Gaining Support for Teen Families: Mapping the Perceptual Hurdles

A Report from the FrameWorks Institute to Healthy Teen Network

A FrameWorks Research Report

prepared for the Frameworks Institute

by

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June 2008

Introduction

Beginning in September 2007, Healthy Teen Network, a national advisory committee and the FrameWorks Institute began to collaborate to identify, test and deploy new messages that might have the potential to change the public conversation about support for young families. Specific policy goals put forward by the Network include: 1) enforce and expand implementation of Title IX to provide legally mandated support for pregnant and parenting teens to graduate high school and go on to college, and 2) gain expanded and stable funding for pregnant and parenting teen programs nationwide. To these goals, the FrameWorks Institute brought its perspective of Strategic Frame Analysis™, which poses the following questions:

1. How does the public think about a particular issue?
2. Are there dominant frames or ways of thinking that appear almost automatic?
3. Are there default frames that are routinely relied upon to make sense of unfamiliar situations or policies?
4. How do these frames affect policy preferences?
5. How are these frames reinforced; what frames are available to people from media and from issues advocates?
6. How can the problem be reframed to evoke a different way of thinking, one that makes appropriate policy choices salient and sensible?

In this seminal part of our inquiry, FrameWorks and the Network collaborated to answer Question 5, by initiating a study of frames in the news media and of the framing practices of advocates. Given financial constraints, we agreed that this would allow us the most cost-effective foundation for speculating about the dominant frames available to people (Questions 1 and 2). Typically, in the FrameWorks' approach, these questions are answered through one-on-one cognitive interviews. However, it is often the case that these interviews mirror in many respects the dominant frames in the news. So we agreed to focus our limited resources on this aspect of the research inquiry.

The frames analyzed here are subjected to critical evaluation, based on a body of scholarship and original research about how people think about social issues in general and how they think about young people in particular. In our evaluation of both media and expert communications, we

recognize the evident fluency and mastery of subject evidenced by these writers. Our criticisms are not with the art of these communications, nor with their intent. Rather, we propose to evaluate their effectiveness with reference to research findings about what serves to engage Americans in policy thinking, and what does not. Our intent is to help all those who wish to engage the public in a practical dialogue about what policies might better support young families by suggesting how this conversation can be more productively stimulated.

Coming out of this preliminary work, we hoped to be able to speculate sufficiently about Question 6 that we could outline a sound strategy for exploring speculative reframes in qualitative and quantitative testing. We believe we have arrived at that point, and that the work captured in these pages sets out a clear path for future research, as enumerated in the final section of this report.

This report is organized as follows:

Section I: *The Pictures in Our Heads: An Analysis of Media Coverage*
Section II: *Frames in the Field: An Analysis of Advocates' Materials*
Section III: *Building Better Frames*
Section IV: *Recommendations for Further Research*

Section I: The Pictures in Our Heads: An Analysis of Media Coverage

This section of the report examines how teen parenting is presented to readers, directly and indirectly, in the nation's newspapers. It lays out the dominant frames that are applied to teen pregnancy and young families and demonstrates how these frames constrain public solutions.

The data for this report are drawn from major news articles in the past year that covered issues relating to teen pregnancy and/or teen parenting. Findings include a list of the dominant frames in news and an explanation of their construction and nuances, with examples.

Summary of Findings

In this section, we summarize the important findings and implications that resulted from the media review.

- Assumptions about why teens become parents are cast in highly moralistic terms. News media invoke frames that explain teen pregnancy with reference to teen character assessments, notably their selfishness, apathy, promiscuity and stupidity. This media trope promotes public understanding of teen pregnancy as a matter of individual choice and potential solutions as encouraging teens to simply make better decisions.

- The news articles tend to focus almost exclusively on causes of teen pregnancy, teen pregnancy rates and preventative strategies. Coverage of the practice of teen parenting is minimal as it is typically portrayed as "dooming" young families and their children to a "cycle" of poverty. As such, most public discussion of policy revolves around preventive measures with little focuses on support for young families.

- There is a strong tendency for media to present images of a "teen mother bubble." The teen mother who drops out of school, fails to find employment and dooms her child to a life of poverty is a common narrative journalists use to begin stories, particularly those that report on the recent rise in teen pregnancy rates. The focus on individual teen mothers obscures broader issues of context that are critical for supporting young families.

- Through the use of statistics regarding teen pregnancy and poverty, the materials confuse correlation with causality. The use of scholarly research in newspaper articles often posits—implicitly and explicitly—that poverty is caused by teen pregnancy rather than creating more complex, "big picture" understandings of the relationship between poverty and teen pregnancy.

- There is a strong tendency for issue advocates quoted in media to frame teen pregnancy primarily as a public health crisis, isolated from social and economic issues. This frame is understandable, given new research about the negative impacts of abstinence-only education on teens' safer sex practices and its implications for teen pregnancy rates. However, narrowly framing the problems related to teen pregnancy as a health issue reduces potential policy interventions to improving sex education. This frame does not encourage discussion of the provision of reproductive services to teens or the availability of health care for teen parents. Furthermore, the frame fails to capture a holistic picture of other social and economic factors involved in teen pregnancy and teen parenting.

- The few materials that deal with policy for teen parents often rely on images of dedicated, hardworking and maverick advocates who overcome "government bureaucracy" and anachronistic social policies, including Title IX. The corollary to the "teen mother bubble" is the dedicated, solitary advocate who bucks government policies and aids teens through hard work and personal charisma. While these frames rightfully give credit to hardworking advocates, it stops the public from imagining social policies and social structures that will assist young families. It also undercuts the full utilization of social policies that are already in place, such as the application of Title IX to secure educational equality for pregnant and parenting teens.

- Constructive frames in media include critical discussions of scholarly studies dealing with teen pregnancy and poverty and stories that show teens as active participants in their lives and larger communities.

Methods

FrameWorks reviewed 58 newspaper articles collected from newspapers in various parts of the country. Articles from the period of April 10, 2006 to April 10, 2008 were drawn from a range of news sources, both large newspapers and local papers as well as publications from a variety of political perspectives. News stories were drawn from *The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, The Boston Globe, The Philadelphia Inquirer, USA Today, Newsday, The Washington Times, The Christian Science Monitor, The New York Daily News,* and *The St. Petersburg Times*.

The articles were identified by searching LexisNexis for the following terms: "teen/adolescent parents," "teen/adolescent parenting," "teen/adolescent mothers" "teen/adolescent moms," "teen/adolescent fathers," "teen/adolescent dads" and "teen/adolescent pregnancy." Initially, the searches were delimited with other terms such as education, school, jobs, employment, Title IX. These searches yielded very few results. For example, only one article contained any information about Title IX as it pertains to teen parenting.

The search terms identified a number of articles that dealt with recent treatment of teen pregnancy in popular movies such as *Juno* and the pregnancy of 16-year old Jamie Lynn Spears, Britney Spears' younger sister and the star of a popular children's show. These types of articles were included in the sample if they included political or social commentary on teen pregnancy. Therefore, articles that only reviewed the movie *Juno* but were captured with the search term "teen pregnancy" were not included. A total of six (10.3%) of the "Hollywood" articles were included in the sample.

Importantly, this analysis should not be interpreted as a quantitative look at the frequency of topics, but rather as a qualitative examination of how topics related to teen parenting are treated in the materials, and the likely implications for readers' thinking. The analysis looks at such factors as the types of topics that are and are not mentioned in a given article, the ways in which topics within a story are treated as either related or unrelated, the causal stories conveyed or implied by the articles, the metaphors used to talk about teen pregnancy topics, and so forth. The analysis is less about cataloguing what is explicitly said than it is about identifying the implicit understandings that are conveyed by the materials.

Much of the report is devoted to harmful patterns in the coverage of teen parenting—i.e. ways in which the coverage is likely to create counterproductive understandings in the minds of readers. However, we also discuss pieces that avoid these traps, since these positive examples can help guide advocates (and responsible journalists) to identify more constructive framing.

Findings

In this section, we lay out some of the counter-productive frames that shape patterns of thinking about teen pregnancy and teen parenting and the types of solutions that these frames invoke. This section covers five major frames in media coverage of teen pregnancy: teen pregnancy as a moral failing, the "teen mother bubble," fuzzy causality between teen pregnancy and poverty, teen pregnancy as disease, and finally maverick advocates as solutions. Each frame is discussed

in turn in the following sections.

By far the largest category of articles included in this analysis were those that dealt with teen pregnancy rates, reporting on either the rise or decline of pregnancy rates and explaining potential causes of these shifts (n=31 or 53% of the sample). Teen pregnancy rates rose by 3 percent in 2006 following several years of decline. The major news items concerning teen pregnancy and parenting focused on whether or not this shift could be attributed to abstinence-only education. These articles were included in the sample because they often contained assumptions about why teens become pregnant, why they decide to have children, as well as anecdotes that reveal common assumptions about the lives of teen parents. As will be discussed in the following sections, these types of articles lead to an overwhelming focus in coverage on teen pregnancy and its prevention, rather than teen parenting and policies that aid young families.

Teen Pregnancy as Moral Failing
Many of the stories include implicit understandings about why teens become pregnant and opt to have the baby. In a variety of ways, these stories frame teen pregnancy as a result of immoral cultural values, poor decision-making, misguided mindsets, apathy, and personal moral failings.

"The Cultural Component"

Newspaper articles about teen pregnancy and parenting often invoke the term "culture" to explain why teens become parents. Culture is employed in two distinct ways in media frames concerning teen pregnancy. The first is an appeal to American popular culture and its recent "glamorization" of teen pregnancy. In one article, the journalist argues that "acceptance [of teen pregnancy] may be cultural":

> Sarah Brown, CEO of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, is concerned about the message girls will get from *Juno*, which she believes is unrealistic. The movie paints a portrait of a pregnant teen who is not only extremely self-possessed but who also has a very supportive family. "Adults understand the bigger picture and what the risks are of adolescence and childbearing," Brown says. "Adolescents see it through the lens of the 'me generation.' Adolescence is also a self-absorbed time. If the baby got handed off and she got the boyfriend back (as happens in *Juno*), what's the problem?" ("Does 'Juno' show strength or glorify teen pregnancy? Reaction pits traditional vs. moral vs. tolerant vs. accepting," *USA Today*, Life pg 7D, March 10, 2008).

This excerpt implies that teen pregnancy is caused by positive representation in media, without mediation from any other factors, such as availability of reproductive services. The problem with this frame is it presents an oversimplified view of culture (i.e. culture makes people do things, similar to the way that computers are programmed). Second, it can block discussions of other factors that may explain teenage pregnancy. Finally, the underlying assumption is that teens become parents because they are selfish. Being part of the "me generation" further exacerbates

these selfish impulses.

Culture is also employed to explain differences in pregnancy rates and attitudes about teen pregnancy among various racial and ethnic groups. In the following article, the advocates discuss the "cultural piece" that explains high rates of teen pregnancy in Latino communities.

> Candace Kattar, executive director of Identity Inc., a nonprofit group that serves Latinos, said low income and undocumented teen moms often might not see pregnancy as a barrier to such goals as an education or career. "A lot of teen Latino moms are actually quite happy to be pregnant as teenagers," Kattar said. A survey of Latino teens and adults by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy found that a significant portion of the Latino community does not see teen pregnancy in their community as a big deal, according to the Montgomery report, and only a small number thought it prevented teens from reaching their goals. "The whole cultural piece is enormous," said Pilar Torres, executive director of Centro Familia, a Silver Spring group that promotes child care and education for Latinos. "We're not understanding why these girls are getting pregnant. It's totally different for this community" ("Hispanics Drive Teen Birthrate," *The Washington Post*, Metro pg. B04, July 27, 2007).

The excerpt begins with the statement that Latinas who are becoming pregnant are low-income and/or undocumented, yet it is the Latino culture and its supposed unwillingness to "see" teen pregnancy as detrimental that encourages high rates of teen pregnancy. Previous FrameWorks research on Americans' thinking about race has shown that a dominant frame is "separate fates," in which concerns of communities of color are separate and alien to those of the broader American society.[i] This frame, as previous FrameWorks has shown, makes it more difficult for people to connect differences in life chances to larger social structures. Similarly, the invocation of "culture" to explain differences in teenage pregnancy rates undermines public understanding of other structural factors, such as economic inequality and discrimination based on race and immigration status, as important predictors of these differences.

