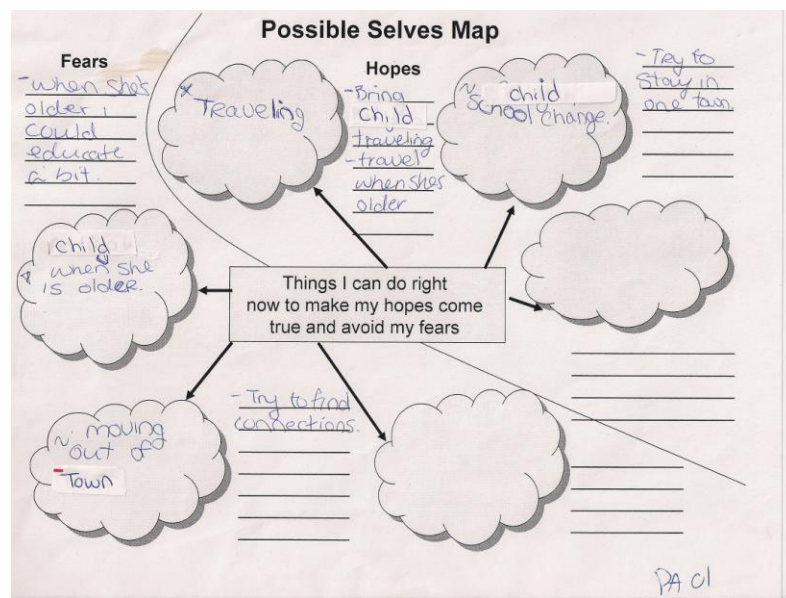


Figure 9: Lisa's Possible Selves Map

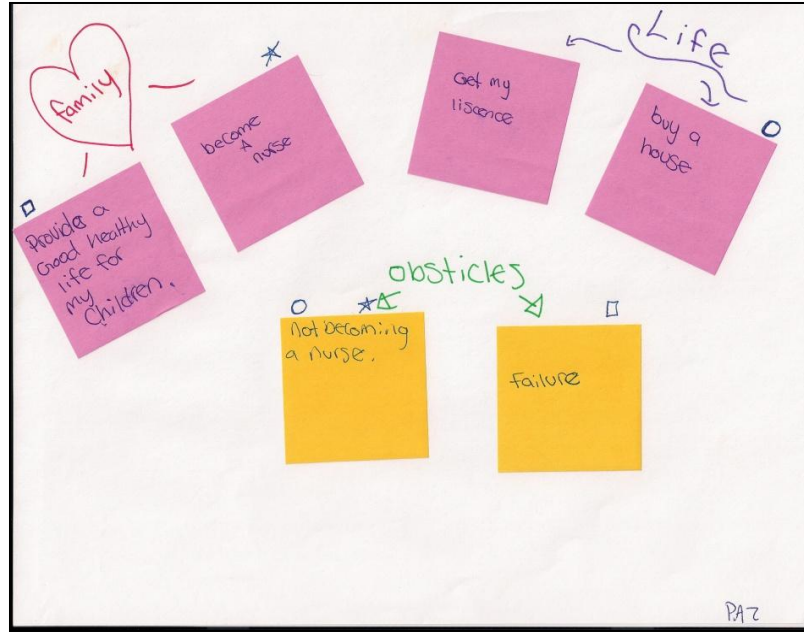


Figure 10: Kari's Brainstorm Map

