

**“It’s Just the Way Things Are:” Reframing Experiences of Young Motherhood in  
Bella Coola**

by

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## **Abstract**

This case study investigates the educational experiences of women who became parents during their adolescent years. Set in the rural community of Bella Coola, BC, this exploratory study was designed to explore the pathways participants had created or used to access educational and career opportunities, and to determine the factors women who became young mothers identify as enhancing educational engagement in their community. Using qualitative data collection methods, this study focuses on the factors that influence young mothers' decision making with regards to their family, school and work based goals and needs. A detailed account of the social and economic history of the research setting was provided in order to situate the research findings in the contextual conditions relevant to the educational experiences of young mothers in the research setting. Aspects of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice and Young's Five Faces of Oppression frame the discussion of the social and political structures that influence individual's decision making process. The findings of this study are organized according to the research questions set out according to the research questions set out in the interview schedule according to the broad themes related to the fields of education, employment and young motherhood. This research examines how the 16 women who participated in this study were making life choices that were greatly influenced by the environments within which they learned, worked and lived. Overall, research participants reported that young parenthood was a positive experience overall, even though they faced various challenges as young moms. The women interviewed in this study were motivated to attain economic and social independence for themselves, but also for the benefit of their children. The findings of this research suggest that participants viewed education as a tool that could enable an individual and community-wide shift away from poverty, economic dependence and personal dissatisfaction with current living situations.

## **Preface**

This thesis is an original intellectual product of the author, A. Krahn. This research was approved by the UBC Behavioral Research Ethics Board, Certificate number H11-00336. All participants in this study are identified by a pseudonym in order to ensure confidentiality.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	ii
Preface.....	iii
Table of Contents .....	iv
List of Figures .....	viii
Acknowledgements .....	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
1.1 Situating Myself .....	2
1.2 Purpose of this Study.....	4
1.3 Overview .....	5
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	8
2.1 Teen Pregnancy as a ‘Social Problem’ .....	8
2.2 Perceptions of Young Motherhood .....	12
2.3 Young Motherhood and Poverty .....	13
2.4 Young Motherhood and Education .....	15
2.5 Young Motherhood and Stereotypes (Labels) .....	18
2.6 Young Motherhood and the Good Choices Discourse.....	21
2.7 Young Motherhood and Structural Factors .....	24
2.8 Summary .....	32
Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework .....	33
3.1 Reading Bourdieu.....	33
3.2 Logic of Practice .....	36
3.3 Capital .....	37
3.3.1 Economic Capital .....	38
3.3.2 Cultural Capital.....	38
3.3.3 Social Capital.....	39
3.3.4 Symbolic Capital .....	41
3.4 Habitus .....	42
3.5 Field.....	43
3.6 The Five Faces of Oppression.....	46
3.7 Summary .....	51

Chapter 4: Methodology .....	52
4.1 Research Design.....	52
4.2 Research Setting.....	54
4.3 Participant Criteria .....	60
4.4 Sampling and Recruitment .....	61
4.5 Participants .....	62
4.6 Consent Process.....	63
4.7 Non-Participants.....	65
4.8 Methods of Data Collection .....	65
4.8.1 Participant Observation .....	66
4.8.2 Informal Interviews .....	67
4.8.3 Semi Structured Interviews .....	68
4.8.4 Researcher Role .....	69
4.9 Data Analysis Procedures .....	70
4.10 Ethical Considerations.....	71
4.10.1 Power Imbalance .....	71
4.10.2 Researcher as ‘Outsider’ .....	72
4.11 Representation.....	74
4.12 Confidence .....	74
4.13 Validity.....	75
4.14 ‘Limitations’: Time Constraints and Forces of Nature .....	77
4.15 Transferability .....	78
4.16 Summary .....	78
Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion Part 1, Field of Education .....	79
5.1 Making ‘Good’ Choices.....	80
5.2 Theorizing Choices .....	82
5.3 Education: Before Pregnancy.....	84
5.4 Education: After Pregnancy .....	87
5.5 Education and Family.....	90
5.6 Education and Children.....	92
5.7 Education in the Community.....	93