Teen Parents as Apathetic and Immoral

Another frame used to explain teen pregnancy is that teen parents do not care about their future. The image of the apathetic teen runs counter to morally-tinged ideas about hard-working Americans, who are pursuing their future goals and dreams. For example, one journalist wrote an article about the Carrera Program, which is described as a holistic approach to education designed to reduce teen pregnancy, among other social problems. The journalist reported that the program provides opportunities for program participants to:

> "…study art and music, and learn how to open a savings account, budget money and

draw up business plans. They are mentored and tutored and receive lessons in sports they can enjoy for a lifetime, such as golf, swimming and squash. They also receive medical care, including visits to dentists, mental health professionals and even dermatologists" ("One School Shows Prevention Requires more than Health Class," *Washington Post*, Metro pg. B01, December 12, 2007).

The head of an academy where the program is being implemented described the program as teaching "the importance of having choices and caring about outcomes." Furthermore, the journalist describes it as a process by which children are "inoculated with heavy doses of self-respect, integrity, discipline, responsibility and teamwork." The article implies that students who become pregnant do not possess such qualities and do not care about future choices and outcomes. Furthermore, the inoculation metaphor implies that teens are not capable of taking an active role in their lives (in a later section, we elaborate on the disease metaphor in media framing of teen pregnancy and parenting).

This frame is rearticulated in other articles.

> Kristin Moore, a senior scholar at the District-based Child Trends research center, said, "One of the obvious reasons for the sharp decline in teen pregnancy among African Americans is a growing recognition that you need to finish high school, and having a child just gets in the way." These are life affirming decisions for which black teens will surely be rewarded. Imagine the future as they continue on this path: Educational achievement skyrockets. Stable black families become the norm again. Crime and poverty go down. Income and sense of well-being go up. All because black teens decided that their lives matters. Because they said yes to education and no to drugs. And because they waited until they were grown-ups to have kids. What a treat that would be ("A Statistical Portrait that Puts Black America in a Hopeful Light," *The Washington Post*, Metro pg. B01, October 31, 2007).

This passage frames teen pregnancy in individualistic terms that undercut big picture thinking about teen pregnancy and teen parenting; by this, we mean situating individual outcomes within the larger conditions and community contexts that constrain certain outcomes and advantage others. In this narrow frame, teens who do not become pregnant or do not "decide" to become parents are making life-affirming decisions, which will lead to the improvement of their entire communities. This frame implies that those who do become parents simply do not care, or have not recognized the value of education, saying no to drugs, or planning for their futures. Furthermore, the article implies that teens will not become pregnant if they "recognize" its negative impacts and are in an appropriate mind set. FrameWorks has identified this frame as the "mentalist perspective," in which people's beliefs, perceptions, feelings and desires are the primary causal mechanisms which can explain intentions and actions. This perspective is in contrast to the "materialist," in which the public can begin to think about other factors, apart from subjective inner states, that might lead to certain courses of action.[ii]

While not a predominant frame, ideas of the teenage mother as hyper-promiscuous were still in play in the media we reviewed. In fact, a lawmaker was forced to apologize for intimating that teen mothers and fathers were "sluts."

> State Rep. Larry Liston apologized yesterday for using the word "sluts" to refer to unmarried teenage parents during a lunch presentation before state House Republicans by the Colorado Health Foundation, which included a discussion of the group's 2007 health report card and teen pregnancy rates.
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> "In my parents day and age, [unwed teen parents] were sent away, they were shunned, they were called what they are," said Mr. Liston, as quoted by the Colorado Springs Gazette. "There was at least a sense of shame. There's no sense of shame today. Society condones it...I think it's wrong. They're sluts. And I don't mean just the women, the men too" ("Lawmaker apologizes for insult to unwed parents," *The Washington Times*, Nation A02, February 9, 2008).

Despite the fact that this politician was forced to apologize, his words nevertheless reflect an understanding of teen pregnancy as personal immorality. In a similar vein, other articles implied that teen pregnancy was caused by stupidity, as the following excerpt demonstrates.

> All 16-year olds make mistakes. They all need forgiveness, from others and from themselves. But forgiveness does not erase consequences, and Jamie Lynn does not get a pass because she was unbelievably stupid, even allowing for the fact that brains don't run in her family ("It's Ethics 101: Nick Needs to Nix Jamie Lynn," *Daily News*, Pg. 107 December 20, 2007).

The dominant frame used to explain why teens become parents reduces the very complex factors related to teen pregnancy to particular mindsets and the moral characters of individual teens. Whether this was based on simple views of "culture" affecting teen's decision-making processes, or moralistic judgments about the teen's sexual practices or intelligence, teen pregnancy was typically framed as an individual choice.

The Teen Mother Bubble
Previous FrameWorks research has shown that the "family bubble" is a dominant assumption in the public's ideas about parenting. This frame supports patterns of thinking that child rearing occurs in the family and things that occur outside that family are irrelevant. In media representations of teen pregnancy and teen parents, this bubble is further deflated to include only the teen mother. She becomes the only person responsible for securing her own and her child's health. For example, the following article describes how adolescent mothers "compromise" their lives as well as the safety of their children.

Adolescent mothers frequently compromise not only their health but also their future, dropping out of school and struggling financially. Their babies are at greater risk for a host of problems, including low birth weight and abuse, neglect and poor academic performance ("Teen Pregnancy, Birth Rates Plummet Across D.C. Region," *The Washington Post*, A-Section pg. A01, October 29, 2007).

Absent from this discussion are the social structures that may contribute to such outcomes, like job opportunities that pay a living wage, access to affordable healthcare, and availability of schools that will accommodate the teen mother and her child.

The "teen mother bubble" is reinforced even in articles where larger social policies that aid teen parents are included. For example, this article documented the story of Ashley White.

A mastery of words landed 13-year old Ashley White a spot on the Scripps National Spelling Bee in 1999 and a role in a documentary about the bee, Spellbound. Four years later, the teen from a working class home in Washington D.C., got pregnant. "I was so crushed," she says. She knew she had disappointed her mother, who was 17 when Ashley was born. Now 21, White attends Howard University full time while raising her daughter, Dashayla, and working 20 hours a week at a program that urges teenage girls to delay childbearing. "I tell them my life story and how hard it's been for me," says White, who has been on welfare, lived in homeless shelters and lugged a baby on buses in the snow. As a teen mom, she says, "you have to grow up fast" ("Strong messages get girls to wait on motherhood," *USA Today*, pg 2A, October 30, 2006).

The "teen mother bubble" frame is particularly strong for readers who saw the very popular documentary. Ashley's mother and extended family that attended the bee were very compelling characters. At the beginning of this article, Ashley is by herself, living in homeless shelters and commuting on buses in the snow with her child. Despite these obstacles, she is now a University student. At the very end of the article, the journalist explains some of the social support Ashley received to attend college while raising a young daughter, such as affordable childcare. Yet, this part of the story was not used as the "hook" to draw readers in up front. The journalist explained the rest of Ashley's story.

Ashley White, now a college junior studying communications and TV production, knows she's an exception.[iii] She wants to get a Bachelor's degree and attend graduate school. She's thankful for scholarships, loans and government subsidized housing and childcare.

This article demonstrates the very difficult life of a teen mother and emphasizes how teen pregnancy does not have to "ruin" a young person's life. Ashley's success is undoubtedly attributable to her own hard work, but subsidized housing and health care are social policies that were also a crucial contributor to her success and that merit inclusion in the story. In an inverse example, the "teen mother bubble" frame remains intact despite the existence of supportive social programs, such as good schools.

You are smart, talented and pretty, but you are failing ninth grade for the second time.

Your mother works two jobs and is gone most days by 6am, but you still live in grim public housing. And you're exhausted all the time because you are pregnant and expecting a baby girl the first of March. Most of the days it's easier to just skip schools all together. You are 15 years old and your name is Mariya Tarrant. And right now you are this close to dropping out. This is how it happens. It's a story about an unusual high school that seems to do everything right, from keeping everyone's shirts tucked in to making a field trip detour past the million-dollar homes of black entrepreneurs. It's about a mom working hard to extricate her family from one of the city's bleakest neighborhoods. And it's about a girl whose writing teacher says she has enough talent to "fill stadiums" but who seems intent on thwarting predictions of a promising future. It shows just how hard it is to keep some kids in school, even when that school is clean, personalized and inviting. Lately, school has been decidedly optional for Mariya ("She is a student 'superstar' on brink of dropping out; Meet Mariya, a gifted teen facing many obstacles," *USA Today*, News Pg. 1A December 4, 2007).

In this article, the school is framed as "doing everything right." However, emphasis on personal appearance and demonstrations of Black wealth may not be the educational policies that are most helpful to pregnant teens. Mariya is the problem in this narrative because she has decided that school is optional. Similar to the "family bubble," this frame then leads to assumptions that social policy should be about "fixing" teen mothers, rather than focusing on policies that might create educational environments that can effectively support young mothers and their families.

Fuzzy Causality: Poverty and Teen Pregnancy
The two frames described in the above sections promote individualistic thinking about teen pregnancy and parenting. In some instances, news articles attempted to create narratives about the larger social patterns related to teen pregnancy/teen parenting and poverty. Healthy Teen Network (HTN) has documented some of the problems related to teen pregnancy and parenting. There is a strong relationship between teen pregnancy and school drop-out rates, a greater likelihood that teen parents and their babies will remain in poverty, and teen parents and their children face increased social and psychosocial risks.

The frames that are in play in media also draw on scholarly studies and statistics that paint a very bleak future for pregnant teens and teen parents. But these media frames create assumptions about the causal direction of problems such as drop-out rates, criminal activity, health problems and drug use and teen pregnancy. The following examples show how these news articles frame social problems as beginning with and being perpetuated by teen parents and specifically teen mothers. In this frame, the pregnant teen or teen parent typically begins inevitable and self-reproducing "cycles" of social problems.

Teen Pregnancy as "Opening the Door"

Similar to the concept "gateway drug," teen pregnancy was framed as "opening the door" to other problems. For example, in this editorial, the writer reports a dramatic drop in teenage pregnancy in the District of Columbia from 102.3 to 42.1 per 1,000 births. The writer explains some of the effects of teen pregnancy.

Washingtonians are more aware today than 10 years ago that, like nothing else, teen pregnancy opens the door to neglect, abuse, poor educational attainment, future criminality and a variety of other social problems ("Teen Renaissance," *The Washington Times*, Editorials p. A20, November 1, 2007)."

There is undoubtedly a strong relationship between teen pregnancy and poverty, which needs to be emphasized in public discussions of teen parenting. However, representing teen pregnancy as opening the door to poverty again places responsibility for all social problems on the teen parent. The teen is the protagonist, the only one responsible for all the bad things that happen when she "opens the door." This frame again leads to policy solutions that are concerned with fixing the teen parent in highly moralistic terms, getting them to resist "opening the door."

Cycle of Poverty

Once the door is opened, media often discuss how an inevitable and inescapable cycle of poverty begins, as this example demonstrates.

"Multiple problems arise for teen mothers who have more than one baby," says Helen Koo, a demographer who evaluates teen pregnancy prevention programs at RTI international, a non-profit think tank in Research Triangle Park, N.C. Koo says preventing subsequent pregnancies among teens is a challenge. "Once girls start having sex, it's hard to get them to stop," she says. Planned Parenthood of Arkansas and Eastern Oklahoma in Fayetteville, Ark., sees many repeat teen pregnancies, says medical director Scott Spear. It "just dooms a lot of women to a cycle of poverty—and their children as well" ("Repeat Teen Births highest in Texas at 24%; Alarming stats bring call for Prevention," *USA Today*, Life Section Pg. 7D, October 25, 2007).

Understanding teen pregnancy as dooming a young woman and her children to a cycle of poverty discourages public thinking about any forms of social intervention that may assist these young families. A similar frame is invoked in this next article, which contained one of the few references to teen fathers in the sample of articles collected for this analysis.

Teen pregnancy has significant social and economic ramifications for Massachusetts. It is the number one reason why adolescent girls drop out of school. Young men are also impacted by teenage pregnancy—since male adolescents are significantly more likely to drop out of school when parenting a child. According to a report released by the Massachusetts Department of Education about the class of 2006, 40 percent of urban students failed to finish high school in four years, and 22 percent have dropped out entirely ("Getting Real with Sex Education," *The Boston Globe*, Op-Ed Pg. A11, December 27, 2007, written by Diane Luby, president/CEO of the Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts).

