HOLLYWOOD IS MY BABY’S DADDY: TEEN PREGNANCY AT THE COST OF STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WHEN EARLY MOTHERHOOD IS IDOLIZED IN THE MEDIA

By Nicole Thurston

Within the last ten years the social stigma of being a teenage mother has disappeared and a culture shift in acceptance of teenage pregnancy is evolving. The media, with the help of Hollywood, has been able to portray teen pregnancy as nothing more than a bump in the road or a badge of bad girl honor. With teenage pregnancy being a topic in the hit film Juno, and in television shows such as Teen Mom, 16 and Pregnant, The Secret Life of the American Teenager, Glee, and One Tree Hill, teenage girls are discovering that after a certain amount of anxiety, discomfort, and embarrassment the fallout from a thoughtless teenage adventure heals up nicely without any harmful consequences.

The stories told by pregnant teenagers today differ greatly from those of teen mothers past. In 1968, a sixteen year old pregnant teenager wrote to Seventeen magazines describing how she felt upon discovering her pregnancy:

In the next few days, I tried to slit my wrists with a razor blade, but just scratching it hurt so much I gave up that attempt. I walked into the streets several times hoping a truck would run over me, but the trucks in my town appeared to have amazingly good breaks.

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1 © 2010 Nicole Thurston is a 2011 candidate for Juris Doctor at Regent University School of Law.
2 Unless otherwise indicated, teenager refers to women aged 15 to 19 throughout the article.
4 Id.
5 Juno (Fox Searchlight 2007).
6 Teen Mom: Looking for Love (MTV Networks Dec. 8, 2009).
7 16 and Pregnant: Maci (MTV Networks June 11, 2009).
8 The Secret Life of the American Teenager: Falling in Love (ABC Family July 1, 2008).
9 Glee: Preggers (Fox Sept. 23, 2009).
10 One Tree Hill: Can’t Stop This Thing We’ve Started (WB Television Network Oct. 18, 2006).
Today, this young girl takes a different approach to her newly discovered pregnancy and instead writes the producers of MTV’s hit show *16 and Pregnant* in hopes of landing a spot on the third season. She does this with secret aspirations of landing magazine covers like fellow *16 and Pregnant* alum Maci Bookout or Farrah Abraham.

Teenage pregnancy has been around as long as there have been teenagers, but its pervasiveness in the United States, the dimensions of its social cost, and the urgent need to attack the problem is in dire need. The United States has the highest teenage pregnancy and birth rate of all the industrialized nations. American teenagers become pregnant twice as often as Canadian teenagers, three times as often as Swedish teenagers and seven times as often as teens from the Netherlands. In 2004 there were 750,000 teen births, 15% of which were intended pregnancies equating to 100,000 intended births. Focusing specifically on teenager mothers ages 15 to 17, there were a total of 250,000 pregnancies, 27,000 those were intended.

In 2005, the United States teen pregnancy rate reached its lowest point in more than thirty years, an alarming 69.5 per 1,000. Just one short year later, for the first time in a decade, the United States had its first increase in the teen pregnancy rate. In 2006, the pregnancy rate for teenage girls was 71.5 per 1,000, equating to 750,000 women under the age of twenty.

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19 Id.
21 Id., at 3.
becoming pregnant.\textsuperscript{22} Out of the 71.5 per 1,000 teenagers who became pregnant, 41.9 per 1,000 gave birth.\textsuperscript{23}

The media’s portrayal of teenage pregnancy shines light on the initial difficulties of being a young mother, but fails to show long term consequences. Those who become pregnant as teenagers are at greater risk of social and economic disadvantages.\textsuperscript{24} Teenage mothers are less likely to complete their education, to be employed, to earn higher wages, and to be happily married.\textsuperscript{25} In addition, they are likely to have larger families and to receive welfare.\textsuperscript{26} Teenage mothers also have characteristics that often lead to long term reliance on welfare.\textsuperscript{27}

The dependence of teenage mothers on government assistance has come at a great expense of government finance. Within the first five years of child birth half of teen mothers turn to welfare for support.\textsuperscript{28} In ten states alone the government cost of assisting teenage mothers was $578 million.\textsuperscript{29} A study published by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (hereinafter, “National Campaign”) in 2004, estimated the future cost of teenage pregnancy for the local, state, and federal government to be at least $9.1 billion.\textsuperscript{30}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Id., at 2.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Deborah Jones Merritt, \textit{Ending Poverty by Cutting Teenage Births: Promise, Failure, and Paths to the Future}, 57 OHIO ST. L. J. 441, 441 (1996) (comparing the economic disadvantages between teen mothers and those who waited until twenty to have their first child).
\item \textsuperscript{25} See Deborah Brake, \textit{Legal Challenges to the Educational Barriers Facing Pregnant and Parenting Adolescents}, 28 CLEARINGHOUSE REV. 141 (1994) (discussing the correlation between adolescent parenting and low levels of educational attainment).
\item \textsuperscript{26} National Research Council, 1 Risking the Future 138 (Cheryl Hayes ed., 1987), \textit{in} Deborah Jones Merritt, \textit{Ending Poverty by Cutting Teenaged Births: Promise, Failure, and Paths to the Future}, 57 OHIO ST. L. J. 441, 441 (1996).
\item \textsuperscript{28} See Ruth Ellen Wasem, \textit{Welfare Reform: Adolescent Pregnancy Issues} 4-6 (Congressional Research Service 94-591 EPW, Aug. 23, 1996) (noting that most welfare reform proposals include provisions aimed at adolescent pregnancy), \textit{in} Garfinkle, \textit{supra} note 25, at 1239.
\item \textsuperscript{29} E. Kathleen Adams ET AL., \textit{The Cost of Public Services for Teenage Mothers Post-Welfare Reform: A Ten State Study} 35 J. HEALTH CARE FIN. 3, 44-59 (2009) (analyzing the yearly cost of providing for teen mothers and their children).
\item \textsuperscript{30} Saul Hoffman, \textit{The Public Cost of Teen Childbearing}, National Campaign, 3 (Oct. 2009), http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/costs/pdf/report/BTN_National_Report.pdf (encompassing in this $9.1 billion estimate is a $1.9 billion cost for increasing public health care and a $2.3 billion cost for child welfare expenses).
Today’s pregnant teenagers turn to the media for guidance and foreshadowing of the experience to come. These pregnant teenagers think to themselves, “I won’t have to quit school and when I do have the baby the father and I can take care of him just like Amy and Ryan in *The Secret life of the American Teenager.*”31 These teenagers are unaware that only forty percent of teen mothers who give birth at age 17 or earlier graduate high school.32 Out of those teen mothers, only twenty-three percent go on to earn their General Educational Development (hereinafter, “G.E.D”).33 Or these pregnant teenagers think that money will not be an issue and like Nathan and Halley Scott, of *One Tree Hill*, they will get married and each have lucrative careers.34 However, majority of families headed by teenage mothers have an income that is less than half of the poverty line.35 Those teenagers who give birth at age 17 or younger can expect to earn $28,000 less in the fifteen years after the child’s birth compared to those who delay childbirth to at least age 20.36 In addition, teenage mothers with limited education and labor market skills face numerous obstacles in obtaining a secure job.37 Those teen mothers who earn a G.E.D. will be saddened upon discovering the G.E.D has a minimal labor market value and earns no more than high school dropouts.38 The unrealistic expectations placed into the young minds of pregnant teenagers and the unsightly reality of the financial cost to the government must be discussed.