5.8 Support and Barriers.....	96
5.8.1 Childcare.....	96
5.8.2 School Support .....	99
5.9 Discrimination and Barriers in Schools .....	100
5.9.1 Peer Pressure, Boredom and Judgment .....	107
5.9.2 Programming and Location .....	110
5.10 Education and Employment .....	111
5.11 Cultural Education.....	114
5.12 Post-Secondary Education.....	115
5.13 Financial Issues .....	117
5.14 Relocation and Mobility Issues .....	119
5.15 Summary .....	122
Chapter 6: Findings and Discussion Part 2, Field of Employment.....	123
6.1 Field of Employment.....	123
6.2 Social Assistance .....	127
6.3 Local Economy and Habitus .....	132
6.4 Gendered Division of Labour.....	136
6.5 Summary .....	138
Chapter 7: Findings and Discussion Part 3, Field of Young Motherhood.....	140
7.1 Young Motherhood .....	140
7.2 Reaction to Pregnancy.....	143
7.3 Becoming a Mom ‘On Purpose’ .....	146
7.4 Support .....	147
7.5 Young Parenthood in the Community.....	150
7.6 Gossip and Rumors .....	153
7.7 Stereotypes .....	154
7.8 Recommendations .....	157
7.9 Summary .....	161
Chapter 8: ‘Legend of Cautions’ and Sensitive Topics .....	162
8.1 Social Issues .....	165
8.2 Poverty .....	166

8.3 Substance Use .....	168
8.4 Violence .....	173
8.5 Teenage Pregnancy and Violence .....	174
8.6 Violence Against Youth and Children .....	177
8.7 Self-Esteem .....	178
8.8 Community Level Distrust.....	181
8.9 Codes of Silence and the ‘Undiscussable’ .....	182
8.10 Moving Forward.....	189
8.11 Summary .....	194
Chapter 9: Conclusion.....	195
9.1 Summary of Research Findings .....	195
9.2 Strategizing for Change.....	202
9.3 Recommendations for Programming .....	206
9.4 Recommendations for Future Research .....	207
9.5 Concluding Thoughts .....	209
Works Cited .....	210
Appendices.....	235
Appendix A .....	235
Interview Participants .....	235
Appendix B .....	236
Participant Recruitment Poster .....	236
Appendix C .....	237
Adult Consent Form .....	237
Appendix D .....	239
Parent/Guardian Consent Form .....	239
Appendix E.....	241
Interview Guide .....	241
Appendix F.....	244
Know Your Rights With Research Handout .....	244
Appendix G .....	246
Findings Table .....	246

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Visualization of the Logic of Practice: $[(\text{habitus})(\text{capital})] + \text{field} = \text{practice}$ .....	44
Figure 2: Bourdieu's Logic of Practice with Young's 5 Faces of Oppression .....	50
Figure 3: Fields of Education, Employment and Young Motherhood.....	80



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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This case study is an investigation into the educational experiences of women who became parents during their adolescent years. Adolescent pregnancy and parenting is a multifaceted issue that has been the subject of a great deal of research, most of which focuses on the perceived limitations that young parents have placed on their educational and occupational futures. In Canada, previous national surveys have indicated that teenage pregnancy and educational disengagement are issues “of concern,” particularly in rural areas where young parenthood and school leaving rates remain higher than urban parts of the country (Bowlby, 2008; Olsen, 2005). While literature associated with teenage pregnancy and educational completion rates is available, we know comparatively little about the educational experiences of women who become parents during their teenage years, especially those living in rural and remote areas in BC.

In British Columbia, the data that is available on this topic is mostly composed of health and social service reports, along with a large body of statistical information regarding teenage fertility rates in various provincial communities. A review of these documents reveals a striking lack of attention to the voices of these women, and this absence has contributed to a lack of insight into the lives of young mothers (Murdock, 2009). Subsequently, dominant discourses surrounding the issue of young motherhood often neglect to include the larger frameworks that contextualize these women’s lives (Kelly, 2000). By separating the choices these women make regarding their education and careers from the options that are seen as being available to them, how these women might experience resilience in the context of real social constraints is often overlooked.