This article reports the significant likelihood that pregnant and parenting teens will drop out, but

then includes the overall drop-out rate for Massachusetts, regardless of the reasons why the student dropped out. A more nuanced analysis of overall drop-out rates and the impact of teen pregnancy might paint a more holistic picture of the various factors that are related to educational attainment.

Some articles were more direct in positing a causal relationship between teen pregnancy and poverty. For example, in an article about experimental programs for poverty reduction in New York City, the author describes attitudes towards poverty from the right and the left.

> Poverty can be a politically polarizing issue, with Democrats traditionally claiming its roots as structural (loss of manufacturing jobs, poorly funded schools, etc.) and Republicans seeing the cause as social or personal failures (teen mothers, absent fathers)
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> "Pay the Poor for Good Behavior?" *Christian Science Monitor*, Editorial Pg. 8 May 24, 2007).

This excerpt argues that holding teen mothers responsible for poverty is the conservative stance. Whether explicitly or implicitly, news media from a variety of political perspectives often frame poverty as beginning with teen parents. There are numerous studies that demonstrate the relationships between teen pregnancy and a host of social problems. Causal relationships, however, are very difficult to establish. Does poverty cause teen pregnancy or does teen pregnancy cause poverty? It is in reality a complex and co-constituting relationship. The frames present in the media, however, encourage thinking that begins with teen pregnancy and teen parenting as the source of a range of social problems.

Policy Solutions: "Working Upstream"

Framing teen pregnancy as uni-directionally causing poverty, poor health outcomes, and school drop-out rates leads to policy solutions that focus exclusively on teen pregnancy prevention as *the* solution to these problems. In the following excerpt, a policy advocate uses maps to demonstrate a relationship between teen pregnancy rates and crime. She then refers to policy solutions as "working upstream" to prevent teens from becoming pregnant and, according to the logic of the argument, reducing crime rates in those areas.

> Joyce A. Forth Clemons recently walked around the John A. Wilson Building with maps of the District and lettuce seeds. To each council member, she gave a package of seeds with a message: "During this budget season, 'Let us' put our money where mouth is: Invest in teens." The map showed where pregnant teens were, clustered in pockets where juvenile arrests also occurred. Clemons, communications director of the D.C. campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, said teen crime and delinquency go hand in hand. Now she and her four colleagues at the small non-profit can quantify it.
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> ….The maps show a nearly identical overlay of teen pregnancy and juvenile arrests. "It's either a cause or effect of children having children," she said. "Sons of teen mothers are three times likely to go to jail…If you want to do something about crime, you want to

work further upstream. ("Teen-Pregnancy Nonprofit Pushes for City Funds; Group Not Yet on List to Get Money," *The Washington Post*, Extras Pg. DZ03, April 3, 2008)"

Another advocate uses a similar frame:

> Advocates noted that despite the 14 year decline, U.S. teens are still far more likely to get pregnant and have children than those in other developed countries, and teen mothers and their children are far more likely to live in poverty. "The vast majority of teenage mothers never finish high school," said Sarah Brown of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. "Teen pregnancy and child care is directly related to poverty, both for the mother and the child. This should be a wake-up call for a renewed focus on preventing teen pregnancy" ("Teen birth rate jumps; Mirroring a recent uptick in sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancies rise 3 percent in 2006," *Newsday*, pg. A37 December 6, 2007).

Reduction of teen pregnancy rates is a critical and important goal. But the exclusive focus on pregnancy prevention precludes thinking about policies that will also support young families in these areas. Implicit and explicit policy solutions in these frames encourage patterns of thinking in which teen pregnancy prevention is the only solution. Teen parents become lost causes, doomed to a cycle of poverty and crime.

Teen Pregnancy as Disease
As the above section shows, teen pregnancy is framed both implicitly and explicitly as causing poverty and other social problems. However, when teen pregnancy is discussed as a social problem in and of itself, it is primarily framed as a health issue, often isolated from economic and social conditions. Teen pregnancy is depicted as a "health epidemic" and listed alongside sexually transmitted diseases. The following excerpts demonstrate this frame.

> Teen pregnancy is a public health epidemic in this country. This year, more than 750,000 teens will become pregnant and nearly 4 million will contact a sexually transmitted infection ("A role for TV in Sexual Health," *The Boston Globe*, Op-Ed, Pg. A-13, July 2, 2007, written by Diane Luby, president/CEO of the Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts).

> "Some sexually transmitted disease rates have been rising, including syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia, and the teen pregnancy rate is part of the same phenomenon," said Carol Hogue, an Emory University professor of maternal health. "It's not rocket science." ("Teen birth rate jumps; Mirroring a recent uptick in sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancies rise 3 percent in 2006," *Newsday pg. A37* December 6, 2007).

> While experts said it was unclear what may be causing the reversal, the new data reignited debate about abstinence-only sex-education programs, which receive about $176 million a year in federal funding. Congress is currently debating whether to increase that by $28 million. "The United States is facing a teen-pregnancy health-care crisis, and the national policy of abstinence-only programs just isn't working," said Cecile Richard, president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America. "It is time for

everyone who cares about teenagers to start focusing on the common sense solutions that will help solve this problem." ("Teen Birth Rate Rises in U.S., Reversing a 14-year decline," *The Washington Post*, A-section, Pg. A01, December 6, 2007).

The intense debate over abstinence only education understandably encourages progressive advocates to focus on teen pregnancy as a health issue. The problem with this frame—a frame that is not inclusive of other social factors—is that it narrows thinking about social policy to solutions that center exclusively on comprehensive sex education. Furthermore, teen parents are excluded from potential social policies, as is demonstrated in the following excerpt.

> After graduating from college last year, Sarah Audelo joined teach for America and was assigned to the tiny Texas border town of La Joya. There, at Jimmy Carter High School, she noticed something odd. Despite the fact that her school enrolled only ninth and tenth graders, a noticeable number of girls were mothers caring for babies or pregnant. Midway through the school year, one of her 14-year old students became pregnant. Then Audelo discovered that the school's sex education program teaches abstinence ("Abstinence-only fails to stop early pregnancies, diseases," *USA Today*, pg. 10A July 30, 2007).

Comprehensive sex education is critical for Ms. Audelo's students but policies for teen mothers in this narrative are non-existent. Teen pregnancy is undoubtedly an issue related to sexual health. Framing it as analogous to other sexually transmitted diseases that need to be prevented and treated may be counterproductive for public support of policies beyond those that could be resolved through the health system that would assist young families..

Maverick Advocates—not policy—as solutions
The final frame identified in this analysis concerns popular assumptions about what should be done to assist young families. The media often frame support for young families as best handled by caring individuals or maverick advocates. The following two excerpts from news articles demonstrate this frame.

> But at Emerson, pregnant teenagers and young mothers get lessons in science, self-worth and hope, along with a scaffolding to help them pursue careers and build a better reality. Bennett and Gene Williams, who've team taught science for 14 years, integrated their science program with health careers program in 2003…Bennett, 64 and Williams, 51; are very different: She's emotive, an adoptive mother and National Board certified teacher who first started Emerson in 1977; he's quiet and analytical, a scientist by training. "They call him the brain and they call me 'Pinky,'" Bennett quips. Sensing their complementary skills and personalities, they quickly decided to team teach when Williams joined the Emerson staff in 1993. As different as they are, they are united in their approach. ("Nursing Hope in Oklahoma; Science Teachers Encourage Teen Mothers," *USA Today*, Life pg. 4D April 5, 2007).

She said she formed the idea for her program after an early morning phone call several months ago. She was asleep she said, when one of the girls she was helping rang her just past midnight; the teen was pregnant, had no place to go, and was walking the streets of Lowell alone. Spears said she picked up the girl to take her to a nearby shelter. But there were six sex offenders at the facility, she said, so she made a few more calls—to find the teen really had no place to go. If a pregnant teen or teen mother did not live with an adult, she was not qualified for state aid; that teen probably lacked the skills to land a good-paying job, Spears said. "That's when I realized I had to do something," she said. "We were having a group of teens who were falling through the cracks because of

government bureaucracy" ("Baby steps Lowell initiative offers support and guidance to teenage parents," *The Boston Globe*, Northwest, Pg Reg 1, November 15, 2007).

The first example highlights the personal charisma and the complementary personalities of the people who created this very successful program. The second example creates a narrative in which a frustrated advocate, trying to assist a pregnant teen must buck "government bureaucracy" in order to assist young families. In both examples, it is the people, and not large scale social policy, that will ultimately better the life chances of young families.

The "maverick advocate" frame is coupled with negative discussions of large-scale policy intervention. Policy implementation is often represented in media as a last resort solution if individuals fail to keep up with their responsibilities.

Sex education, of course, is primarily the responsibility of parents, and shouldn't be confined solely to the classroom. Parents, along with religious communities, can impart messages of restraint, unselfishness, and commitment that shape relationships. Where these values are lacking in the home, then public schools can have a role, one with difficult policy choices, as this report points out. ("Honesty About Abstinence Only*,*" *Christian Science Monitor*, Editorial, pg 8 April 24, 2007).

Similarly, in an article about the decline of teenage pregnancy, the journalist asks:

What caused it? Many will first point to government programs. That would be wrong. This was and is a social movement, reflecting a change in attitudes and priorities. Government policy only has so much influence over teen behaviour. Families, neighbourhoods, houses of worship and community voices play a much bigger role, and it is there that the change begins…Ministers, priests, area leaders and ordinary mothers and fathers should be credited as the unsung heroes who make it clear to youths the very serious stakes of bringing a child into the world (Teen Renaissance, *The Washington Times*, Editorials p. A20, November 1, 2007).

Policy implementation related to assisting teen pregnancy is also portrayed as anachronistic. The following is an excerpt from the only article in the sample that mentions Title IX and its impact on mandating equal educational opportunities for pregnant and parenting teens. The title of the article refers to schools established for pregnant teens as "relics." Advocates report that such

schools have created a "separate but unequal" system of education for pregnant teens and teen mothers. The article begins with the following narrative.

> A dozen girls, some perched awkwardly with their pregnant bellies flush against the desks, were struggling over a high school geometry assignment on a recent afternoon. No pencils, no textbooks, no Pythagorean theorem. Instead, they sewed quilts. That is what passes for math in one of New York City's four high schools for pregnant girls, this one in Harlem. "It ties into geometry," said Patricia Martin, the principal. "They are cutting shapes." ("Schools for Pregnant Girls, Relic of 1960s.New York Will Close," *The New York Times*, Section A, Column 1, Metropolitan Desk, Pg. 1, May 24, 2007).

Title IX has been and continues to be an important piece of legislation that can ensure teen parents have access to education. Increasing public understanding of its potential role in supporting young families, rather than a "relic" of a different historical era is an important goal. The lack of coverage of Title IX may indicate a lack of knowledge on the part of journalists and a lack of backgrounding from advocates. Certainly this article could have been improved had it pointedly tackled the lack of resources available for this population, and assessed the educational consequences for young mothers when even these inadequate resources disappear.

Constructive Patterns of Coverage
The counterproductive patterns discussed above describe the bulk of the stories sampled in this research, and it might be natural to conclude that more constructive stories are simply not compatible with the parameters of the mainstream press. This is in fact not the case. A few stories actually did succeed in framing the issue of teen parenting in ways that are conducive to public support for young families. In this section, we show that more productive coverage of young families is possible, and that this coverage is characterized by a number of specific patterns. While a few articles are models of coverage that do much to provide the reader with a "big picture," many others simply contain productive elements, examples of which are discussed here.

Sophisticated Analysis of Scholarly Literature

The majority of the coverage of issues related to teen parenting and poverty rely on scholarly studies as well as the commentary of academics and policy advocates. However, some journalists unpacked scholarly studies for their readers and invited a number of perspectives on certain issues. In one article, the journalist dealt with erroneous assumptions in research that posited a causal relationship between adolescent sex and criminal behavior. The journalist discusses research that framed teen pregnancy as one of economic inequality, rather than simply a health care crisis.