33 Id.
34 *One Tree Hill: Now You Lift Your Eyes to the Sun* (WB Television Network Nov. 9, 2009).
This article examines whether Hollywood’s portrayal of teen motherhood has affected the role of teen pregnancy at a cost to the state and federal government. Section I of this article presents and discusses the explosion of teen pregnancy in the media and the resulting fame for these teen mothers. Section II identifies the reality teen mothers will face. Both the career and educational limitations placed on teen mothers will be discussed, in addition to drawing on true life experiences from teen mothers.

Section III explores the solutions the government has implemented to assist pregnant teenagers. An introduction to the programs of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (Hereinafter, “TANF”) and Women Infants and Children (hereinafter, “WIC”) are discussed; addressing the goals and eligibility requirements for these programs. Also, the cost of teen pregnancy for the first year of child birth, in addition to a projected future cost of teen pregnancy will be analyzed and discussed.

Lastly, Section IV suggests an alternative proposal for addressing teen motherhood. This article critiques the finding that MTV’s programs Teen Mom and 16 and Pregnant are not glamorizing teen pregnancy. The shows efforts are applauded, but with an increase in teen pregnancy rates for the first time in ten years, the message is not coming across to viewers. This article proposes awarding grants to create media that exposes teens to the sobering reality of teen pregnancy or to programs willing to use a form of media to educate the youth. It is evident that teen pregnancy is become a prevalent problem in the United States and the cost of providing for these mothers and their children is increasing, for this reason the media must take the first step in promoting prevention of teen pregnancy.

I. The Hollywood Interpretation of Teen Pregnancy
In older films pregnancies was more than unplanned, but in recent films pregnancy is portrayed as a mere bump in the road. Clearly the stigma of teen pregnancy has vanished and the media glamorization is behind the shift in attitude. As a result of this shift teen pregnancy has become an extremely hot plot device lately, showing up in numerous television shows.

While parents and teenage girls may be glad to see a conversation about teen pregnancy out in the open, the important parts of the story are glossed over. These movies and shows are missing the three C’s: there’s little commitment, no mention of contraception and rarely do we see negative consequences. The media’s sexual script is missing the issue of why these teenage girls are getting pregnant and what happens afterwards. By failing to address the damaging results of teen pregnancy, the media has presented teen pregnancy in a false light.

In fictional movies and television shows, the teenagers come from supportive, financially stable families and appear to be on track to have an endless array of future opportunities. This is evident in a closer look at a few of the media’s more recent teen pregnancy promotions.

A. The Ideal Hollywood Teen Pregnancy

In 2007, Juno was released starring a witty independent-minded pregnant 16 year old by the name of Juno MacGruff. Throughout the film Juno’s pregnancy is neither sinful, shameful, nor ruinous. Juno, a fortunate teenager, does not have to quit school, nor is she insulted by any

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39 Tracy, supra note 2.
40 Id.
42 Id.
43 In Cluster of Teen Pregnancies, ‘Juno’ Comes to Life, supra note 18.
44 Kliff, supra note 41.
46 Juno, supra note 5.
47 Hischhorn, supra note 11.
of her peers.\textsuperscript{48} Shockingly, Juno is celebrated as a heroine in the film, and after giving the baby up for adoption her life returns to complete normalcy.\textsuperscript{49}

The topic of teen pregnancy was sub-plot in the popular show \textit{Glee}, which attracted 12.2 million viewers in its season two premiere.\textsuperscript{50} Viewers watched as Quinn Fabray, President of the Celibacy Club and Head Captain of the cheerleading squad discovered she was pregnant.\textsuperscript{51} As a result of her pregnancy Quinn is kicked off the Cheerios squad, in addition to being kicked out of her home.\textsuperscript{52} Unlike, Juno MacGruff, Quinn was the topic of gossip and ridiculed by her former cheerleading coach.\textsuperscript{53} Quinn’s life resumes to normalcy upon giving her child up for adoption.\textsuperscript{54} Season two premieres with Quinn living back at home and in a cheerleading uniform.\textsuperscript{55}