Examining the reasons why school completion rates remain comparatively low for young mothers in rural BC is important as a means to understand how certain variables and structures may enhance or hinder educational attainment. An investigation of the external influences on the educational decisions of women who become young mothers is required in order to fully understand and effectively respond to the complexity of the educational needs and goals of these women. In an effort to address a gap in the research regarding the educational experiences of young mothers in rural BC, this study explores the answers to the following research question: How do women who became mothers in their teens in Bella Coola describe their experiences with education and parenthood, and how do these experiences influence their decisions related to education and employment?

## **1.1 Situating Myself**

I entered the graduate program in the Department of Educational Studies at UBC to examine issues related to schooling in rural contexts in British Columbia. Having grown up in a rural BC town, I was interested in understanding the factors involved in the process of educational disengagement for various student populations in rural areas, as well as how these processes might be mitigated. Through conversations with my supervisor, this initial focus was narrowed in order to gain a better understanding of the educational experiences of a particular student demographic in one area of BC. After careful consideration, I centered my investigation around the educational experiences of young mothers in the Valley of Bella Coola, BC.

My own educational and socio-economic background has influenced my continued interest in the relationship between formal education and the lived experiences of students in these areas. I completed high school in the Thompson Nicola Valley, and following the “boom-

burst” industrial cycles in rural BC, my family experienced bursts of middle class living, and other periods of financial difficulty. At that time, university education was not considered to be the norm in our family, and I was one of the few who decided to pursue post-secondary education after high school. After my first moderately turbulent year, I left community college to pursue employment opportunities elsewhere. After some time I developed an interest in teaching, and I eventually returned to university to study education. In my work as a volunteer, teaching assistant and classroom educator, I noticed, for one reason or another, that the school system was not the best fit for students who might have come from non-conventional backgrounds. These encounters became the guiding force behind my goal to make research and scholarship more effective in helping us understand the interactions between various student populations and educational processes, as well as to my own practice as an educator in rural communities in BC.

My first visit to Bella Coola was spurred by an invitation from close friends who were teaching at the two Nuxalk schools in the community. I was immediately taken with the impressive physical landscape of the Valley. Located on an inlet in the Coast Mountain Range, this narrow valley displays dense temperate rainforest surrounded by snowcapped mountains. During my initial visit, I learned through conversations with community members of the rich social and cultural histories of the area, and I was also informed about certain difficulties the community faced in terms of low enrolment and graduation rates in schools throughout the district. I was also told that young parenthood was seen as somewhat of a social norm in the community, although there was some concern about the impact on educational attainment.

My decision to focus on the demographic of young mothers was influenced by several factors, including my visits to Bella Coola, as well as witnessing first-hand various social and

systemic difficulties several of my students and schoolmates have experienced as young parents. I have lived, studied and worked in various rural locations around the province, and in all of these places I became aware of the lack of programs and support available for young mothers, not to mention the common stereotypes and misrepresentations they faced while attempting to balance schooling with parenting responsibilities. I now find myself in a position where I have the opportunity to employ research as a tool to include the perspectives of young mothers into larger conversations regarding educational programming and practices. I recognize that a single study will not dramatically change how issues associated with young motherhood are perceived, but my hope is that this research will prove to be beneficial for instructors, service providers, educational professionals and community members to better understand and respond to this particular issue.

## **1.2 Purpose of this Study**

In this exploratory study, sixteen women share their experiences of young motherhood, and describe the role this event has played in their educational careers and occupational pathways. Our discussions were centered on the guiding objectives of this study:

- To gain a better understanding of the role young parenthood plays in women's decision making processes in Bella Coola
- To explore the pathways these women have created or used to access educational and career opportunities
- To determine the factors women who became young mothers identify as enhancing educational engagement in their community.

While the research questions were devised before the interviews took place, the themes that emerged and the recommendations are the product of the experiences and knowledge participants shared with me.

### **1.3 Overview**

The second chapter in this thesis provides the reader with an overview of the material relevant to this study, and background information about the public perception of teenage pregnancy, and how the phenomenon has been addressed over the past several decades from a moral, institutional and social perspective. Research on high school and post-secondary educational attainment in rural and Aboriginal communities in BC is also reviewed in this section. Finally, the ‘good choices’ discourse - and its implications - is introduced in a discussion about the framing of personal responsibility and motivations within the context of young motherhood.