> In another example, Arline Geronimus, a University of Michigan professor of health behavior who is now a fellow at Stanford University's Center for Advanced Study, knew that babies born to teenagers are more likely to die in their first year of life than those born to older women. "But that is an apples-to oranges comparison," she said. "In New York City, for example far more teen mothers live in Harlem than on the Upper East Side, and there are lots of differences between these groups." So Geronimus looked more

closely and got a different answer. "If you compare Harlem teen moms to Harlem older moms you find that the kids of the teen moms are less likely to die." The reasons include the fact that, unlike older women, poor teenagers are generally not juggling jobs and have older relatives to help. It can make sense for poor women to have children when they are quite young, Geronimus concludes, and any effort to change that ought to treat it as an economic problem, not a health education problem ("Study Debunks Theory on Teen Sex, Delinquency; New Analyses Challenging Many Old Assumptions," *The Washington Post*, A-Section Pg. A03, November 11, 2007).

Notwithstanding controversies associated with this scholar's work, this particular article demonstrates that when results from scholarly literature are presented in a clear manner, the public is encouraged to engage in a critical dialogue about the assumptions that underpin these studies. Furthermore, this article complicates the "teen mother bubble" frame by bringing attention to larger support systems, including extended family that may be available to support young mothers.

Teens as Active Participants

Rather than focusing on the faulty mindsets and suspect moral characters of teen parents, other articles presented teens as active and responsible people, although constrained by certain structural issues.

> Sindy Dominguez, 17, of Hyattsville already had a baby, and didn't want another—at least not until she established a home and a career. Three months after her daughter was born, she and her boyfriend went to the CVS pharmacy near their apartment to buy a large box of condoms. They found them locked in a case equipped with a button that read "push for assistance." They pushed and heard a call for help for a pharmacist, but no one came. They pushed again. And again. "My boyfriend said 'Do you want to just leave?' and I said 'Yes, let's just go,'" said Dominguez. "We went to a nearby gas station and bought a few single condoms" ("Prophylactic Measures; Many Can't Buy Condoms Now Before Paging a Store Clerk to Unlock Them," *The Washington Post*, Health F01, April 11, 2006).

The article has a number of elements that are conducive to productive thinking about teen parents. First, it presents both a teen mother and father as caring about their futures and wanting to establish a home and a career. It also shows both parents taking active control of their sexual health. The article addresses some of the structural reasons why teens may get pregnant. Here the culprit is systems failures, not individual failures. In this case, the story depicts a profound lack of access to reliable reproductive services. Finally, the New York Daily News reported a story of young girls who advocated for sex education in their schools.

> The teen activists' fight started three years ago as a community service project for the nonprofit's after-school program. At the time, the girls were middle schoolers at Public

Middle School 218 in the South Bronx, and all had teenage friends with babies. The young activists started a petition, created a MySpace page and designed brochures on sex education for teens. In November, they took their fight to City Hall. "They have a real sense of ownership about this. They're doing an amazing job," said teacher Nicole Jennings, who has guided the girls through their activism. Their hard work is paying off in a personal way. "I'm happy I participated in this project," said Katherine George, 14. "I've learned to voice my opinions and to try to change a situation that's affecting myself and other people around me" ("Give Us Sex Ed, say teens. Bronx kids lobby council to Make Subject Mandatory." *New York Daily News*, January 8, 2008)

Similar to the above story, these young girls are taking active roles in educating their peers and providing information to members of their communities. These examples demonstrate that social policies and programs that involve teens as active participants, rather than targets of "inoculation" might enjoy more successful outcomes. Furthermore, framing teenagers as active and engaged citizens might promote more productive and contextualized public understandings of teen pregnancy and parenting.

Conclusion
The causes of teen pregnancy and potential prevention strategies dominated news media concerning teen pregnancy and parenting over the last year. The frames present in these articles, such as understanding teen pregnancy as a moral failing or the "teen mother bubble," focus on adolescent girls as the cause of many social problems teen parents face if they become pregnant and as the appropriate target of social policy for pregnancy prevention. The frames that were invoked in the very few articles that covered programs that assist teen parents and their children focused on hardworking and dedicated advocates. Social policy enacted to protect the educational rights of pregnant and parenting teens was framed as ineffective and anachronistic. Overall, these frames support public thinking that solving problems related to teen pregnancy is about changing individual outlooks rather than changing larger social structures.

Newspapers are often considered our best source of authoritative journalism – the media that give us the most accurate and informative picture of the world. We might therefore expect print coverage – especially the kind provided in in-depth stories – to produce narratives that advance the public's grasp of the issue of teen parenting. An analysis of more than fifty articles suggests, however, that newspaper coverage of teen parenting is subject to the same unproductive framing tendencies that we might expect from other media[iv]. Even if print journalism is generally better than local TV news coverage, for example, newspaper articles still fall into patterns that prevent readers from understanding teen parenting in a way that will encourage large-scale social support for young families.

Section II: Frames in the Field: An Analysis of Advocates' Materials

This section of the report on Framing Policies to Support Adolescent Parents considers the

materials available from nonprofit groups, especially those with a history of advocacy on this topic. The goal was to identify and analyze the ways that advocates tend to frame the issue. Of course, many of these same frames emerge in the quotes from major advocacy groups in news coverage. But without a first-hand scan of advocates' materials, we cannot discount the possibility that these quotes have been taken out of context or do not fully represent the range of frames used by experts and service providers, as well as policy-oriented and advocacy organizations.

To direct the inquiry, the FrameWorks Institute asked Healthy Teen Network and the national advisory committee to survey their constituents to identify which organizations they find credible on issues affecting adolescent parents, as well as those organizations they find problematic on these same issues. To supplement this admittedly unscientific sample, FrameWorks used a number of search engines to locate key information providers on the topic of teen parenting, adolescent health and related issues. Overall, approximately 25 websites were investigated, with one or more documents selected from each, resulting in more than 50 documents subjected to in-depth analysis. Those documents suggested by the Healthy Teen Network are summarized in Appendix A attached to this report; additional materials were discovered using conventional search engines.

Summary of Findings

- Advocates' materials tend to focus narrowly on individuals and groups, and often leave out the shaping forces of communities and adults in those communities; in this sense, they reinforce the assignment of responsibility for teen pregnancy to the teens themselves.

- Non-experts would be hard pressed to explain how teen pregnancy happens, what contributes to it, and how it might be prevented or teen parenting enhanced as a result of exposure to the vast majority of the advocates' materials.

- This issue tends to be discussed in terms of sexual practices, teenage demography and consumerist health promotion/prevention habits and practices. As such, this perspective constitutes a relatively narrow approach to issues that are admitted by advocates to be shaped by broader societal forces like economic policy, education quality and lack of access to opportunity by marginalized communities.

- When societal repercussions are discussed, they tend to be in terms of negative interdependence and to focus on the monetary costs to the society of bearing the burden of welfare programs.

- While there are many fine passages in the materials, they do not add up to a strong and consistent counter-frame to the dominant views about teenagers, sexual promiscuity, and minority stereotypes; they are insufficiently developed to create a counter-narrative.

Themes in Advocates Materials

Finding Information about the Array of Policies Affecting Teen Parenting is not Easy
The parenting problems, practices and policies that adolescents encounter in raising their children, as well as the systems and conditions that contribute to their hardships or successes are buried in a diverse array of documents that never quite succeed in contextualizing teen pregnancy. Given the common themes of sin, punishment and individual redemption playing out in mainstream media, this complex and disorganized "story" is doomed to extinction in the public mind. We found very few materials that offer new information within the context of a "big picture" explanation of teen parenting. Much of the focus in advocates materials can be reduced to what political scientist Sanford Schram calls "facts from nowhere"[v] – long lists of statistics with no interpretive framework.[vi]

By choosing to connect teen pregnancy to the domain of Health, the wide array of policies that affect teen parents are often buried in reports on such critically relevant topics as economic development, welfare policy, poverty, workforce participation and education. It might be more productive to unify topics under the domain of Youth, which would have a further benefit of integrating these teens into the larger group, not "Otherizing" them. Some of the materials we examined did this – a brief from the Center for Assessment and Policy Development dealt with childbearing among adolescents in the context of "Improving Outcomes for Adolescents." In this respect, teen parents were not identified as a subgroup, but rather early parenting was viewed as one outcome in the risky process of adolescence.

Moreover, by emphasizing "prevention" to the exclusion of other aspects of teen parenting, the narrative appears to end when the problem either is or isn't prevented. There is no room in this story for the next chapters of parenting which seem non-germane to the main plot. Similarly, the emphasis on "planning" is entirely personal.   In reality, the fact that many negative outcomes affecting young people are entirely <u>predictable</u> because of the inability of local, state and federal governments to <u>prevent </u>deteriorating conditions in neighborhoods that expose young people to damaging stressors (like alcohol, violence and poverty), which is in itself the result of bad societal <u>planning</u> is entirely drowned out as these important concepts have been co-opted into the narrative of individualism.

But a simple "name change" will not suffice to overcome the problems associated with teen pregnancy. Naming in any superficial way – that is, in ways that do not substantively contest the dominant frames nor realign the issue with other American values – will not overcome the negative associations. Whether pregnancies are "planned" or "unplanned", "wanted" or "unwanted", continues to put the emphasis on the individual and not to explain contributing conditions. They do not change the terms of the debate in the fundamental ways required to redirect responsibility from the unique arena of the private to the public, from individuals to states and communities. Moreover, these changes do little to create a way to get beyond the galvanizing episode of the pregnancy. Thus, documents like "One in Three: The Case for Wanted and Welcomed Pregnancy" do little to redefine the issue in terms that are systemic, despite their efforts to do so.

Consider this potentially useful explanation: "Teen pregnancy is closely linked to a host of other

critical social issues – poverty and income, overall child well-being, out-of-wedlock births, responsible fatherhood, health issues, education, child welfare, and other risky behavior. There are also substantial public costs associated with adolescent childbearing. Consequently, teen pregnancy should be viewed not only as a reproductive health issue, but as one that works to improve all of these measures. Simply put, if more children in this country were born to parents who are ready and able to care for them, we would see a significant reduction in a host of social problems afflicting children in the United States, from school failure and crime to child abuse and neglect." [vii] While this paragraph sets out to explain linkages, it does not deliver on that promise. Instead, the reader is left to surmise how these things are related, what are the causal variables, and how one might effectively counter these trends.

This seeming confusion over how the problem works and what can be done to address it is predictably mirrored in media. As this report goes to press, a front page story in the Washington Post[viii] attempts to explain why teen pregnancy rates have "hit a plateau" and comes up empty: "The new report did not examine the reason for the trends, but experts said there could be many causes, including rising complacency about HIV and AIDS, changing attitudes about sex and pregnancy, shifts in ethnic diversity, and the possibility that there will always be teens who cannot be persuaded to wait." The inability of advocates to turn this list of possibilities into a series of explanatory sentences, with clear Simplifying Models and causal sequences that link systems with individual outcomes, is a costly lost opportunity. Left to their own cognitive devices, the general reader will quickly default to the master narratives identified in the media section of this report, which provide comforting reassurance that the world works in the same predictable if regrettable way it always has: the poor will always be with us and some individuals are beyond salvation.

Counting Them: Numbers Up or Down, Crisis in Any Event
The above-referenced news article also speaks to another frequent trope in advocacy materials. Whether the teen birth rate is rising or falling, and what contributes to these changes appear to be a driving force behind advocates' efforts to engage the public and to secure news coverage. Indeed, while advocates often complain that they don't get the news they want or need to drive home an issue, the news coverage of teen pregnancy rates appears to be driven as much by opportunistic media advance work as it does by happenstance. Advocates for better conditions for teen parents need to question whether the drumbeat of this coverage abets their cause or undermines it, or even more cautiously whether promoting such reports is time well spent. Without more contextualizing information, the "up or down" reporting has a Chicken Little dimension to it.

Even when teen births are falling, there is either an explicit or implicit assertion that this constitutes a crisis. Typical fact sheets and report cards we reviewed quantify the number of mothers and children, the dollars in public assistance, and the numbers of case workers – but fail to explain how the problems come about, how the services help and why these problems are "public" in nature or affect the society as a whole, as contrasted with affected individuals.