Another show that has graced the airwaves, of the ABC Family network, is titled \textit{The Secret life of the American Teenager}. To much surprise, this show was originally pitched with the title “The Sex life of an American Teenager."\textsuperscript{56} Season one premieres with the newly discovered pregnancy of 15 year old “good girl” Amy Juergens.\textsuperscript{57} Unlike, the two media teen mothers mentioned above, Amy decided to keep her baby and raise him with the father. Now on its third season, another teen pregnancy has taken place.\textsuperscript{58}

The series \textit{One Tree Hill}, originally aired in 2003, follows the lives of a small group of friends. In the fourth season, the innocent book smart teenager Haley James becomes pregnant

\textsuperscript{48} Id.
\textsuperscript{49} Juno, supra note 5.
\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Glee}, supra note 9.
\textsuperscript{52} See \textit{Glee: Throwdown} (Fox Oct. 14, 2009), \textit{Ballads} (Fox Nov. 18, 2009).
\textsuperscript{53} Id.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Glee, Journey} (Fox June 8, 2010).
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Glee, Funk} (Fox Nov. 2, 2010)( once again, viewers see another teen mother who is able to have her life return back to the way it was before the pregnancy).
\textsuperscript{56} Kliff, supra note 41 (After watching a few episodes viewers will easily pick up on the meaning of the “secret life” is sex and pregnancy).
\textsuperscript{57} \textit{The Secret Life of the American Teenager}, supra note 8.
\textsuperscript{58} \textit{The Secret Life of the American Teenager: I Got You Babe} (ABC Family Mar. 22, 2010).
by her high school basketball star husband, Nathan Scott. The teen parents are able to achieve their dreams; Haley gains a music career and Nathan earns his spot on a professional basketball team. This show presents the idea that having a child in your teenage years will not inhibit young parents from exploring numerous career options and obtaining a dream job.

B. Real Teen Mothers Finding a Temporary Shortcut to Fame

One of the newer television programs that deserves a lot of attention is the documentary program released by MTV, titled 16 and Pregnant. In 2009, MTV premiered a program aimed at showing the difficulties of being a pregnant teenager. The show follows the pregnancies of teen girls, showing the strained families, failing relationships, loss of friends, labor pains, late nights, mood swings, morning sickness, and the baby’s arrival. In the first season America was introduced to six pregnant teenagers; four of these alumni have gone on to star in the spin off program Teen Mom. Taking a closer look at the original cast of 16 and Pregnant the effects of the celebrity spot light can be seen.

Maci, was introduced to viewers as a high school student from Tennessee, who as a result of her teen pregnancy had to quit the dance team. Maci, fortunately, was able to graduate high school by enrolling in an accelerated program. While it can be stated that 16 and Pregnant and Teen Mom show the numerous obstacles facing teen mothers in today’s society, the show has given Maci a moment in the spot light, for example the weekly magazine O.K. Weekly made Maci’s love life the cover story of its September 13th issue.

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59 One Tree Hill, supra note 10.
60 One Tree Hill, supra note 33.
61 16 and Pregnant, supra note 7.
62 16 and Pregnant, Now Casting, supra note 13.
63 Teen Mom, supra note 6.
64 16 and Pregnant, supra note 5.
Farrah was a popular cheerleader at her high school in Iowa prior to her unplanned pregnancy. With the word of her pregnancy spreading rapidly throughout her school, she decided to finish high school online. Farrah began waitressing in order to provide for her and her daughter, but falls victim to a scam leaving her with only $100 to her name. All of Farrah’s financial troubles were the cover story of the September 13th issue of the magazine OK!Weekly.

Catelynn, became pregnant at age 17 with her boyfriend of three years, Tyler. This couple makes the mature decision that they want their child to have more than they are able to offer, and decide to have a semi-open adoption with a loving older couple. Tyler is disowned by his father when he finds out his son is giving up his child. Catelynn also faces opposition from her mother who refuses to forgive her for giving up her grandchild.

Teen Mom follows the relationship between Catelynn and Tyler, as well as their relationship with their daughter which they describe to be that of an “aunt and uncle” relationship. The show gives insight to the difficulty of giving a child up for adoption, and how feelings of regret still overcome the young couple. However, magazines once again did not miss the opportunity to have the young couple grace the cover. The young couple appeared on the cover of People magazine September 20th issue, with the title “We Miss our Baby.”

The final costar, Amber, of 16 and Pregnant returned to have her life aired on the spin off Teen Mom. She became pregnant with her boyfriend Gary after having unprotected sex. The
couple makes the decision to keep their baby and move in together.\textsuperscript{75} Due to the pregnancy Amber was unable to finish high school. But, at the encouragement of her boyfriend and her desire for achieving her high school diploma she decides to earn her G.E.D. However, Amber is unable to answer the questions and leaves the test in tears.\textsuperscript{76}

In \textit{Teen Mom}, viewers continue to see the highs and lows of Amber and Gary’s relationship, as the two become engaged, break up, get back together, and have yelling matches in front of their daughter. The relationship takes a turn for the worse when Amber physically assaults Gary.\textsuperscript{77} In light of the media attention Amber receives, viewers see her physical appearance change. Amber talks to magazines about losing weight and the excitement she has about being able to fit into a size 0 jean.\textsuperscript{78} In addition, Amber helped sell the October 25\textsuperscript{th} issue of OK!Weekly magazine as her child custody battle ran across the cover page.\textsuperscript{79}

C. A Documentary Straying Away from its Original Intent

In comparison to the portrayal of pregnancy on the Hollywood screen, the MTV documentary presents an element of reality that is lacking from fictional characters. Viewers watch as the girls struggle to balance being a teenager and a mother. Their education suffers, for example Amber cannot pass a G.E.D. test\textsuperscript{80} and Farrah cannot complete her senior year in a classroom.\textsuperscript{81} While fictional television programs show teen fathers to be supportive and involved in the process, the MTV documentary shows the negative reactions and lack of assistance from