The third chapter introduces concepts from Pierre Bourdieu’s and Iris Young’s work that will foreground information found in the findings section of this thesis. Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice, (incorporating the concepts of cultural capital, habitus, field and logic of practice) provides a theoretical framework to help us understand the processes involved in the relationship between institutional structures and individuals as agents (Andres, 1994). Young’s concept of the ‘Five Faces of Oppression’ is employed in order to observe structural and discursive inequalities that often remain hidden by more prominent discourses or public narratives.

In the fourth chapter, I outline the methods used to gather, organize and analyze the data from this research. I also provide an overview of my research design, as well as participation criteria and recruitment. In this section I also discuss some of the ethical considerations and

sampling difficulties that influenced the research design. A description of the research setting, and the role that education plays within it, is also given here.

The results of my data analysis are presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. The information in all three chapters is organized according to the research questions set out in the interview schedule, and the broad themes that emerged in my analysis of the interview transcripts. Chapter 5 presents findings relating to the field of education, Chapter 6 is devoted to the field of employment, and Chapter 7 focuses on experiences related to young motherhood, and recommendations for programming related to adolescent parenting in the community.

The theoretical works of Bourdieu and Young are reintroduced throughout the fifth, sixth and seventh chapters in order to frame the discussion of the findings. These chapters analyze the barriers and supports participants identified as being influential in their decision making processes regarding their education and career choices. Aspects of Bourdieu's Logic of Practice and Young's Theory of Oppression are used to discuss relationships between economic, education and personal situations and social support networks.

The discussion presented in Chapter 8 developed from the sensitive nature of certain themes discussed in this study, including substance misuse, domestic violence, sexual violence and abuse, and community-level violence. I have taken great care to present this data in the most respectful and non-judgmental manner possible. I must also clearly state that this study was not designed to directly analyze social issues in the research setting, but this information plays a key role in understanding the experiences of certain young mothers in Bella Coola.

Finally, in Chapter 9 I conclude this thesis with a summary of my research findings, along with a discussion for possible school and policy practices that could prove useful for young parents in rural BC communities. I also mention further directions for research in this area, and how a study such as this could be improved upon.



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In this chapter, I provide a review of the relevant literature relating to how young motherhood has been contextualized in British, American and Canadian research. The chapter begins with an examination of how teenage pregnancy came to be viewed as a social problem during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. After this, I review the national differences in perceptions of young motherhood in research from the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada. In this section I have highlighted the pervasive stereotyping of young motherhood, particularly through the lenses of poverty, educational disengagement, welfare dependency and race. Following this, I turn to the literature regarding the ‘Good Choices’ discourse as it relates to a deficit-based model of understanding teenage parenthood. This is followed by a discussion of the structural and situational factors that potentially occur in the decision making process for young women living in BC.

### **2.1 Teen Pregnancy as a ‘Social Problem’**

The perception of adolescent parenthood as an event that ensures negative consequences for a young woman’s life is fairly common, yet this discourse has only come into being within recent history. Early marriage and pre-marital pregnancy were minor public concerns during the baby boom era, and teenage pregnancy and childbearing drew little public notice (Furstenberg, 1991). Several studies (Stapleton, 2010; Addleson, 1999; Phoenix, 1991) have noted that motherhood was more common amongst women under 20 in 1957 than it was in the 1980s. Early childbearing was often not considered a problem as long as it was accompanied by marriage (Furstenberg et al., 1987). However, it was common policy to exclude pregnant or mothering students from public schools during this time, as administrators feared that the presence of such

women would prompt “undesirable” discussions about sexuality among “unmarried” girls (Kelly, 2000, p. 10).

During this time period, Stapleton (2010) notes that procreation among unmarried younger women was considered ‘deviant’ behavior, as it happened outside of conventional structures, and was often seen as offending against the ‘natural order’ of mothering or family practices. Young ‘unwed mothers’ during this era were considered to be ‘promiscuous’ and their children were labeled as illegitimate (Phoenix, 1991). Addleson (1999) contends that if a young mother came from a middle or upper class background, she might bring shame on her family as her ability to marry well would be gone, as she would no longer be considered a ‘good girl.’ In some cases the family itself might be socially shunned – a devastating event in “a world where social connections were everything” (p. 85).