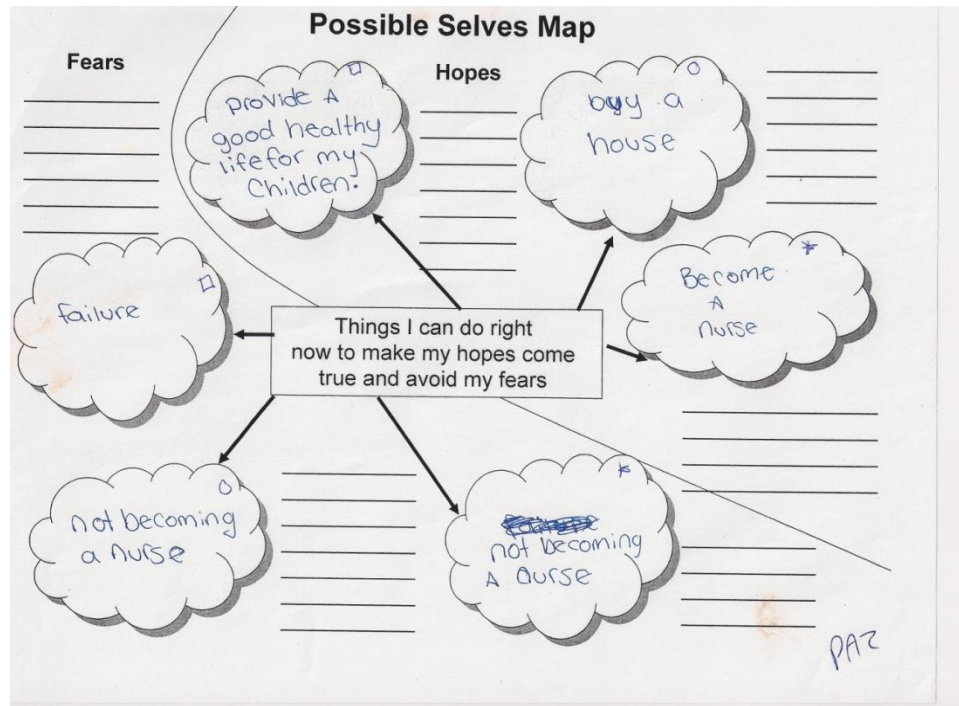


Figure 11: Kari's Possible Selves Map



Figure 12: Jennifer's Brainstorm Map

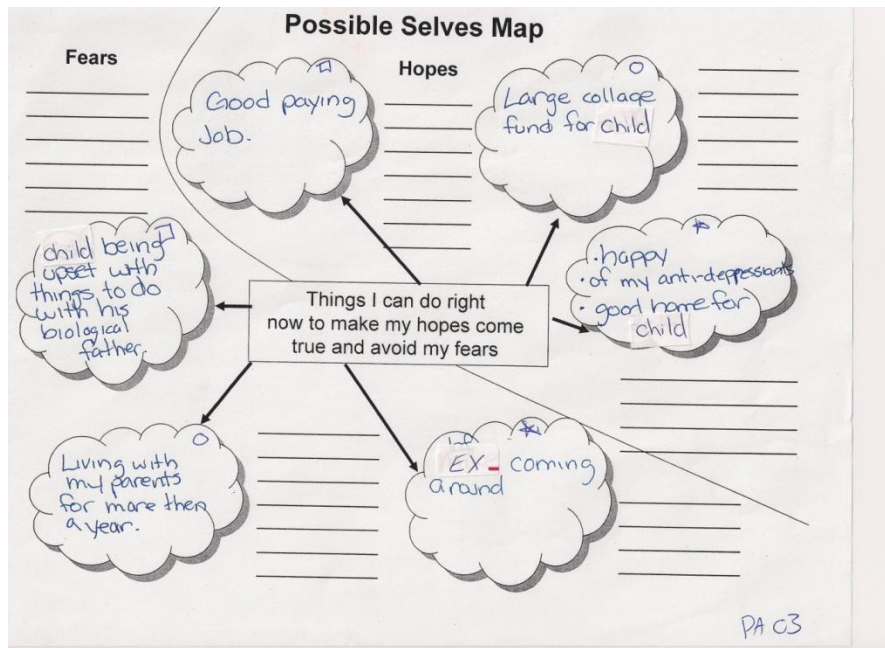