When solutions are available in these publications, they are too often at a far remove from the problem descriptors, and placed after these frames have been established. For example, a

strongly balanced publication from Rhode Island Kids Count on teen pregnancy and parenting in that state, fails to integrate solutions with problems.[ix]

Given the fact that many of these reports are either self-generated or based upon annual measures or state and national reports, HTN members would do well to develop backgrounders and other evergreen documents that, for example, use expert testimony to explain what we know about risk factors for adolescent parenting and program approaches that keep these young parents and their children connected to society. Simply equating public salience with the need to get Americans to understand "the magnitude of the problem" is unlikely to lead to further support for progressive policies. What is needed is a clear understanding of the environmental contributors that shape teen outcomes, the ways these environments could be changed to better results, and the impacts of these kinds of programs on the lives of both young parents and their children.

By tacitly agreeing to measure the birth rate, these documents buy in to the overall paradigm that high is bad, low is good and measuring the individuals as an aggregate tells us most of what we need to know about the problem. Indeed, the entire list of "Things You Might Not Know"[x] about unplanned and teen pregnancy is entirely comprised of descriptive statistics that chart the problem in multiple degrees of crisis – with no information about effective solutions, programs that have been shown to work, or even contributions of societal factors. The world of teen pregnancy is created as a place where bad things happen or not, and this act then defines the actors. Talking about this practice as it applies to welfare reform, Schramm writes: "'Self sufficiency' versus 'dependency' and other dichotomies are ratified in a contemporary welfare policy discourse that reinforces institutionalized practices that work against those who are considered 'dependent' or in some other way undeserving."[xi]

At times, merely counting the growing numbers of adolescents or minority adolescents takes on the Crisis Frame, as when the growing youth population is described as a "youth quake"[xii]

The Consumer Frame and the Public Pocketbook
There is considerable attention paid in advocacy materials to "the public costs of teen childbearing."[xiii] The argument here is that preventing teen pregnancy is in everyone's interest because of "the enormous potential for cost savings." This form of Negative Interdependence is rarely, in FrameWorks' research evidence, a catalyst for public support. While advocates may believe they are trumping the moral argument with an economic argument and therefore redefining teen parents as assets, it is more likely to be understood as a confused appeal to "invest" in something or commodify something that is still seen as a problem of individual choice or declining morals. It is simply not a persuasive argument. It is, moreover, based on faulty assumptions about the degree to which people judge public policies according to whether they advance their own self-interest.

The translation of this social issue into the "news you can use" format is another example of its commodification. As teenagers are urged to "take a quiz" that "challenges them to think carefully about what they might do 'in the moment'"[xiv], Americans are further encouraged to see this issue as a defect of character or a lifestyle choice.[xv]

Even materials that acknowledge that context is important as well as information do so only in

passing. For example, "with adequate information and adequate support, young people can make healthy and responsible decisions about having sex and using contraception."[xvi] Given the strong orientation to consumerist thinking in American society, this is likely be heard as information only. The reader, who will also assume the widespread availability of services and products, is likely to think: "If contraceptives are so available, what's the problem?"

In effect, these kinds of consumerist frames reinforce the notion of radical individualism. They pose information and education as the key differentiating variables between those who avoid teen pregnancy and those who succumb. When information and education are available and teens get pregnant anyway, the problem becomes inevitably one of character – the information "didn't take" or was resisted by faulty individuals. This "small picture" thinking undermines attention to broader systemic issues like the economy, the education system, and the availability of social supports for youth in poor communities.

Even when the social costs are made explicit – as in the National Women's Law Center's report on high school graduation rates for girls – it is about lost income, not lost opportunity that is highlighted: "the aggregate drain on our nation's economy – through foregone income tax revenue and increased public spending – is substantial."[xvii] This Negative Interdependence frame needs to be balanced with a vision of fully integrated young people who are able to become stakeholders in communities.

At Risk for Everything: Vulnerable or Disconnected Youth
Some documents do mention "the loss of this potential talent" and the fact that "solutions exist,"[xviii] but these themes are clearly tertiary to the litanies of risks and negative outcomes that adolescents face. Teen pregnancy, and teens who drop out of school because of teen pregnancy, are too often used as statistical ammunition to document these downward trends.

The Preparation Gap argument is one example of this kind of framing. "Employers report major deficiencies at every educational level," according to Ready by 21.[xix] This framing strategy attempts to catapult youth development programs on the back of scary trends in workforce preparation. Unfortunately, as FrameWorks' research on global education revealed[xx], this is more likely to turn attention to educational "basics" like reading, science and math, than it is to affective aspects of maturation and learning. In effect, the priming of "a nation at risk" serves to downgrade consideration of youth development activities and programs, not to elevate them. This is regrettable, as it drowns out the important youth development message, which can be better promoted if linked to adolescence as a developmental period; the following could more effectively have made that point had it first explained how adolescent development works, or if it had argued for more responsible and effective management of the infrastructures that support adolescent development:

> *"The current way we approach preparing young people is not working. We fragment our efforts into narrow silos, shifting our focus from one area (such as teen pregnancy) to another (such as youth violence), rotating our attention and resources without ever providing the core family and community supports young people need to succeed. We approach young people as a set of problems to solve (keep them from dropping out,*

getting pregnant, breaking the law) rather than as a set of resources to develop
(preparing them for success). We stare at academic test scores so long that we fail to
notice that young people also need to grow in social, emotional, physical, civic and
cultural ways."[xxi]

Unfortunately, this highly promising article fails to deliver on that vision, devoting the first full half of its intellectual property to the Crisis Frame. In this respect, the Crisis Frame is almost always a distraction from learning and policy promotion, as it effectively shuts down thinking.

Only rarely do we get the sense that the risk faced by young families is a risk for the community as a whole. This quote is the exception to the small picture view that focuses on individuals and subgroups: "'The cycle of poverty that accompanies many teen parents and their children impacts the entire community,' says Pat Paluzzi, President and CEO of Healthy Teen Network. 'We need to look deeper at ways to support teen parents so they can support themselves – help them to stay in school, obtain employment, and provide for their child(ren).'"[xxii] While this is a good beginning, it does not go far enough in explaining what FrameWorks has called "shared fate"[xxiii] or the notion that communities and societies cannot prosper when some are left out of the fabric of the mainstream.

Who is Responsible?
One of the major contests in framing public issues arises over public determinations of who is responsible for the situation and, by implication, the remediation. Given the dominant news frame of teen parents as irresponsible individuals who have made bad choices, the very use of the term "responsibility," without strong redirections to environment and community, is likely to reinforce these stereotypes. Put another way, advocates must work extra hard to avoid inadvertently buying into the dominant frame of individual responsibility. A report from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy makes this mistake on its cover and proceeds to invigorate it throughout the report. "One in Three: The Case for Wanted and Welcomed Pregnancy" is subtitled "Responsible Behavior. Responsible Policies."[xxiv] Questions of whether the pregnancy was "wanted" or "unwanted" essentially refocus attention on the parent as chooser or bungler, rather than on bigger picture issues like factors in that young person's environment that shaped these outcomes.

Moreover, underage pregnancy is often presented in these documents as the precipitating action that leads to a downward spiral, including rising child poverty rates, high school drop out rates and unemployment. This is a damaging causal sequence – one that is relatively uncontested by any other models of how the issues "works." Put simply, these contextualizing and interconnected forces which contribute to early pregnancy, are being attributed to an irresponsible act of choice. As long as advocates focus on the "difficult proposition…of getting people to change their behavior,"[xxv] even sympathetic voters are likely to focus on sex education, not economic and educational opportunities, as the most effective response to the problem. And this lone solution must be evaluated through the prism of the dominant narrative. Put simply, no progress is achieved toward a bigger tent on teen parenting issues.

Even in documents where there is great promise to explain how teen parenting is intimately

connected to other social issues, the potential of these documents is often undermined by narrative habits that reinforce individualism. For example, the National Women's Law Center's excellent publication that seeks to influence school practice[xxvi] inadvertently falls into the trap of setting up the problem in terms of volition: students decide to drop out, but there is something that schools can do. It would have been far better had this presentation begun with the responsibilities of schools to meet the needs of many different students, reminding us of the public role that education plays in our society. This piece moves immediately to issues of discrimination without having adequately established the value of Fairness and Opportunity against which Title IX violations should be measured. This framing then sets up a kind of Rights Frame that may be useful in explaining litigation but does little to help ordinary people understand why enforcing Title IX access in schools is consistent with American values of Opportunity for All. It attempts to do this in its subtitle header – "When Girls Don't Graduate, We All Fail" – but this notion of interdependence as a public good is never sufficiently explained to prime the reader with this familiar value. Nevertheless, it should be noted that this is one of the few documents we reviewed that clearly puts forward the role of Title IX as a focus for resolution of problems confronting teen parents; in that sense, it was refreshing.

In the midst of the deluge of negative coverage associated with the "Girls' Pact," one advocate insisted on assigning responsibility to community by broadening the lens on environmental factors affecting the lives of young people:

> "This is a city in transition going through a hard economic time," Ms. Kirk said. "There are cuts in economic programs, cuts in services, cuts in after-school programs, and they're all impacting the social climate. We really let these kids down."

> "It's the social environment these girls are coming from," she added. "They think that a baby can give them love or give them status or fill an empty space in their life, and these girls are very, very young. And I think if you talk to any teenage mother who is caring for an infant, the road is not easy." ("Spike in School's Pregnancies Leads to Report That Some Resulted from Girls' Pact," The New York Times National Edition, Pg. A15, June 20, 2008).

Unfortunately, the term "social climate" and "social environment" are likely to be read by readers as being about being social, not being connected to society. But this quote provides one of the few efforts at contextualization in the materials reviewed.

What Works to What End: Sanctions, Services and Support
While there are some fine documents that list policies and practices that experts agree would make a difference,[xxvii] these are often disconnected from any explanation of why or how these services would matter. Given the fact that teen pregnancy is often portrayed in media accounts as the origin of poverty, causal sequences that connect these policies to the nature of the challenges confronting parenting adolescents and to better outcomes are highly desirable. Unfortunately, these tend to be buried inside lengthy reports where they are used as passing examples and not used to educate the reader about the link between policies, situations, and outcomes. For example, in a report on "Improving TANF for Teens,"[xxviii] the reader is usefully reminded that "most teens do not own cars and so depend on others to get to school," thereby

explaining why providing transportation might enhance school matriculation.

In general, the notion that there are interventions that affect outcomes and that these can be identified as characteristics of successful programs is almost entirely missing from the literature we reviewed. In other projects, FrameWorks has suggested use of the term "Effectiveness Factors" to help distinguish what needs to be in place in communities and institutions to make a measurable difference. And, while there are documents in the literature that examine the characteristics of effective programs, these are written largely for practitioners, not voters. [xxix] This is a fatal oversight.

One exception that succinctly conveyed a Solutions frame was this paragraph: "Factors that create barriers to care among adolescent males include lower socioeconomic status, lack of health insurance, and lack of a regular source of care, whereas factors that promote adolescent male access to care include the availability of confidential services, gender of the provider, assistance with appointment making, and school-based health services."[xxx]

The solutions put forward in the vast majority of the advocacy materials we reviewed fit neatly into the category of "news you can use." Put simply, parents and teenagers should read this, do this, avoid this, and they will successfully navigate the dangers in the society. Typical of this trope is the following: "Despite hitting the lowest level in 30 years, one in three teen girls gets pregnant at least once before they reach age 20. Most teens say they are concerned about pregnancy, but too many teens still think: 'It won't happen to me.' The National Day Quiz helps people understand that it can happen to them." Following the prevention model, this formula assumes that the right information, duly applied by the individual, will "inoculate" them against the disease of pregnancy.

A fact sheet on the public costs of teen childbearing in Massachusetts[xxxi] puts forward some important value trade-offs: If you care about rising health costs, then invest in teen pregnancy prevention; If you want a skilled workforce…; If you want to spend more on world class universities, etc. However, there is nothing in these or other materials that connects effective programs to these larger societal goals. Without these critical connections, these assertions will seem like political posturing to most people.