In order to avoid such happenings, families attempted to avoid the deviance label and its consequences by keeping the pregnancy a private or hidden issue. Some of the steps taken included: inducing the man responsible for the pregnancy to marry the young woman; finding a sympathetic physician who might provide abortive services if they saw the young woman as an innocent who was ‘seduced’ and then ‘abandoned’ by her suitor, or sending the young woman away during her pregnancy to stay with a relative or at a maternity home, where she would have her baby and place the child for adoption, (Addelton, 1999; Phoexnix, 1991). While generally seen as a ‘private’ affair, the development of maternity homes for unwed mothers was supported publicly as a means of socializing young mothers and deterring repeated out-of-wedlock births (Liebmann, 1993).

Viewing adolescent pregnancy as a troubling social issue became common in the late 1960s, when the *Reader's Guide to Periodic Literature* mentioned that teenage parenthood ensures negative consequences for a young woman's life (Furstenberg, 1991). Arai (2009) traces the 'discovery' of teenage pregnancy as an 'epidemic' back to 1976, when the Alan Guttmacher Institute published the booklet *11 million teenagers: What can be done about the epidemic of adolescent pregnancies in the United States*. The author notes that the 'discovery' of teenage pregnancy as problematic owes much to the Guttmacher study, as it is still regularly cited as a landmark report on adolescent sexual and reproductive behavior (p. 48). Seen this way, adolescent pregnancy appears to become a dangerous entity that embodies so many moral 'evils,' wherein the terms 'teen pregnancy' or 'teen moms' are often used as if they were synonyms for a range of social problems (Phoenix, 1991; Kelly 2000).

During the 1970s, almost limitless attention was given to the 'problem' of teenage parenthood in research, policy and media literature (Phoenix, 1991). The event often became associated with a variety of health issues – for the mother and the child – along with economic dependence, improper parenting practices, and reduced educational, housing and employment opportunities (Chabot et al., 2010; Stapleton, 2010; Kelly, 2000). Arai (2009) found that young motherhood was conceived of as being bad for the teenage girl herself, for her baby, her partner, her family, her community and most importantly, for (the future of) society. It should be noted in this discussion that teenage pregnancy disproportionately impacts racial minorities and low-income communities, and such patterns play into mainstream fears about social disorder and excessive reliance on social services (Mollborn, 2011).

Concurrent with the emergence of teen pregnancy as a social problem was the general use of the term “children having children.” Kelly (2000) notes this discourse of infantilization has been used to degrade young mothers as being incapable of making their own independent decisions, and they therefore do not possess the maturity required for childrearing. The ‘kids having kids’ discourse is also a context that renders (female) adolescent sexuality as a problematic behavior that can dangerously divert young women from the generally accepted norm. Society upholds a largely negative attitude towards female adolescent sexuality, whereby girls are expected to take the initiative in protecting themselves against male “predatory behaviors and sexual pressures” (Stapleton, 2010, p. 18). As they transition into puberty, young women are pressured to be “nice girls and good women in adolescence” who refrain from sexual experiences until they are involved in a heterosexual, monogamous relationship, and ideally marriage (Tolman, 1994, p. 324). Furstenberg (1991) has noted that as the rate of non-marital adolescent births increased, so did the visibility of adolescent parenting as a social problem.

Although studies from the 1970s to present day have documented an association between adolescent parenthood and poor outcomes for teenage mothers, their offspring and society at large, Geronimus (2004) concludes that the labeling of this as a cause and effect relation was premature. Most comparisons between younger and older mothers have generally failed to take into account pre-existing factors that lead some teenagers to become parents early, and others to delay childbearing. Furstenburg (1991) notes the most influential factors between these two groups of women tend to be differences in: “social background, education, and family influences along with individual cognitive abilities and personal motivation” (p. 132).