Figure 13: Jennifer's Possible Selves Map

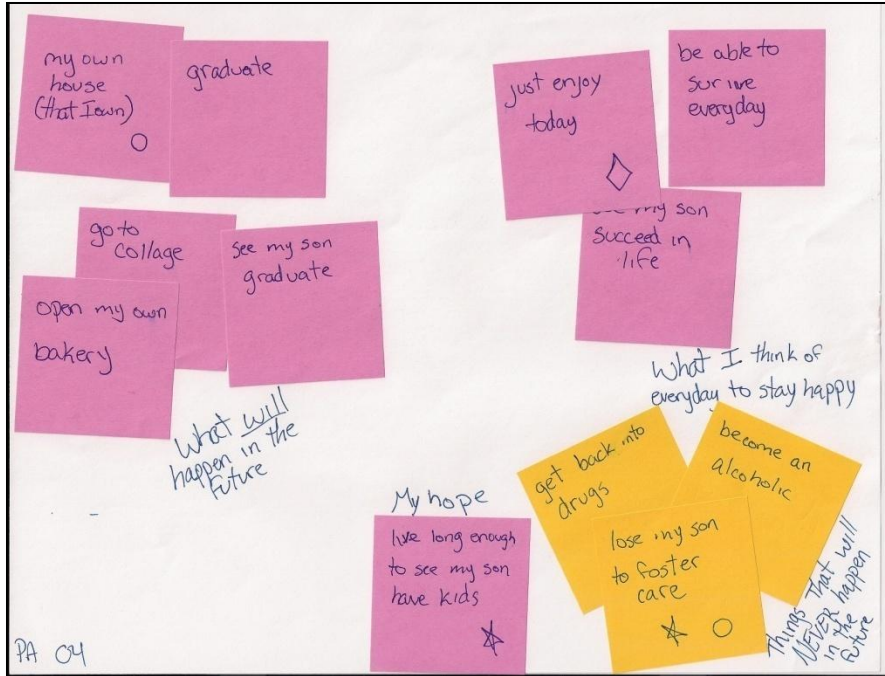


Figure 14: Sara's Brainstorm Map

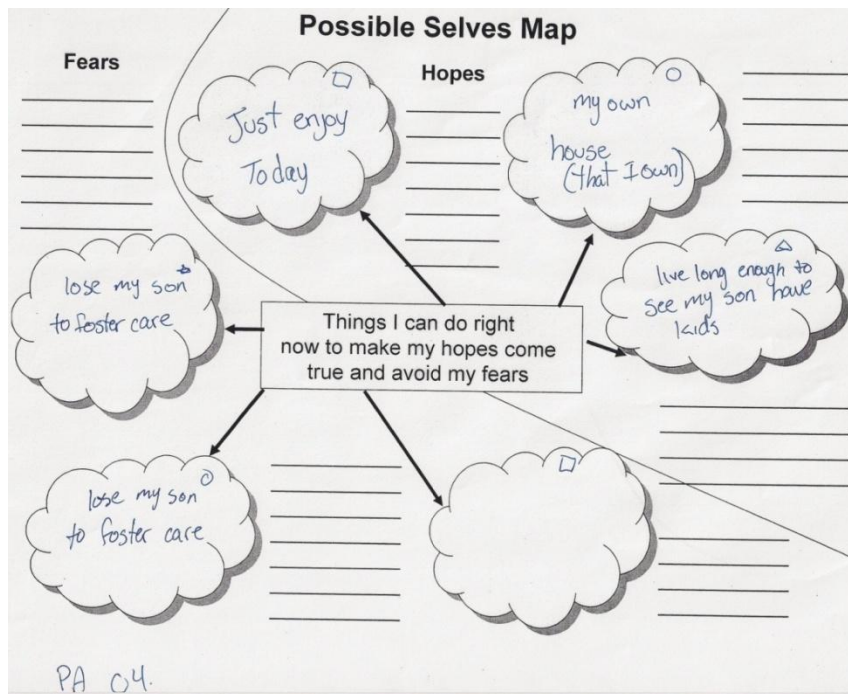


Figure 15: Sara's Possible Selves Map