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{16 and Pregnant: Amber} (MTV Network June 25, 2009).
\textsuperscript{76} Ginsberg, \textit{supra} note 63, at 39.
\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Teen Mom: See You Later} (MTV Network Oct. 12, 2010).
\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Losing her Baby}, OK! WEEKLY, Oct. 25, 2010 at 43.
\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Teen Mom: How Many Chances?} (MTV Network Dec. 15, 2009).
\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Teen Mom}, \textit{supra} note 64.
the fathers. For example, Maci is forced to work thirty hours a week because Ryan refuses to pay child support and boldly threatens she will have to take him to court to see any money.\textsuperscript{82}

The documentary series is shining light on the difficulties teen mothers face, but at the same time benefiting from the alluring glow of the third season of \textit{16 and Pregnant}. Because the program has attracted a large audience, season two premiere grabbing the attention of 3.4 million viewers,\textsuperscript{83} a growing fear is the program’s strong appeal to young vulnerable girls who would like to be part of the temporary fame. To become part of what some call a ground breaking documentary, all a young girl must do is simply email the producer, include a picture, where they are from, and why they want to take part in this series.\textsuperscript{84}

The problem with both fictional programs and the MTV programs is their lack of reality. \textit{16 and Pregnant} which started off with good intentions of showing teenagers the struggles of teen pregnancy has now fallen victim to being solely concerned with ratings. Each episode tries to outdo the other; picking racially diverse couples, impoverished couples, couples who are children of teen parents themselves, and couples who are victims of domestic violence. In season three of 16 and Pregnant marriage is the rating booster.\textsuperscript{85}

Within the last two seasons of \textit{16 and Pregnant} there have been a total of sixteen episodes. Out of the sixteen girls, only two chose to give their child up for adoption.\textsuperscript{86} A combination of these sixteen teenager mothers and fictional teen mothers has created an acceptance of teen pregnancy in our society. There is less stigma of illegitimacy surrounding

\textsuperscript{82} \textit{Teen Mom: Not Again} (MTV Network July 20, 2010).


\textsuperscript{84} 16 and Pregnant, Now Casting, \textit{supra} note 13.

\textsuperscript{85} \textit{16 and Pregnant: Brooke} (MTV Network Oct. 26, 2010).

\textsuperscript{86} See \textit{16 and Pregnant}, \textit{supra} note 69, \textit{16 and Pregnant: Lori} (MTV Network Mar. 16, 2010).
teen pregnancies; these teen mothers are less inclined to give up the baby for adoption, for it appears glamorous to be a mother to impressionable teens.87

Unfortunately, all these television shows and movies have done is implanted into the heads of teenage girls a Hollywood ending that rarely plays out in the high school hallways.88 The media has created a pleasure in the prospect of teen motherhood, without showing any real socioeconomic consequences.

II. The Reality of Teen Motherhood: What ends up on Hollywood’s editing floor

The cruel reality of it all is that teen mothers are in poorer health,90 have more medical problems during the pregnancy,90 have a lower educational attainment,91 are less likely to finish high school,92 more likely to remain single parents,93 and more likely to have children who will repeat this pattern.94 Teenage parents today live in dangerous neighborhoods, are less likely to be married, have fewer job opportunities, and lack family support.95

Teenage pregnancy crosses all racial boundaries, social classes, and age groups. These teen mothers are more than the sum of narratives and fictional portrayals of them.96 The reality of being a teen mother is nothing like the television shows or movies. The reality of teen pregnancy is more complicated than Hollywood makes it seem.97

A. Teen Mothers Unable to Carry School Books and a Baby

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87 Wells, supra note 15.
88 Tracy, supra note 2.
89 Luker, supra note 37, at 129.
90 Id.
91 See Brake, supra note 24.
92 Id., at 142.
94 Id., at 32-34.
95 Judith S. Musick, Young, Poor, and Pregnant: The Psychology of Teenage Motherhood 8 (Yale University 1993).
97 Press, supra note 67, at 127.
While in the movies seeing a teenager with a little baby bump push her way through a crowded high school hallway may not seem out of the realm of possibility, in real life these girls will be met with harsh stares and harsher remarks. For example, Meghan Mellecker, a 15 year old girl, had the support of her parents but had trouble living among her peers in the small populated town outside Iowa City. Many in the town spoke negatively of Meghan and her mother. The reality is teen mothers are not receiving the acceptance and approval their fictional peers receive.

Pregnant teenagers experience being stigmatized and ostracized, to the point where they drop out of high school. Teen mothers are less likely to finish high school and more likely to remain a single parent. Parenthood is the leading reason why teen girls have to quit school. Sadly, fewer than two percent of teen mothers earn their college degree before the age of 30. Taking a closer look at high school education teenage mothers, 17 and younger, only have a 40% high school graduation rate and a 23% rate of earning their GED. Mothers between the ages of 18 and 19 have a 63% high school graduation rate and an 11% rate of earning their GED. The lack of a solid education foundation only imposes more obstacles for these teen mothers.

The higher education of teen mothers is limited, unlike their peers they are unable to go away to college. Instead, they must settle for a community college that offers child care service. The littlest things, such as completing high school, become difficult when a baby is involved.