## **2.2 Perceptions of Young Motherhood**

Bonnell (2004) and Arai (2009) have reviewed a variety of materials published on adolescent parenthood from the United States and United Kingdom, and both authors discuss the national differences in approach to the subject. Researchers from the UK often identify teenage pregnancy as problematic due to health issues, whereas American researchers often identify Welfare expenditures as the problematic issue associated with adolescent parenthood. Bonnell also notes the ‘bootstrap’ assumption behind much of the writing from the USA, where individuals should be able to support themselves if they work hard enough (2004, p. 266).

While a number of U.S. and U.K studies of teen pregnancy and parenting exist, not much has been documented with strictly Canadian content. Wong and Checkland (1999) consider this lack of scholarship to be significant as Canada has not had the same correlations among and between poverty, residence in inner cities, welfare ‘dependency’ and race that have been prevalent and much discussed in America. However, similar trends exist in Canada’s social response to adolescent pregnancy, such as the debate over entitlement to social assistance, particularly at a time when the Canadian public is unhappy about perceived failures of current social programs and are discouraged by the inertia of certain government bodies (Peters, 1999). The most commonly identified distinction in the political opinions of rural, suburban and urban Canadians lies in support for socially conservative ideologies. People living in rural and suburban areas are generally more socially conservative than their urban counterparts (Thomas, 2001). Previous studies (Chabot, et al., 2010; Culter & Jenkins, 2000) in rural and northern BC have noted that most communities have a tendency to identify with conservative political ideologies such as ‘family values,’ which entails waiting to have children after one is older and more established.

### **2.3 Young Motherhood and Poverty**

Historical trends have often blamed women for transmitting undesirable values and behaviors to following generations, particularly if they are poor (Addleson, 1999). The blaming of those who are poor and oppressed for social ‘ills’ has been acknowledged as a longtime practice that diverts attention away from the larger systems and policies that factor into the causative issues of oppression and poverty (Kelly, 2000; Bourdieu, 1992). Numerous studies (Stapleton, 2010; Arai, 2009; Salmon, 2005; Olsen, 2005; Bonell, 2004; Kelly, 2000; Phoenix, 1991) provide a wealth of examples of how young parenting can be accompanied by poverty, yet the former does not necessarily lead to the latter. Furstenberg (1991) argues that the negative consequences of early childbearing have been overestimated due to the neglect of researchers, policy makers and educators to recognize that many young parents are at a disadvantage socio-economically before they have children.

Stapleton (2010) contends that growing up in poverty is arguably the most critical determinant of adult experience, as daughters of unskilled manual workers are almost ten times more likely to become pregnant “than young women whose parents have professional qualifications” (p. 18). Considering that economic success is rarely a given for disadvantaged youth, women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds might not necessarily improve their socio-economic circumstances by simply deferring motherhood (Furstenberg, 1991; Best Start, 2007). Women who have less earning potential have less reason to defer motherhood (Phoenix, 1991), since motherhood in adolescence is seen as making less difference in determining long-term economic stability (Stapleton, 2010). Systematic differences increase the chance of poor outcomes for women of any age, so it should be noted that poverty is not confined to young parenthood (Geronimus, 2004; Phoenix, 1991).

Additionally, teenagers have very little credibility in the public imagination, as emphasis is placed on their alleged immaturity and economic dependence on others (Stapleton, 2010). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this lower status is especially noticeable in the case of young mothers through the process of infantilization. Given this, young mothers face both cultural and economic injustices that are usually intertwined and mutually reinforcing:

Cultural norms that are unfairly biased against some are institutionalized in the state and the economy; meanwhile, economic disadvantage impedes equal participation in the making of culture, in public spheres, and in everyday life. The result is often a vicious circle of cultural and economic subordination (Fraser, 1997, p. 15 in Kelly, 2000, p. 7).

Kelly (2000) contends that such viewpoints have also influenced the re- structuring of teenage motherhood as a societal cost, rather than a moral or religious issue, paving the way for legislation that attaches even more stringent criteria to school programs and subsidy payments.