Who is in the Picture
Visually, the advocacy documents we reviewed tend to use tight portraits of individual young women[xxxii], thereby reinforcing the notion that they and only they are responsible for the situation.[xxxiii] In this way, advocates' materials inadvertently reinforce the dominant media frame of individual responsibility. Moreover, many of these young women are presented in poses that could be read as seductive, not because they are inherently this, but because the additive value of the "moral deficit" frame effectively contextualizes them as such. This would be countered if they were show in group activities with other adults, in places of work or in serious study. Without these countervailing cues, these images reinforce dominant frames associated with adolescents: selfish, morally deficient, and recklessly dangerous.[xxxiv] Some documents showed young people in groups[xxxv] – but this merely reinforces the widely-held view that peers are among the destructive influences on young people. As presented, young parents occupy a world apart from the "civilizing influences" of adulthood; this further identifies them as

Other.

Adolescence as a Stage of Development
The now well-developed case for promoting youth development is almost wholly lacking in these documents.

When it does occur, it is used well after the Crisis Frame is played out, as a kind of postscript to a policy menu. Consider this important section that occurs too far down in a fact sheet to make a difference: "Even those programs that do not focus on sex education can help young people avoid early sexual activity, pregnancy and parenthood. Initiatives that give young people opportunities for growth and achievement as well as meaningful relationships with adults and older peers – community service programs, Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs and YWCAs, youth groups at religious organizations, for example – help them safely navigate adolescence." FrameWorks strongly suspects that this message of Community and Development holds great promise for redirecting the old welfare narrative of self-makingness and dependency. One is left to wonder why that case is not presented more regularly; certainly, there is good data and an array of important scholars who stand ready to support this. For example, why isn't the following included in the case for prevention and parenting programs[xxxvi]:

- At no other time have people of different ages spent large amounts of concentrated time in their day-to-day routines with their age peers.
- Few young people have even one significant, close relationship with a nonfamiliar adult before reaching adulthood themselves (Steinberg, 1991).
- In a national sample of over 250,000 adolescents, only 49% could identify 3 or more nonfamilial adults they could go to for help with an important question about their life (Benson, 1997).
- Adults, on the other hand, segregated from youth, expressed persistent negative beliefs about adolescents, amplified age differences, or denied age differences (Camino, 2001).

It is notable that there were very few scholars of adolescent development that appear in these materials. That is a mistake; as John Maynard Keynes once noted, "Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist." Without this kind of contextualizing expert commentary to redirect the conversation, teen parents remain captive to an intellectual arena dominated by economists and demographers. Indeed, despite the promise of a publication on teen childbearing entitled "Science Says,"[xxxvii] the only "science" represented is economics and demography.

The Healthy Teen Network promises "to promote the use of a science-based approach to teen pregnancy."[xxxviii] But the inclusion of scientific perspectives appears to be limited largely to reproductive health professionals. If the problem is, indeed, as these same experts suggest, one of social and economic exclusion, then other scientific disciplines are required to explain the problem and solutions.

A notable exception occurs in a Healthy Teen Network fact sheet: "Pregnant and parenting teens need opportunities to 'fail' safely and learn from their mistakes. Pregnant and parenting teens, like all youth, need opportunities to make mistakes, and then learn from their mistakes without

fear of being expelled from the program."[xxxix]

Many materials reviewed for this report focus narrowly on the science of sex education, while admitting that teen pregnancy is the result of a wide array of societal problems.[xl] This creates a frame clash between problem definition and solutions.

Child Development
Concern for children and for their well-being is too often ancillary to the overall prevention argument. That argument is more likely to be about preventing children than about preventing bad outcomes for children or, better yet, helping all children thrive. Thus, an excellent passage about what children need to develop, and how this is tied to improving conditions for their parents, is lost in the barrage of negative data: "But equally compelling have been the gains for children, given the compelling evidence that children fare better when their parents are older, have completed at least high school, and are in stable and committed relationships."[xli]

Child development is mentioned in passing in publications associated with negative costs: "The children of teen mothers tend to have decreased educational attainment and earnings, suffer higher rates of child abuse and neglect, and are more likely to be incarcerated (among adult sons of teen mothers). The daughters of teen mothers are also more likely to become teen mothers themselves. In addition to these important personal consequences, teen childbearing is also costly to federal, state, and local governments and the taxpayers who support them." This argument is problematic for a number of reasons: (1) it never explains how and why teen pregnancy has these multiplier effects on children from a developmental perspective, (2) the consequences of the developmental problems are seen as only personal, not costly to communities in terms of lack of social inclusion and skills unavailable in its citizenry; and (3) the transference of wealth argument – people who work need to support those who don't – which lies at the heart of the welfare backlash is again reinforced.

"Increasing the proportion of pregnancies that are wanted and welcomed will help ensure healthier pregnancies, healthier babies and enhanced child development," attests one report that continues to link the development outcomes of parent and child.[xlii] But, again, this is not fully explained in a way that would allow the reader to see contraception and pregnancy planning within a broader construct of healthy behavior, supported by caring adults that are fully engaged in young people's lives.

The opportunity to get in front of intergenerational poverty and to secure better futures for the children of teen parents is often expressed as a Value with too few details about how this might be achieved: "The more training and encouragement allotted to teen parents, the more promising their children's futures will be."[xliii] Here again, the work of neuroscientists and developmental psychologists, especially with respect to life-course outcomes resulting from enhanced environments,[xliv] would seem absolutely critical to advancing public understanding of these missed opportunities.

Places, not People
There is a movement among public health scholars, advocates and social epidemiologists to explain differences in outcomes according to place-based differences. In the words of Sally

Macintyre and Anne Ellaway, summing up a volume of scholarly work on this topic,[xlv] "People create places, and places create people." They go on to explain what they call "the atomistic fallacy": "In much research on socioeconomic inequalities in health, the unit of analysis is the individual or household. Individuals or households are ascribed socioeconomic characteristics based on indicators such as occupation, housing tenure, education, income and car access…and these indicators are then examined in relation to health. These measures are usually treated as though they were properties of the individuals or households. However, these indicators can be conceived of as determined as much by the place as by the person or family."[xlvi]

These scholars argue for a place-based orientation toward social problems. "It is not for nothing that real estate agents say that the three most important things about a property are 'location, location, location.'" More seriously, they report "a deprivation amplification effect, or inverse care law, that tends to apply, across the whole range of potential environmental influences on health, to neighborhoods in which more socially advantaged people are concentrated. In places where there are high rates of obesity and poorer dietary habits, there are fewer facilities for healthy physical recreation and for the purchase of healthy foods. Areas where there are high rates of unemployment may be stigmatized and suffer from 'address discrimination' such that local residents may be less likely to obtain employment, bank loans, or other forms of credit….It could be the case that as well as leading to a lack of services, such stigmatizing processes might be internalized and lead to lowered self-esteem and self-efficacy."[xlvii]

This approach to telling social stories is perhaps best exemplified in California Newsreel's multipart video series "Unnatural Causes"[xlviii] where, for example, different health and socioeconomic outcomes are explained by holding a protagonist static while shifting the neighborhood background behind him or her, arguing that where you live affects your life-long trajectory of health and success. Another example can be found among neuroscientists and developmental psychologists who explain early child development in terms of the "environment of relationships" that interacts with a child's emerging brain architecture to create either a strong of weak foundation for future health and learning.[xlix] Both examples demonstrate how a place-based approach to describing the dynamics between individuals and outcomes can help broaden the narrative to include community.

A number of advocacy publications begin to move in this direction – but they are the exception and they don't go far enough in explaining the interaction between communities and young parents. "Build the delivery capacity in communities with high youth distress," advises the Campaign for Youth in testimony before the U. S. Congress. And, in arguing against deleterious policy changes to Massachusetts TAFDC regulations, advocates cited evidence of disparate outcomes in Boston compared to Chicago or Atlanta, based on the availability of quality programs. These kinds of place-based comparisons – which should not be confused with rankings or report cards -- if supported by further explanations of how these places achieved solutions and what those solutions addressed, hold great promise for contextualizing teen parenting. These comparisons point to different metrics; they allow the quantification of programs and policies that support the healthy development and life progress of adolescents. As Healthy Teen Network explains the dominant messaging about teen parents in American society, "we fail to take into account the poor schools she may have attended all her life, the unstable housing situation experienced by her family, the living wage so unattainable by her own parents,

or the limited 'real of possibility' she has experienced."[l] There is little in the documents we reviewed to help the reader see this reality.

Some advocates do put forward the idea of environmental influences, but these are often framed in terms of "safety" and not fully developed as the environment of relationships and supports necessary to weather the innate risks of adolescent development and the additional deficits inherent in impoverished neighborhoods. The opportunity to expand on the definition of "affirming environments,"[li] as SEICUS Vice President Bill Smith put it, is one that should not be ignored. There is some considerable discussion in the materials we reviewed about the negative effects of youth stereotypes – the mentalist environment that surrounds young people; but too little attention is paid to the materialist environment that shapes their destinies. Development needs to be explained in terms of both influences. In this context, Hector Sanchez-Flores' useful explanation does only half the job:

"A primary issue that young people are trying to figure out is who they are, and this rests squarely on their shoulders. But adults can help lessen the burden and facilitate a process of growing and maturing. Environments created at places such as school are very important to talk about with young people, especially young men. Often young men are raised within a homophobic culture that says, 'I'm going to maltreat other people because of who they are.' And young men may view someone who is different as a personal threat to them and their emerging masculinity."[lii]

A fact sheet on "The Unique Needs of Young Fathers" puts forward this tantalizing but entirely undeveloped solution: "Teen males have high levels of involvement in social institutions, providing many settings to involve them in pregnancy prevention."[liii] What institutions? By demonstrating what institutions young men are connected to, and how society might build on these connections, this piece could have added some important detail to our cognitive maps of adolescence. In another fact sheet, we get more useful information: "Supportive Housing is a highly integrated system of living arrangements and professional case management services that provides pregnant or parenting teens with: a safe place to live, 24-hour access to caring adults, and connections to community resources."[liv] These are the kinds of partial stories that need to be fully developed in order to contextualize the issue of teen parenting, to make it more material and less mental, and to reassign responsibility to communities. They don't have to be longer, but they do need to be fuller.

In searching for specific linkages between teen pregnancy and the asset-based approach that characterizes the positive youth development field, we found surprisingly few in-depth connections. One is left to wonder how a better explanatory framework might be built to contextualize teen pregnancy within the youth development literature. For example, using the Search Institute's Preliminary Model of Asset-Based Community Capacity Building[lv], one is left to wonder how preventive programs and supportive teen parenting might be explained.

Conclusion

Advocates often charge, with some considerable reason, that media do not cover their issues appropriately. As we saw in the previous section of this report, media coverage does indeed pose

a problem for progressive policy-thinking on teen parenting. But advocates need to take responsibility for the enumeration of a coherent narrative that effectively sets up that policy thinking in consistent ways. The current set of materials being put forward by advocates are not sufficiently explanatory to accomplish this. Moreover, they tend to incorporate habits of storytelling and framing that work to their disadvantage. And they lodge teen pregnancy and parenting within narrow issue domains (health, sex, prevention) that do not allow ordinary Americans to see the shaping forces of poverty and policy as related to these outcomes. While there is much good work to be gleaned from these materials, they require more coherent and consistent organizing principles if they are to redirect public attention away from the shallow and pernicious dominant frames described below.

Section III: Building Better Frames

While it would be presumptuous of these researchers to put forward a specific narrative without further confirmatory research, it is clear that there are numerous ways to build better frames for advancing public understanding of teen parenting and the policies that would better support youth.

- Teen pregnancy and teen parenting need to be understood in terms of larger societal values such as building effective communities, making society prosper, etc. As it currently stands, the issue is too narrowly construed, as individual success or failure or negative interdependence.
- Teen pregnancy and teen parenting need to be reintegrated into positive youth development with "success" defined as the successful reintegration of child and parent into society. The current story ends with either the successful or unsuccessful navigation of conception in the teen years.
- The successful prevention of, or adjustment to, teen parenting needs to be redefined in terms of place-based influences that are connected to specific outcomes. Simplifying Models and Causal Sequences can help make these vivid for people.
- More adult actors need to be brought into the story – including non-familial adults who can speak to the importance of social connections and institutions in the lives of these young people.
- Young people need to be heard from and shown in successful relationships – with their children, with their mentors, and with their communities.
- Solutions need to go up front in the narrative, and be explained using causal sequences at the point of problem definition. Effective characteristics and differential outcomes need to be explained and showcased.
- Additional Messengers, especially Science-based Messengers, need to be brought in to the problem definition. As it stands, the messengers are too narrowly identified with reproductive health, and not sufficiently explanatory about public health in general or adolescent development in particular.
- Otherizing, via stories or demographics, needs to be understood as a nonproductive way to engage people in this issue.