B. Teen Mothers Living on a Limited Budget

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98 Luker, supra note 36, at 96.
99 Id.
100 Kliff, supra note 41.
101 Brake, supra note 25, at 142.
103 Id.
104 Hoffman, supra note 27, 24.
105 Id.
Women who become pregnant as teenagers are at a greater risk of economic and social disadvantages throughout their lives.\textsuperscript{106} Even with the assistance of government aid, money is extremely tight. Teen mothers must sacrifice their personal needs and use all their finances to support their baby.\textsuperscript{107} Sadly, government assistance for child care is not sufficient to cover the expense of providing proper care for a child.\textsuperscript{108}

The actual cost of motherhood for the first year is an estimated total of $8,316.\textsuperscript{109} A teen mother who has not obtained a high school diploma and has a low paying job will have great difficulty in covering such an expense. Teen mothers who have their first child at 17 or younger earn on average $6,900 per year, which is less $3,350 less than the earnings of women who delayed their first birth until after the age of 20.\textsuperscript{110} Due to the inability to find adequate and reasonable priced child care, these teen mothers will have to settle for flexible low paying jobs. As a result, an earnings comparison for the first fifteen years of motherhood shows that there exists a deficit of $84,000 between the earnings of teen mothers and those who waited until 20 to have their first child.\textsuperscript{111}

Due to the lack of education, employment experience, and job opportunities many teen mothers must turn to the government for assistance. There are more than 400,000 teen births annually in the United States, most of them to mothers on welfare.\textsuperscript{112} Sadly, as teen mothers make up a large portion of the women on welfare, 42\% of mothers on welfare have higher levels of depression symptoms.\textsuperscript{113} This rate is twice the amount for the general population.\textsuperscript{114} Not only

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{106} Merritt, supra note 25.
\bibitem{107} Rinaldo, supra note 100, at 6.
\bibitem{108} Musick, supra note 93, at 145
\bibitem{109} Press, supra note 67, at 129.
\bibitem{110} Hoffman, supra note 27, at 26.
\bibitem{111} Id.
\bibitem{112} Id.
\end{thebibliography}
are these girls too young to have children but with the stress of financial struggle many of these teen mothers suffer emotional lows daily

C. Internal Conflict between Childhood and Parenthood

Teen mothers are struggling to balance three fundamental and sometimes conflicting roles; parenthood, partner-ship, and education.\textsuperscript{115} The struggle between the roles sets limits to what kind of parent a teenager can be, regardless of what type of mother they wish to become. Today’s teen parents lack the social and economic support network upon which young parents could rely on in the past.\textsuperscript{116} These teen mothers are left without childrearing assistance, as well as the financial and emotional support.

The demand to be a student, worker, daughter, girlfriend, and mother is too demanding for a teenage girl, and leaves little room for error.\textsuperscript{117} When a teenager must also be a mother someone will be shorthanded, and it usually will be the child as teen mothers continue to fight for their youth. An internal conflict takes place in the hearts and minds of these young girls. They understand the necessity of caring for their child, but at the same time are not ready to end their youth. Due to their lack of involvement, dedication, and inability to adequately provide for their children they leave their child with a relative. The child many of times will then go back and forth between living with a relative and their teenage mother, robbing the child of any consistency in their childhood. These dysfunctional patterns of raising children are more prevalent in younger mothers than in comparison to their adult counterpart.\textsuperscript{118} These patterns can become permanent, and the children will have a permanent home with a relative. Children

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Id.
\item Musick, supra note 93, at 149.
\item Id., at 8-9 (discussing the numerous problems pregnant teenagers encounter.).
\item Musick, supra note 93, at 144.
\item Id., at 145.
\end{enumerate}
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living with other relatives, such as grandparents, increased from 1.4 million to 2.2 million between the years 1990-2000.119

D. Children of Teen Mothers, Dealt a Bad Hand from Birth

Teen pregnancy imposes a lasting hardship on two generations: the parent and child.120 Teen mothers are less likely to receive proper medical care during pregnancy,121 resulting in a higher rate of premature babies born to teen mothers. Due to their lack of knowledge teen mothers do not understand the importance of visiting their doctor and properly caring for their health. As a result of this teen mothers are more likely to have complications during their pregnancy and give birth to premature babies.122 Teen births have a substantially, widespread negative effect, especially for the children of teen mothers.123

Lifestyle qualities of the teen mothers shape the kind of childrearing environment they create for their child.124 A single teen mother must assume the role of breadwinner and find immediate employment. Teen mothers must resort to low paying jobs, due to their lack of education.125 As a result, the quality time with their child suffers and the income is diverted to pay for work related expenses such as transportation and childcare.126 Upon returning home these fatigued mothers have no desire to interact with their child, and instead put the child to bed and enjoy a few hours of solitude until they must awake and do it all over again.

Children of teen parents are more likely to be in foster care and less likely to not graduate high school. The daughters of teen mothers are more likely to give birth during their teen years

119 Litcher, supra note 113, at 130.
120 Wells, supra note 15.
121 Luker, supra note 36, at 114.
122 Id.
124 Musick, supra note 93, at 149.
125 Litcher, supra note 113, at 129.
126 Id.
and the sons of teen mothers are more likely to be incarcerated. This is because children, of teen mothers, at best only receive sporadic protection from destructive influences. These children are left without parental supervision and guidance.

E. First Comes Love, Then Comes Baby, Then Comes Marriage

Compared to women who delay child birth till after the age of 18, teen mothers have a 16% more likely chance to be a single mother. After giving labor, more than half of teen mothers say that they are either “sure” or “chances are good” they will marry the father of their child. However, eighty percent of the time the couple does not marry. Those who do marry will become victim to divorce as marriage between adolescents is more likely to end in divorce, and in a short period of time.

The expectations teenager mothers place upon their relationship with the father is wishful thinking. The experience of a 17 year old teen mother is too familiar to those who have traveled in her shoes. “We were going to get married in April. . . . . He said if I got pregnant he’d want to be with me and the baby always, which is what he said when he found out I was pregnant. Then he changed his mind and split.”