For a woman in such a position, the experience of teenage childbearing itself may only moderately compound her life outcomes. For example, in her longitudinal study Mollborn (2011) has followed a group of grade eight students from 1988, and found that former adolescent parents (both mothers and fathers) reported similar results to their peers in work involvement, income levels, satisfaction with work and marriage, mental health and social support. The author found that on average, former teenage parents had ended up with two years less education than non-parenting adolescents (2011, p. 36). Having a child at an early age presents challenges, but it does not necessarily present an insurmountable barrier to achieving future goals. Such findings run counter to popular beliefs that early motherhood causes long term unemployment and economic or welfare dependence (Phoenix, 1991).

## **2.4 Young Motherhood and Education**

Much has also been made of the relationship between teenage pregnancy and school drop-out rates, with studies often indicating that early parenthood causes low educational attainment (Geronimus, 2004). However, more recent studies indicate that lower academic achievement among adolescent mothers may result from a loss of interest in school that occurs before a young woman becomes pregnant (Furstenberg et al., 1987; Phoenix, 1991; Kelly, 2000; Bonnell, 2004; Arai, 2009). Mahler's (1999) study of adolescent pregnancy in the U.S. employed analyses controlling for family variables, school characteristic and academic performance and experience, and found that young women who left school were 50% more likely to become adolescent parents than those who stayed in school. Similarly, Arai (2009) found educational disengagement for young women in the U.K. intensified at the secondary level due to bullying and poor teacher attitudes towards students.

In Canada, reports indicate that while school leaving rates have lessened overall, they still remain high for certain groups. Young women living in rural and northern areas are less likely to complete school before 19 than their urban counterparts. Within this student demographic, Aboriginal females are less likely to be attending school. According to 2001 Census data only about half (53%) of Aboriginal women aged 15 to 24 were attending school, compared with 66% of non-Aboriginal women in the same age group. Significantly, these rates are highest for Aboriginal students living in rural and remote regions (Richards, 2011), where access to educational services, facilities and opportunities are sometimes scarce (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003).



Additionally, the Women in Canada report reveals that one in five (20%) of female Aboriginal school leavers between the ages of 15-19 reported 'pregnancy or the need to care for children' as the reason for school non-completion (O'Donnell, 2006, p. 196). Previous studies have also reported that Aboriginal communities have more teenage parents than other groups in Canada (Devries, et al., 2009; O'Donnell, 2006; Olsen, 2005; Anderson, 2002). In British Columbia, teenage pregnancy rates are four times higher among Aboriginal adolescents in rural and remote communities when compared to the general population, and 18 times higher on reserves (Olsen, 2005; Ordolis, 2007).

These same reports indicate that Aboriginal women living on reserves experience the highest unemployment rates, as well as relatively high rates of low income (O'Donnell, 2006). These findings reveal complications that play prominent roles in a young mother's ability to stay in school, find employment, and secure reliable childcare in many rural and reserve communities. Yet despite these challenges and potential negative school experiences, many young Aboriginal mothers have expressed a desire to re-engage with their education given the right support opportunities (Olsen, 2005; Ordolis, 2007; Murdock, 2009). It should also be noted that Aboriginal women are more likely than their non-Aboriginal counterparts to return to school at later ages to complete their education (O'Donnell, 2006).

Educational opportunities have improved for young mothers over the past few decades, and high school graduation rates for this student demographic have increased accordingly. Early motherhood may provide an incentive for some women, who might not otherwise do so, to take up educational courses later in life in order to obtain qualifications that are likely to improve their employment prospects (Phoenix, 1991; Kelly, 2000; Murdock, 2009). However, a lag in

educational attainment still exists in comparison to women who do not have children during adolescence (Kelly, 2000). Recent studies (Stapleton, 2010; Murdock, 2009; O'Donnell, 2006,) also demonstrate that women who became mothers during adolescence continue to face barriers in attaining post-secondary schooling during adulthood.

Family responsibilities, finances and the need to find work were the reasons most cited by women who were interested in pursuing post-secondary education, or had started, but not completed a post-secondary program. For example, Stapleton's (2010) study of young motherhood revealed that restricted availability of affordable childcare, sometimes coupled with poor public transport links and inflexible program schedules, negatively affect women's decisions to continue their education. This may indicate the realities of many young mothers' lives have still not been considered by institutions and program planners.