In the following section, we attempt to incorporate some of these principles into a handful of speculative reframes that can be refined and taken into testing.

Section IV: Recommendations for Further Research

This report has provided some important information necessary to understanding perceptual hurdles Healthy Teen Network must confront in taking its work public. It has begun to unravel the dominant frames and to speculate about what is missing in the cognitive repertoire of ordinary Americans that approach these issues, with the likely consequences. It cannot, however, complete the task of recommending effective ways to meet that challenge without undertaking additional research. Reframing, or the ability of certain ways of describing an issue to redirect thinking, requires empirical testing. The FrameWorks' approach, built on Strategic Frame Analysis™, directs our attention to the potential impact of such frame elements as Values and Simplifying Models, among others.

On the topic of Values, we look to those fundamental aspects of the American narrative that have proven redirective in our past work. In general, we look to values that: support public or collective responsibility; enhance assumptions of efficacy in the delivery of solutions; and make the shaping influences of differential environments visible to the public.

In many of our more elaborate research projects, we are able to build new Simplifying Models that "plug the cognitive holes" in people's thinking. As our practice has evolved across numerous issues, however, we have found that we can sometimes repurpose these Simplifying Models to new issue areas, when similar cognitive problems warrant. We suspect this to be the case with some dimensions of teen parenting, where Simplifying Models we have created may prove useful in: (1) helping the public overcome the conclusion that the problem is intractable by considering solutions, (2) providing a more vivid model for child and adolescent development, (3) making the problem more material and less mental, (4) bringing environmental factors into the equation.

As we move into qualitative work, FrameWorks attempts to combine Values and Models into a coherent narrative, one that is often created in the guise of a news article for group discussion. We outline below the six combinations of Values and Models that we propose to test in this kind of qualitative research. As we move to a more fully developed focus group guide, each of these frame elements will be built into a news story that addresses teen parenting and puts forward various of the solutions listed below under the policy list. Finally, our focus groups will debate these various policies and we will watch what Values and Simplifying Models they use to advance their cause. We provide an outline of the reframes below and complement it with a more developed set of frames in Appendix B.

I. Value: Prevention
Prevent pregnancy through programs that work.
Model: Effectiveness Factors
Research-based approaches show promise in addressing root causes.

II. Value: Responsible Management
Promote better parenting by putting proven supports in place.
Model: Public Structures, Environment of Relationships
Adults can and should make more situations and conditions go well for adolescents so that they can make a successful transition and become good parents.

III. Value: Fairness (Places)
The successful transition from adolescence to adulthood is harder in certain places.
Model: Prosperity Grid
By plugging these places and opening up opportunity for all, we can get more successful.

IV. Value: Community (Interdependence)
Community quality of life improves when marginalized groups are brought into the system
Model: Pillars, short bench
Community deteriorates when weaknesses in the social fabric go unaddressed.

V. Value: Future/mutuality
Children are our future. By understanding child and adolescent development, we can foresee places where risk and negative outcomes predictably occur – and we can change them.
Model: Adolescent development to child development (solid foundation; brain across lifespan).
We give to them now so that they can overcome the odds and give back later.

VI. Value: Prosperity
Society prospers when families are able to form, to become stable and productive, to support children. In post-industrial America, this requires more attention to the cusp between education and work, and to supports that allow work to pay adequately. Teen parents should be able to continue through school, get jobs, support their children; it shouldn't be the end. It is a symptom of bad economic policy.
Model: Public Structures, bubble up vs. trickle down economy
When public structures are inadequate – from schools to job training to WIC and AFDC – those most vulnerable are affected first and prevented from improving their lot in life. The economy performs better for everyone when people at the bottom are able to support families and to become stakeholders in their communities.

We propose to begin the original research for this project with the design, conduct and analysis of six (6) focus groups – two (2) each in three (3) locations. Groups would be composed of community influentials (people who are news attentive, actively engaged in their communities, and likely to vote), but varied by education level.

Following this round of research, FrameWorks would take the most promising Values and Simplifying Models into quantitative testing. Working with the Political Communications Lab at Stanford University, FrameWorks would devise a series of online experiments that isolate the respective contributions of the Values and Simplifying Models on the policies enumerated below. This round of research would allow us a valuable quantitative test for the most promising reframes that emerge from the qualitative research. Using panels associated with the Political Communications Lab, we can save valuable time and money over traditional survey research

methods and still be able to demonstrate the relative effects of various frames on policies to the advocacy network.

As part of this research phase, FrameWorks collected and refined a working Policy Menu that can be used in both qualitative and quantitative testing to hold the frames accountable. This menu is attached as Appendix C to this report.

Report Conclusion

This is an extremely difficult topic to reframe. Situated as it is at the crossroads of Sex, Youth, and Race/Poverty, it seems to generate innumerable stereotypes that are deeply ingrained in American cultural thinking and politics. We have but begun to scratch the surface of these pernicious patterns of thinking. But we know enough now to begin to see how advocates and media are missing key ingredients in a larger narrative that would allow Americans to see these young people in terms of their assets, not their deficits, and to assign responsibility to public actors, not individuals alone. Drawing from years of FrameWorks' research on how Americans think about youth, race, health, child development, community and poverty, we can begin to cobble together some reasonably powerful reframes that have the potential for changing this conversation.

About the Institute

The FrameWorks Institute is a national nonprofit think tank devoted to framing public issues to bridge the divide between public and expert understandings. Its work is based on Strategic Frame Analysis™, a multi-method, multi-disciplinary approach to empirical research. FrameWorks designs, commissions, publishes, explains and applies communications research to prepare nonprofit organizations to expand their constituency base, to build public will, and to further public understanding of specific social issues – the environment, government, race, children's issues and health care, among others. Its work is unique in its breadth – from qualitative, quantitative and experimental research to applied communications toolkits, advertising campaigns, workshops, FrameChecks, Study Circles, and active list-serv discussion groups. See www.frameworksinstitute.org.

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Standard rules for protection of intellectual property and citation apply. Citation should read: Bales, S.N. and M. O'Neil, "Gaining Support for Teen Families: Mapping the Perceptual Hurdles: A FrameWorks Research Report," Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute, 2008.

[i] See FrameWorks Message Brief: Framing Race,
http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/clients/message_brief_race.pdf
[ii] See "Moving the Public Beyond Familiar Understandings of Early Childhood Development: Findings from Talkback Testing of Simplifying Models: A FrameWorks Research Report, 2003."
http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/products/cl_shonkoff_sm_report.pdf
[iii] For a detailed discussion of the potential dangers of vivid and "exceptional" examples, see Gilliam, Frank, "Vivid Examples: What they Mean and Why You Should Be Careful Using Them," FrameWorks E-zine Issue no. 33, http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/products/issue33framing.shtml. In short, Gilliam demonstrates that non-strategic use of vivid examples can potentially undermine advocates' framing goals by distorting data, narrowing the public's focus to individual stories, and activating global stereotypes.
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[v] Sanford Schram. Words of Welfare: The Poverty of Social Science and the Social Science of Poverty."Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1995:17.
[vi] See for example, the Guttmacher Institute's In Brief: Facts on American Teens' Sexual and Reproductive Health. September 2006.
[vii] "One in Three: The Case for Wanted and Welcomed Pregnancy. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. May 2007.
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[xxi] Ibid.
[xxii] Healthy Teen Network. "Healthy Teen Network Launches Comprehensive Young Families Initiative." Press Release. 2007.
[xxiii] See FrameWorks' MessageBrief on Race at www.frameworksinstitute.org for more on this topic.
[xxiv] "One in Three: The Case for Wanted and Welcomed Pregnancy." The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. May 2007.
[xxv] Ibid, p. 13.
[xxvi] National Women's Law Center. How to Keep Pregnant and Parenting Students from Dropping Out: A Primer for Schools." October 2007.
[xxvii] See Minnesota Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Prevention and Parenting. Best Practices for Working with Teen Parents and Their Children. November 2006.
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xxx Healthy Teen Network. Fast Facts: The Unique Needs of Young Fathers. Undated brochure.

xxxi "BY the Numbers: The Public Costs of Teen Childbearing in Massachusetts." The National Campaign to End Teen Pregnancy. November 2006.

xxxii See The National Day to Prevent Teen Pregnancy at www.TheNationalCampaign.org. May 7, 2008. Also Why It Matters at http: //www.thenationbalcampaign.org/why-it-matters/default.aspx.

xxxiii For more on this, see the section on Visuals in the "Framing Public Issues," FrameWorks Institute, 2002.

xxxiv For more on this, see the body of FrameWorks' research on how Americans view adolescents at www.frameworksinstitute.org.

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xxxix Healthy Teen Network. Fast Facts: Helping Teens Help Themselves: The Role of Supportive Housing for Young Families. Undated brochure.

xl See Advocates for Youth. Science and Success: Sex Education and Other Programs that Work to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, HIV & Sexually Transmitted Infections. May 2007.

xli One in Three, p. 2.

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xliv See www.developingchild.net.

xlv Ichiru Kawachi and Lisa F. Berkman (eds). Neighborhoods and Health. Oxford University Press, 2003.

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xlvii Ibid., p.34.

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xlix See the work of the Harvard Center on the Developing Child at www.developingchild.net, especially the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child's Working Paper #1: "Young Children Grow Up in An Environment of Relationships."

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lii Ibid: p.11.

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Appendix A

Where do you go online for information about adolescent parents? Who are your trusted sources for information on adolescent parents?	- Healthy Teen Network (www.healthyteennetwork.org/) - Center for Assessment and Development - CLASP (Center for Law and Social Policy) www.clasp.org - The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unwanted Pregnancy (www.teenpregnancy.org) - Minnesota Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Prevention and Parenting (www.moappp.org/outreach/adolescent_parent_network.html) - Georgia Campaign on Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (http://www.gcapp.org/resources/forAdolescentServiceProvides.htm) - Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy (http://www.massteenpregnancy.org/parenting/index.html) - U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Public Health and Science, Office of Population Affairs, Adolescent Family Life (http://www.hhs.gov/opa/familylife/index.html) - National Advocates for Pregnant Women - Planned Parenthood (http://www.plannedparenthood.org/) - Adolescent Pregnancy Childwatch (http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/teenpreg.htm) - OAPP - Florida State University Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy http://www.cpeip.fsu.edu/programArea.cfm?programAreaID=6 - College Guide for Pregnant and Parenting Students: http://www.katherinearnoldi.com - Katherine Arnoldi, author, The Amazing True Story of a Teenage Single Mom - College Mom Magazine: http://www.collegemommagazine.com
Are there organizations/websites that share information about adolescent parents in ways that you find challenging, upsetting, insulting?	- The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unwanted Pregnancy (http://teenpregnancy.org/wim/default.asp) - Heritage House 76 (http://www.hh76.com/) See curriculum called Going It Alone) - National Association of Christian Child and Family Agencies (http://www.naccfa.org/dire_level/crisis.html)

| Do you have samples of news articles that have done a disservice to teen parents? | ▪ "When Children Have Children" (http://www.aacap.org/page.ww?name=When+Children+Have+Children&section=Facts+for+Families)
 ▪ Feminists for Life |
| | ▪ Sex has consequences campaign |

Organization webpages that update lists of articles ranging from prevention to parenting

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Appendix B

A Catalogue of Potential Reframes

The following list includes frame elements – values and simplifying models – drawn from previous FrameWorks research but adapted here to the issue of teen parenting. It is provided as a draft list for illustration purposes only – to be refined in collaboration with the Healthy Teen Network.

Prevention
Lately there has been a lot of talk about social conditions in America. Some people believe that preventing problems among our nation's youth is important because we lose valuable resources that our nation needs to succeed. Communities have a role to play in making sure that young people are not marginalized before they get a chance to succeed. When young people have access to education, committed and caring adults, mental health counseling and reproductive health services, they are less likely to become very young parents and more likely to delay parenting as they finish school and secure jobs. But without those opportunities, prevention cannot succeed. By providing communities with more resources to address the problems young people confront before they become even more serious, experts believe we can reverse teen pregnancy and dropout rates, stabilize declining communities, and enhance workforce participation.