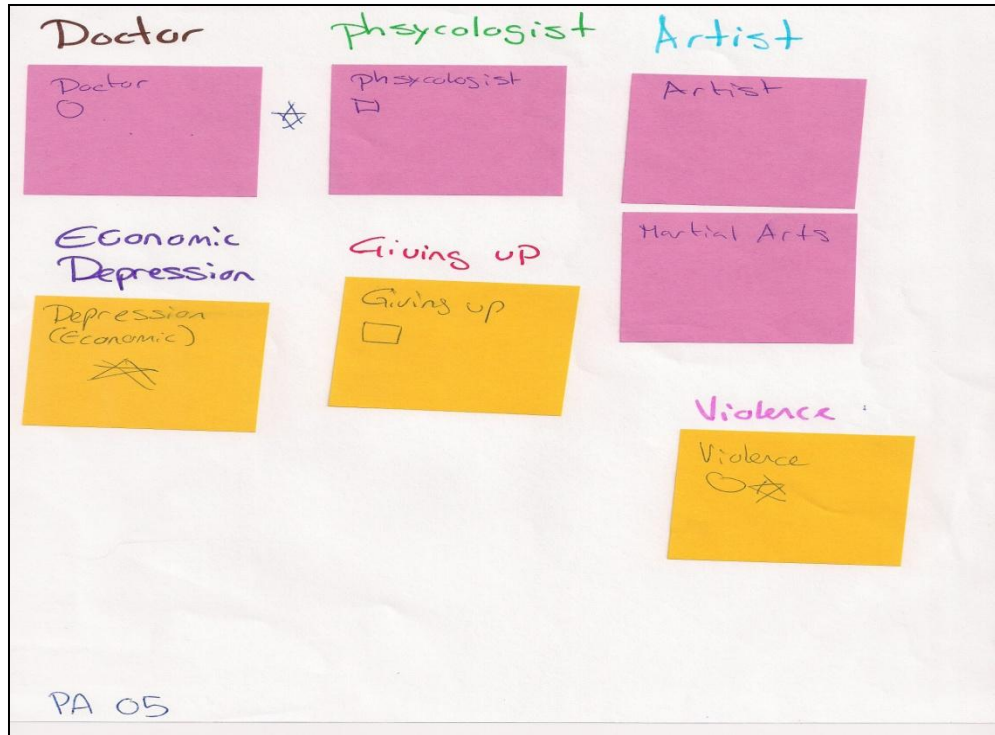


Figure 16: Erika's Brainstorm Map

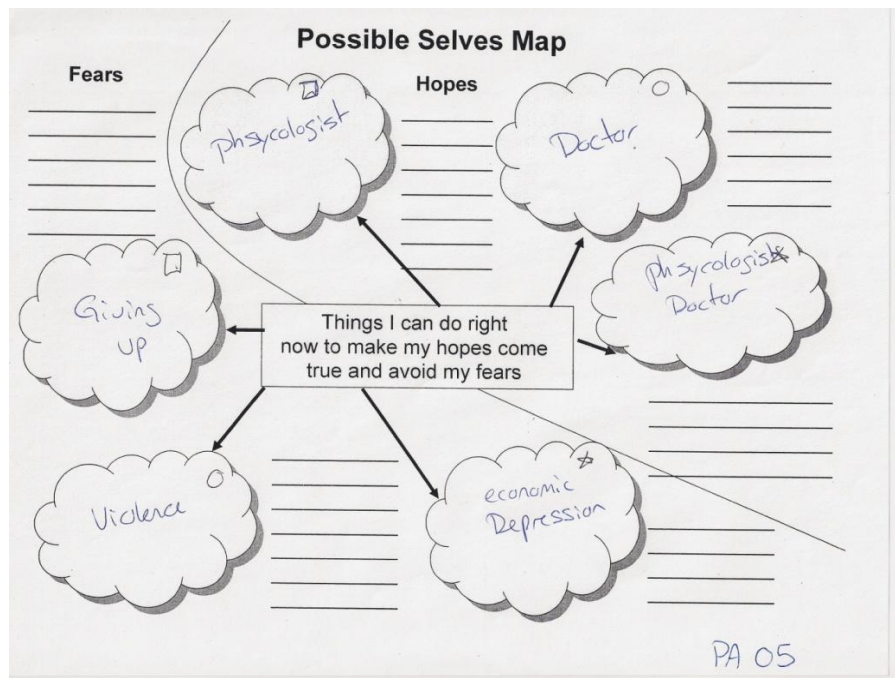


Figure 17: Erika's Possible Selves Map