Teenager fathers have a tendency not to stay around long enough to assist the mothers in childrearing. These young fathers also fail at being able to

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127 Teen Pregnancy, Glamorized by Celebrities, Cost Taxpayers Billions a Year, supra note 127.
128 Musick, supra note 93, at 163.
129 Hotz, supra note 37, at 695.
130 Rinaldo, supra note 100, at 7.
provide child support for their children.\textsuperscript{133} The difficulty of employment and the failed relationship with the father provides great deal of stress for the teen mothers.\textsuperscript{134}

The reality of teen pregnancy is that babies are money, time, friends, and boys not sticking around. These young girls are letting down the very people who love and support them. Teen mothers do not deny the love they have for their child, but they have had to learn the difficult way that they were not mature enough, old enough, nor did they know anything about raising a child.\textsuperscript{135}

III. The Government’s Box Office Ticket Price

To combat the epidemic of teenage pregnancy in the United States President Bill Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (hereinafter, “PRWORA”).\textsuperscript{136} The legislation aimed to “provide some real help for a future to those families . . . in our . . . society who. . . are totally without hope.”\textsuperscript{137} Within the framework of PRWORA the program TANF was created, in which the federal government provides money to the states, which then are responsible for creating and administering programs and eligibility requirements for receiving benefits.\textsuperscript{138} The goals of TANF are to emphasize work, personal responsibilities, economic sufficiency and strong families.\textsuperscript{139} PRWORA provides cash bonuses,
each year, to states that are most successful in reducing the number of unwed childbearing, as long as the reduction is not accompanied by abortion. \textsuperscript{140} 

The new welfare reform contains numerous provisions relating specifically to teen parents. Two mandatory provisions for teen mothers is that they stay at home if not married and to remain in school. \textsuperscript{141} The school requirement allows states to deny benefits to teenage mothers, under the age of 18, who drop out of school or do not participate in a program directed toward the attainment of a high school diploma or its equivalent. \textsuperscript{142} These limitations placed on access to TANF do not apply to Medicaid, Food Stamps, and WIC. \textsuperscript{143}

As a result of the 1996 welfare reform and changes to the Medicaid program the access to public assistance programs for teen mothers has been greatly affected, resulting in rising costs for taxpayers. In 2009, a study was published examining the tax cost of teen births in ten states. \textsuperscript{144} The ten state study examined the cost of four public service programs; cash assistance from TANF, WIC, Food Stamps, and Medicaid coverage at delivery. This study estimated the single-year cost of teen pregnancy, evaluating the past year to measure the cost of public services in a given year attributed to teen birth.

The results of this study found that the expense for teenage mothers during the birth year for the four public programs in the ten states totaled more than $578 million. \textsuperscript{145} The cost of teen pregnancy exceeds the cost of older mothers by $1,500. From all the data collected it was determined the total public cost per teen mother equaled $6,349 for the birth year. \textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{140} Id., at 124.
\textsuperscript{141} See 42 U.S.C.A 608(a)(4)(5).
\textsuperscript{142} See 42 U.S.C.A 608(a)(4)(A).
\textsuperscript{143} 42 U.S.C. §608 (2000).
\textsuperscript{144} Adams, supra note 29 (analyzing the public sector cost of teen pregnancy in the following states: Alabama, Alaska, Florida, Maine, North Carolina, New York (with the exception of New York City), Oklahoma, South Carolina, Washington, and West Virginia).
\textsuperscript{145} Id.
\textsuperscript{146} Id.
If these ten states were able to postpone *unplanned* teen pregnancies they would have saved an average of $75 million annually, and if, *all* teen pregnancies within these states were postponed, $90 million in public service costs would be averted annually.\(^\text{147}\)

In 2006, the National Campaign released a study examining the taxpayer cost of teenage pregnancy. This research performed a single cohort estimate looking forward twenty years to measure the expense of teen birth. In finding the estimate for the taxpayer cost of teen pregnancy researchers evaluated the negative consequences of teenage childbirth, such as the cost of public health care, child welfare cost, cost of state prisons, and lost revenue due to lower taxes paid by teen mothers throughout their lifetime. The total estimate for the cost of teen pregnancy in the United States for 2004 amounted to $9.1 billion.\(^\text{148}\) The annual future cost of taxpayer dollars in providing for a child of a teenager is $1,430 per year.\(^\text{149}\)

Focusing specifically on the expense of child health care, for teen mothers 17 or under, it will cost the government $.95 million to provide for these children.\(^\text{150}\) Children of younger mothers rely more heavily on Medicaid to provide for their child, which in the ten state study 87% of teen mothers relied upon.\(^\text{151}\) The average child of a teen mother uses almost $145 more in public health care services than the child of a twenty year old woman.\(^\text{152}\)

From two different studies conducted it can easily be seen that providing public assistance for teen mothers is costing the tax payers. Welfare reform has not created self dependent and stable families with teenager mothers. Instead, the welfare reform has created a

\(^{147}\) *Id.*

\(^{148}\) *Id.*

\(^{149}\) Hoffman, *supra* note 27, at 11.

\(^{150}\) *Id.*, at 3

\(^{151}\) Adams, *supra* note 29 (discussing teen mothers’ dependence on Medicaid at delivery).

\(^{152}\) Hoffman, *supra* note 27, at 12
higher risk of birth to teenage girls already in lower income families. In addition, to an increase in the risk of teenage mothers electing dropping out of school because a monthly check will be given to them by the government from WIC, Medicaid, and Food stamps.

In total, teenagers who had their first child at 17 or younger collect on average $37,000 in cash assistance through welfare by the time they reach the age of 35. These mothers also spend greater time on welfare, averaging 6.9 years for cash assistance and 5.7 years for food stamps. Teenage mothers who give birth to their first child between the ages of 18 to 19 collect $22,000 in public assistance; spend 4.5 years on welfare and 3.9 years on food stamps.

Financial support provided by welfare programs within the government left untreated the health problems of low income citizens. Thus WIC was created by the government to ensure the health of vulnerable citizens. WIC was first started in 1974 having only 88,000 participants. Now, each month there are 9.3 million participants. Within the ten states studied, 85% of teenage mothers relied on WIC to provide for themselves and their children.