Effectiveness Factors
Lately there has been a lot of talk about the role of young people in society. In particular, people have offered various explanations of why it is important to devote societal resources to young people at every stage of their development. For example, some people believe that we can measure "effectiveness factors" that often make the difference between programs that work and those that don't work to support the healthy development of young people and see them through the process of adolescence. For youth, these would include the critically important provision of transportation services to help parenting teens access child care and higher education, or increasing the number of years that students can receive pubic financial support so that young parents can earn a degree while parenting. Without these effectiveness factors, otherwise well-designed programs will not show as many positive outcomes.

Responsible Management
Lately there has been a lot of talk about the role of young people in the society. In particular, people have offered various explanations of why it is important to devote societal resources to young people as they transition to adulthood. For example, some people believe that it is irresponsible to ignore new findings about youth development that should be incorporated into our health and education systems. According to this view, we now know that youth undergo enormous stress during adolescence, and that this is biologically-driven. We also know that positive community conditions make a great difference in whether a young person weathers this period successfully. Becoming a young parent should shut off a young person's opportunities in our society. When we put in place community strategies for increasing access to post-secondary education for parenting youth, when we ensure that early Head Start programs are available to

young parents, when we ensure access to health care services for young parents and their children, we are able to bring young people back into the community and to ensure their future contribution.

Public Structures

Experts have observed that every town, neighborhood and region in America can be evaluated in terms of its Public Structures. These include, for example, adequate housing and health care, and an education system that meets the needs of all young people, whether they may be young parents or leaving foster care or the juvenile justice system. Without these structures, however, community success is undermined. When they are well maintained, they form a kind of machinery that makes it possible for Americans to maintain their health and quality of life. When we improve the Public Structures in a place, the health of the people who live and work there improves as well. When young people are forced out of school systems or work training programs because of pregnancy, these Public Structures are not working as they should be to support youth development and community development.

Environment of Relationships

Kids experience their world as an environment of relationships, and these relationships affect virtually all aspects of their development – intellectual, social, emotional, and moral. Relationships in childhood and adolescence lay the foundation for a wide range of developmental outcomes that really matter – self-confidence and sound mental-health, motivation to learn, achievement in school and later in life, knowing the difference between right and wrong, having the capacity to sustain friendships and to be a successful parent. Relationships with neighbors, teachers, coaches, mentors and others, engage kids in the community in ways that help them to find out who they are, what they can become, and how and why they are important to other people. Adolescence is the time when young people traditionally became part of the community and begin to try on their roles as adults in training. But today many kids rarely venture beyond their schools and homes, because communities no longer offer safe and meaningful opportunities. This, in turn, leads to problems like teen pregnancy, which further eclipse opportunities for young people. To strengthen the environment of relationships that surround young people in a community, we must combine effective youth development programs with programs that bring parenting young people back into the community.

Missing Pillars

Experts feel that our society is weakened when people who would otherwise become contributing members are lost to preventable problems like health care, inadequate education or early pregnancy. This makes the society unstable, when there are too few people to hold it up. Experts call this the *Missing Pillars* problem. People who are financially secure and able to raise healthy families are like the pillars that hold up society, by paying taxes and participating in community life. Young people who may have become young parents or been in the juvenile justice system become missing pillars if they are not redirected into strong programs that can help them become contributors. These lost members of our society threaten the stability of the entire system, because they are not available to our workforce or our community life. This is why programs that reclaim these young people are so important to our society as a whole.

Fairness

Lately there has been a lot of talk about social conditions in America. Some people believe that certain communities are struggling because they are not given a fair chance to get in good shape. According to this view, we need to level the playing field so that every community's residents can access health care and family planning programs, secure education for all youth including parenting teens, and find housing suitable for young families. When some communities are denied the resources they need to build these things into their environments, they are unable to improve outcomes for their young people, start and sustain strong families, and contribute to the workforce and the community. Leveling the playing field means not only prevention but also making sure that communities have the resources to deliver additional options and opportunities to young people so they can become community stakeholders.

Prosperity Grid

Experts have observed that one of the most practical investments in American life would be to plug minority communities into the network of institutions that make prosperity possible. Thriving banks that adhere to fair lending practices and accessible colleges and universities form an infrastructure that is unavailable to many minorities. Economists call this the Prosperity Grid. According to this view, minority communities are "off the grid" or not connected to the Prosperity Grid in the same way as whites. One of the places the Prosperity Grid is broken lies in its lack of access routes for parenting teens. Young people supporting a family have few chances to remain or return to school, to secure health insurance, and to enter the workforce. We need to build better on-ramps for these young parents so they can become stable stakeholders in their communities.

Future/Mutuality

The future of society depends upon how we raise our youth. We give to young people now and they give back later on – as citizens and workers, as the people who inherit our communities and raise the next generation. Are we doing what we can to make sure that the future of our society will be in good hands? If we want our children to be fully prepared to be successful in the workforce, to be good parents, and to be committed and decent citizens who give back to society, then we need to lay a foundation for these outcomes. These skills do not magically appear overnight. They are nurtured throughout a young child's life through community service projects, quality education, sports, and a range of experiences like being part of a team or a choir. As a society we have a stake in making sure that kids have access to these experiences and encourage them to participate in them. When young people encounter obstacles – an early pregnancy, a juvenile offense, etc. – we need to make sure that programs are in place to get them over these hurdles and to reclaim their futures, because our society's future depends on our ability to do this.

Brain Architecture

Research is revolutionizing our view of the adolescent brain and providing new insight into how to make adolescence go well as a stage of development. A host of structural changes occur in the architecture of the human brain during these critical years. In fact, the last area of the brain to mature is the part capable of deciding, I'll finish my homework, take out the garbage, and then I'll email my friends. The difficulties that young people have with planning, setting priorities, and weighing consequences are literally wired into the brain temporarily. "The parts of the brain

responsible for things like sensation seeking are getting turned on in big ways around the time of puberty," says Temple University psychologist Laurence Steinberg. "But the parts for exercising judgment are still maturing throughout the course of adolescence. So you've got this time gap between when things impel kids toward taking risks early in adolescence, and when things that allow people to think before they act come online," Steinberg explains. "Those connections will happen eventually, but in the meantime, kids need guidance to make the right choices. At the same time that they are becoming independent from their parents, they need role models and other adults to guide their choices." As a society we need to pay attention to the unique needs that kids have at different ages, provide the right opportunities and structures, and set our expectations appropriately. When a young person becomes a parent, for example, communities need to have the resources to help them make strong decisions about their own and their child's future, weathering the transition from adolescence to adulthood. By providing part time vocational and technical degree programs, and access to higher education, for example, communities can make sure that young people are welcomed into communities where they can contribute fully.

Prosperity

Lately there has been a lot of talk about the role of young people in the society. In particular, people have offered various explanations of why it is important to devote societal resources to youth as they make the transition from adolescence to adulthood. For example, some people believe that youth development is important for community development and economic development. According to this view, society's ability to build on capacities that are developed in childhood and youth become the basis of a prosperous and sustainable society – from positive school achievement to work force skills to cooperative and lawful behavior. When young people encounter obstacles – an early pregnancy, a juvenile offense, etc. – we need to make sure that programs are in place to get them over these hurdles and to reclaim their futures, because our society's future depends on our ability to do this. By investing community resources in programs that enhance workforce participation and education for parenting youth, we invest in a more prosperous society.
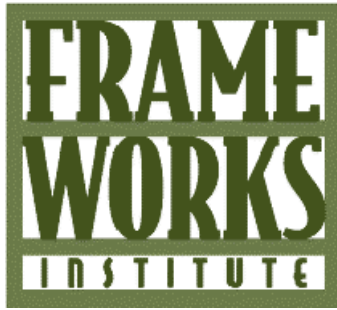
Healthy Teen Network

Pregnant and Parenting Teens: Policy Menu for Frame Testing

It should be noted that all references to parents and parenting teens are meant to include fathers as well as mothers.

1. **Case Management and Family Support Services**

   - Provide assessments for pregnant and parenting teens to identify needs and facilitate appropriate referrals

   - Provide family support services including child care, child development and transportation programs to pregnant and parenting teen students

   - Provide appropriate referrals to health, education, financial and other services

   - Improve access to parenting classes for pregnant and parenting teens

   - Include family planning, nutrition counseling, awareness of community resources, crisis or depression counseling and life skills counseling in family support program curricula

   - Ensure cultural competence in the delivery of services to pregnant and parenting teens

   - Ensure stable and affordable housing for pregnant and parenting teens

   - Build a system to meet the transitional needs of pregnant and parenting youth who are exiting the foster care system

   - Encourage mentoring programs to foster healthy linkages among adolescents and adults

2. Education

- Provide assessment and guidance for students on academic options, educational plans development, etc.

- Assure advocacy programs for pregnant and parenting teens in schools

- Expand and improve after-school programs, including academics, enrichment, arts, volunteerism, sports, etc.

- Develop traditional and non-traditional educational options including evening, weekend, summer and home-based classes for pregnant and parenting students

- Provide flexibility in class schedules for medical and social service appointments and parenting responsibilities

- Make quality, affordable pre-school education available to all three and four year olds with teen parents

- Expand the definition of education to include accredited community, business, and college programs [which may be linked to, but not based in schools, and may replace classroom instruction]

- Increase access to post-secondary education, training and/or employment services for pregnant and parenting teens

- Create access to flexible education accounts for pregnant and parenting teens

- Increase the number of years students can receive public financial support to increase post-secondary options for pregnant and parenting students

- Ensure compliance with Title IX to eliminate discrimination against an enrolled student in academic or non-academic activities because of pregnancy, birth of a child, false pregnancy, miscarriage, or termination of pregnancy

- Create a support system to help students succeed in vocational and technical degree programs, including tutorial assistance, life skills, medical and child care benefits, on-site childcare, case management, and small cash subsidies to cover living expenses

- Require schools to identify and track the reasons students drop out

- Require all schools to address chronic absenteeism

- Initiate Congressional review of Title IX

3. **Health Care**

- Provide comprehensive and timely prenatal care and reproductive health services to pregnant and parenting teens in accessible and convenient venues

- Provide developmental and health screenings to the children of pregnant and parenting teens

- Make mental health counseling available for pregnant and parenting teens

- Restrict youth exposure to alcohol, tobacco and violence, including advertising

- Improve Medicaid enrollment procedures to alleviate delays in accessing care

- Build systems of community-based care

- Ensure eligible pregnant and parenting teens maintain health insurance

4. **Child Care**

- Increase funding for school/campus childcare for Pell Grant recipients and other parenting students

- Ensure that child care center staff has the educational qualifications, knowledge, and professional commitment necessary to promote children's learning and development and to support families' diverse needs and interests.

- Require childcare professionals be trained in the field of early child development

- Ensure that health, nutrition and safety practices within all child care programs are in compliance with accreditation standards

- Ensure Early Head Start programs are available to teen parents

5. **Economic**

- Create local planning and/or advisory councils (including government, non-profit agencies, schools, businesses and parents) to assess needs, modify

existing programs and encourage development of flexible work schedules and subsidized and/or worksite child care for pregnant and parenting teens

- Ensure that funds from the Youth Opportunities Fund are allocated for workforce preparation for pregnant and parenting teens

- Ensure financial aid to enable part time and parenting teen students to enter vocational and technical degree programs

- Increase tax credits for low-income teen parents

- Ensure that the work requirement for pregnant and parenting teens receiving TANF includes the pursuit of accredited education

- Require that eligibility for TANF for parenting teens commence upon entry into a post-secondary educational program and continue for 5 years as long as the teen remains enrolled in the educational program

6. Juvenile Justice

- Ensure the availability of sexual and reproductive health care for incarcerated youth

- Expand community-based alternatives to incarceration of pregnant and parenting teens

- Establish rehabilitation accounts for adolescents leaving foster care or the juvenile justice system to allow them 18 months of funded community supports to re-enter the community

- Screen all juvenile offenders for mental health problems and provide the recommended counseling

7. Citizenship

- Encourage elected youth policy advisory boards within state and local government

- Develop programs that empower teens to address problems in their schools and communities

- Fund youth corps programs that enroll high school graduates and dropouts [for 6 to 24 month stints to work in groups performing community improvement projects, learning about civic engagement, and obtaining further education including GED certificates]

- Fund programs designed to increase long-term involvement and investment in their children by poor, young, and/or unmarried fathers