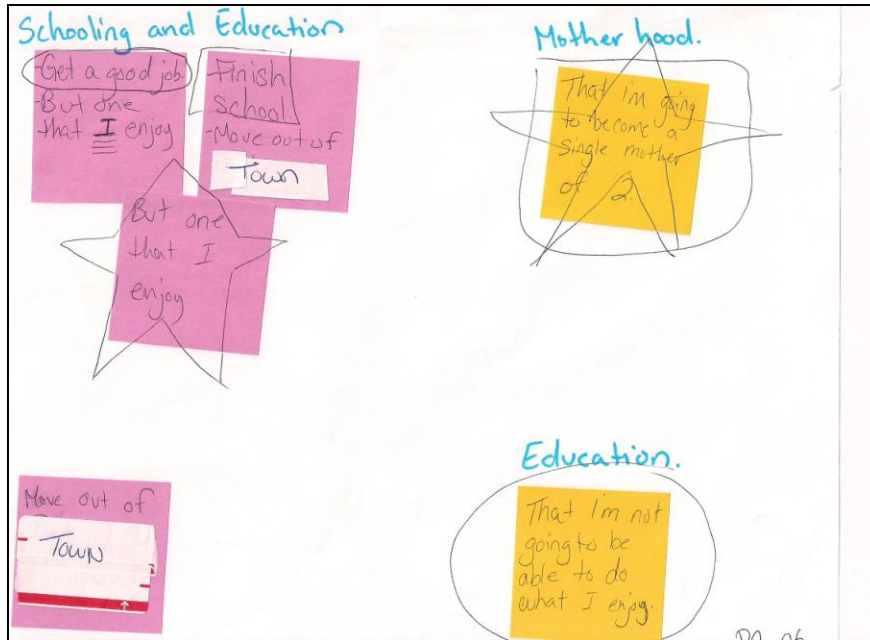


Figure 18: Lara's Brainstorm Map

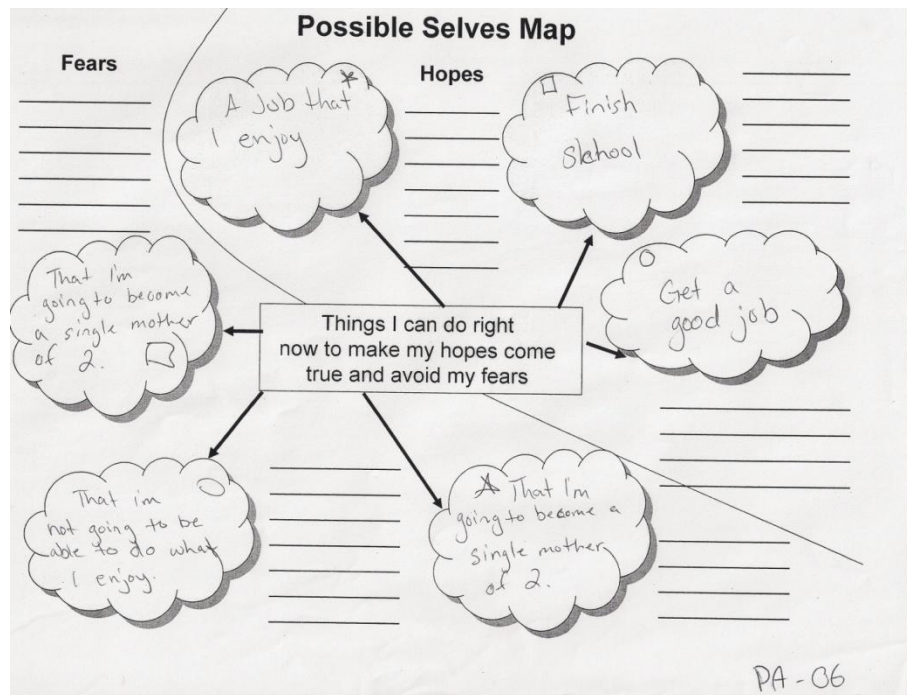


Figure 19: Lara's Possible Selves Map