The mission of WIC is to safeguard the health of low income women, infants, and children up to five years old who are a nutrition risk. Every state is provided with federal grants to provide those qualifying citizens with supplemental food, health care referrals, and

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154 Id.
155 Id., at 28
156 Hoffman, *supra* note 17, at 28
157 Id.
158 Id., at 29.
162 Id.
nutrition education.\textsuperscript{163} The program funding is provided by federal grant programs in which Congress authorizes a specific amount of funding per year.\textsuperscript{164} In 2010, fiscal year, the nationwide total for WIC funding was $7.045 billion.\textsuperscript{165}

The cost of teen pregnancy is alarmingly high. Tax payers are coughing up $1,430 per year to care for the child of a teen mother\textsuperscript{166} and $6,349 to cover the expenses of the teen mother for the birth year.\textsuperscript{167} Combining this with the $9.1 billion expected future expenses of teen pregnancy in the United States,\textsuperscript{168} it is evident that prevention must be the aim of the government and all those who can bring about a change in our growing teen birth and pregnancy rate.

V. How to Combat Hollywood?

The United States compared to other industrialized nations has been the least successful at reducing the rate of teenage births.\textsuperscript{169} As long as the socioeconomic consequences of child bearing for teenagers are slight and childrearing assistance advocate in favor of early pregnancy, financial incentives such as PRWORA will be ineffective in reducing teenage births.\textsuperscript{170} Money is awarded to the five states that are most successful in the reduction of out-of-wedlock births, and because teenage births comprise a large portion of out-of-wedlock births states can target teenagers at risk.\textsuperscript{171} However, PRWORA does not provide any money up front for the programs

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{163} Food & Nutrition Services, Benefits and Services (Apr. 21, 2010), http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/benefitsandservices/foodpkg.HTM (explaining that month those who qualify receive checks or vouchers to purchase specific food to supplement their diets).
\bibitem{164} Food & Nutrition Services, \textit{supra} note 156.
\bibitem{165} \textit{Id.}
\bibitem{166} Hoffman, \textit{supra} note 17, at 11.
\bibitem{167} Adams, \textit{supra} note 29.
\bibitem{168} Hoffman, \textit{supra} note 27, at 3.
\bibitem{169} Garfinkle, \textit{supra} note 25, at 1237.
\bibitem{171} Garfinkle, \textit{supra} note 25, at 1256
\end{thebibliography}
aimed at reducing teen births. States will to reach into their limited budget in order to combat teen pregnancy. Focus should be aimed at teen pregnancy prevention.

Instead, PRWORA lures teenagers with a guarantee of cash welfare benefits if they become pregnant, under the age of 18, stay in school, and do not marry. These monetary inducements are running counterproductive to reducing the teen pregnancy rate, as these government programs are silently promoting teen pregnancy in providing young girls monthly cash assistance. Teenage pregnancy prevention programs must comprehensively address the numerous factors that encourage women to become teen mothers.

The government has been unsuccessful at reducing the teen birth rate because states are not given money to create programs. However, the Office of Adolescent Health is attempting to battle to the teen pregnancy problem by supporting programs within the United States aimed at improving adolescent health, in addition to implementing and administering new grant programs to support evidence based teen pregnancy prevention approaches.

Programs awarded a tier 2 grant are granted more flexibility with regards to their curriculum. In 2010, 19 tier 2 grants were awarded, totally 15.2 million dollars. Because these programs have just begun it is difficult to understand in greater detail what is meant by their

172 Id.
176 Id.
178 Id (explaining grants are given to fund medically and age appropriate programs aimed at reducing the teen pregnancy. Programs awarded tier 1 grants will be replicating already approved evidence-based models).
179 Id (detailing that these programs are still in the process of being implemented, but two of these programs, located in New York and D.C., are using a text message campaign and another form of media to educate about teen pregnancy).
media campaigns. In addition, it is impossible to currently measure the success rate of these media programs as they will run for five years.

While it is too soon to evaluate the effectiveness of these grant programs, there is room for the media to begin to educate and make the teenage community aware of the realities of teen pregnancy. By already implementing the message of the difficulties of teen pregnancy in our present media it will assist educational programs in future years. As of right now, programs stressing the difficulties of becoming a teen mother will not be effective as long as the message runs counter to the life experiences portrayed on television and in magazines. 178

Critics argue that MTV’s 16 and Pregnant has taken a step in the correct direction. The National Campaign recently released polling data on teens’ opinion concerning the glamorization of pregnancy in the media. The main question asked by the poll was “[t]hinking specifically about MTV’s 16 and Pregnant, do you think the show helps teens better understand the challenges of pregnancy and parenthood or does it glamorize teen pregnancy?” 179 The finding to this question was 3% were unsure, 82% said it helps teens to understand the difficulty of teen pregnancy, and 15% said it glamorized teen pregnancy. 180 While, 15% is a small percentage, it must be noted that 39% of the teenagers surveyed had never seen the show. 181 It can be argued that 16 and Pregnant provides girls with a look in to the “real life” expectancy of teenage motherhood. However, teenagers see these girls become popular overnight. 182

178 Weinstein, supra note 185, at 148.
180 Id.
181 Id.
182 When they get to school on Wednesday morning the topic of their pre-morning bell chitchat will be devoted entirely to the newest MTV celebrity of last night’s 16 and Pregnant. Teenage girls will pass over the part where the new celebrity let her straight A’s slip to D’s, and is facing the possibility of not graduating. They will pay no attention to the loss of her best friends. They will completely ignore the disappointment and sadness the parents experience when they have to sit back and witness the future of their daughter take a back seat to their future
The media has an influence, as teenagers spend more time interacting with a form of media. It may not be a direct cause and effect, but the media shows what is “cool” showing the glitz and flame. As of right now the “cool” thing is a consequence free teen pregnancy. However, the National Campaign conducted a survey, in 2007; finding that teens do want the media to address the consequences of sex. These topics can be risky for Hollywood producers, and writers may want to avoid the controversy. In addition, to an entertainment value at stake, a lecture on the consequences of pregnancy doesn’t exactly sell in the box office. Is the media unable to put aside the thought of profits and risk the financial gamble in exchange for assisting the United States in correctly and accurately addressing teenage pregnancy?

The media is currently implanting into the minds of young teen girls the teen pregnancy is acceptable. As a result of the social cognitive effects of teen pregnancy in the media teenage girls are warming up to the idea of having a child when they are a child themselves. Given that the media has become such a large part of the American teenagers’ life and a source of sexual information for teens, we might hope that the media is mindful of the content that would be best for the young viewers. A successful solution cannot view teenage motherhood as the product of individual shortcoming that can be cured with the right message. Instead a broad-

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183 Carol J. Pardun, Jane D. Brown, Kelly Ladin L’Engle, Linking Exposure to Outcomes: Early Adolescents’ Consequences of Sexual Contents in Six Media, 8 MASS COMM. & SOC’Y 2, 75-91, at 77 (2005) (finding that teenagers spend on average eight hours a day using some form of media, and four hours a day watching television).
184 In Cluster of Teen Pregnancy, ‘Juno’ Comes to Life, supra note 18.
185 Kliff, supra note 41.
186 Id.
187 Stacey J.T. Hust, Jane D. Brown & Kelly Ladin L’Engle, Boys Will Be Boys and Girl Better Be Prepared: An Analysis of the Rare Sexual Health Messages in Young Adolescents’ Media, 11 MASS. COM. & SOC’Y 3,4-23, 5 (2008) (explaining that under the social cognitive theory individuals model the behavior of someone they see in the media if the model is attractive and is rewarded or not punished for behaving that way).
188 Id., at 4
189 Weinstein, supra note 185, at 148.
based and comprehensive solution is needed. New media must be used to attack the already existing media portrayals of teen pregnancy.

A newly created organization, The Candie’s Foundation, is leading the way for battling the media’s portrayal of teen pregnancy. The underlying message throughout the campaign is “Pause before you Play.” The Candie’s Foundation encourages teenagers to pause and think about their future, pause to think about the consequences, pause to evaluate your relationship, and pause to delay sex. As a result of exposure to the Candie’s ads teen girls are more likely to view teen pregnancy and parenthood as negative, and are more likely to be skeptical of the media’s portrayal. While the program 16 and Pregnant does ends every show with the public service announcement that teen pregnancy is 100% preventable and encourages their viewers to visit the website “itsyoursexlife.com.” That is not enough. More must be done to battle the media portrayal of teen pregnancy; programs must continue to run counter to the current images bombarding young girls.

IV. Conclusion

Today’s media has fostered the idea that pregnancy among teenagers is a regularly occurring event. This portrayal seems realistic in the wake of 750,000 teen births, in addition to the unfortunate fact that the United States leads all industrialized nations in teen pregnancy.
and birth rate.\textsuperscript{197} However, there exists the ability to change this by investing more in programs that seek to fully inform the teenage community about the risks of pregnancy and the devastating consequences it will have on their future.

This article has examined Hollywood’s portrayal of teen motherhood and its affect on the role of teen pregnancy at a drastic cost to the state and federal government. The explosion of teen pregnancy in television and movies has contributed to the alarming teen birth rate in the United States. Brief summaries of the more recent television programs and movies provided evidence of the complete lack of reality in the media.

In reality teen mothers will live a life completely different than their celebrity teen counterparts. The result of a teen pregnancy places educational and career limitations on the mother. These young mothers are forced to set aside their education in order to care for their child.\textsuperscript{198} Sadly, these teen mothers can expect to rely on cash assistance for 6.9 years and food stamps for 5.7 years.\textsuperscript{199} While, these mothers will do their best to provide for their child it will not be enough.

Section III explored the solutions the government has implemented to assist pregnant teenagers. Programs such WIC and TANF have been created to assist teen mothers in the financial struggle of providing for a child. However, these solutions have come at a great price to the American tax dollar. A future cost estimate from the 750,000 children born to teen mothers in 2004\textsuperscript{200} concluded that the United States will suffer the loss of $9.1 billion.\textsuperscript{201} Ten states alone spent over $0.5 billion dollars in one year providing for teen mothers.\textsuperscript{202} Each year a

\textsuperscript{197} Hoffman, supra note 27, at 1.
\textsuperscript{198} See Rinaldo, supra note 100, at 5-6 (discussing the effect of teen pregnancy on one mother’s goal to finish school).
\textsuperscript{199} Hoffman, supra note 27, at 28.
\textsuperscript{200} In Cluster of Teen Pregnancies, ‘Juno’ Comes to Life, supra note 18.
\textsuperscript{201} Hoffman, supra note 27, at 3.
\textsuperscript{202} Adams, supra note 29.
teen mother is costing the public $6,349.\textsuperscript{203} The economic effect of teen pregnancy is more than apparent. With the teen birth rate for the United States experiencing its first increase in over a decade\textsuperscript{204} the price tag of public assistance will only get more expensive.

Throughout the article MTV’s popular television show \textit{16 and Pregnant} is critiqued for its lack of reality. While, the show claims to be a documentary program educating the youth on the difficulties of teen pregnancy the complete opposite has came to light in the wake of its third season. Young girls watch as these girls are not punished, but rewarded with magazine covers and celebrity status.

Proposed in this article is that media be used to inform teenagers of the consequences of teen pregnancy and to use celebrities that will attract the attention of teenagers. The media must step up and assist in fighting teen pregnancy, due to the inabilities of the government. For the time being the United States must invest in a temporary solution to the media portrayal of teen pregnancy, The Candies Foundation is such solution. The steps taken by Candie’s discouraging teen pregnancy runs counter to the message of mainstream media. If more media support can be given to educate teenagers on the reality of teen pregnancy and eliminate the false sense of fame a positive result will take place in the United States.

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\textsuperscript{203} \textit{Id.} \\
\textsuperscript{204} Guttmacher Inst., \textit{supra} note 20, at 3.
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