Several Canadian studies (Murdock, 2009; Olsen, 2005; Salmon, 2005) report a lack of support programs, such as access to childcare and education, available to young mothers. Olsen (2005) questions whether these results indicate a lack of acceptance from the community or school administration in accommodating young mothers who wish to continue their schooling. Stapleton (2010) notes that it is the same disapproving public that places pressure on teenage parents to access social assistance programs for short periods of time, and to obtain work through completing their education. Kelly (2000) contends that most young mothers also know they now need a post-secondary education in order to obtain work that pays a living wage and covers the cost of child care, yet the majority of programs for young mothers are designed for entry-level employment positions, many of which pay less than welfare payments. Given this, some young mothers delay returning to school until their children are of school age themselves, despite the

negative public attention given to leaving school and/or receiving social assistance benefits (Murdock, 2009).

## **2.5 Young Motherhood and Stereotypes (Labels)**

In her ethnographic study of two B.C. high schools, Kelly (2000) observed that most adolescent mothers are haunted by the “dropout” label regardless of whether they have actually left school or not. The author found that the term was applied to women who took time away from school during or after their pregnancy, as well as to women who were out of school prior to becoming pregnant, and eventually returned to obtain their high school diploma or equivalent through alternative means. Kelly also discusses the double bind a young mother might find herself in when assessing her educational options: “If she wishes to provide full time care for her children she will be relegated to ‘dropout’ status, yet if she resolves this issue by returning to school she may be criticized for ‘abandoning’ her child in daycare while she attends classes” (2000, p. 38). In this sense a young mother is seen as being neglectful of either her mothering duties if she does not remain at home, or of her duties as a future provider for her children if she does not obtain the proper school credentials to achieve a good job. Regardless of her actions, a young mother will typically be categorized as following ‘bad’ mothering practices (Kelly, 2000; 2007).

The pervasive stereotyping of teenage mothers is a publicly sanctioned discriminatory practice that devalues adolescent parenthood in the wider culture (Stapleton, 2010; Arai, 2009; Kelly, 2007). Throughout the industrialized world, pregnant teenagers and young mothers have routinely been stigmatized using a deficit model. Longhurst (2008) examines the practice of viewing young motherhood through the lens of ‘lacking,’ wherein pregnant teenagers are seen to lack one or more of the following: “maturity, wisdom, financial resources, self-control, a

husband, and an ‘instinct’ to mother since she herself is still considered to be a child” (p.125). As such, young mothers do not fit the ideal of ‘good’ mothering practices; a category defined by the narrow criteria of mainstream values of mothering that are typically associated with middle or upper class culture (Faustenberg, 1991; Kelly, 2000; Arai, 2009). In this context, the notion of “good mothering” is perpetuated in many social customs, and the lived experiences of young mothers, along with the conditions in which they attempt to raise their children, are not considered (Phoenix, 1991).

At times, negative discourses of adolescent parenthood are paired with describing teenage mothers as ‘beating the odds,’ where a young mother has overcome her blighted past to become a ‘good’ mother rather than ‘bad’ as expected (Arai, 2009). These reports celebrate the ‘right’ kind of teenage mother: she does not use drugs or alcohol, she has a job, she is trying to maintain a stable relationship with her child’s father, she is finishing school, she is an involved and attentive parent, she is postponing having a second child until she has completed her school and career training, and she is poised, articulate and pretty (Chabot, et al., 2010). While these reports may attempt to interrogate stereotypes – ostensibly, as a means to de-stigmatize young mothers – this approach to teenage childbearing is undermined by its own taken-for-granted assumptions about motherhood, along with an avoidance of discussing the potential impact of various stereotypes surrounding teen parenting (Arai, 2009; Longhurst, 2008; Chabot, et al., 2010).

In Canada, the phenomenon of teenage pregnancy remains a contentious issue in many public discourses. Previous studies (Maticka-Tundale, 2008; Best Start, 2007; Peters, 1999) have indicated that while Canadian attitudes have become more accepting towards adolescent sexuality (especially in comparison to the United States), teenage parenthood is still viewed with

social stigma and lack of social approval in the communities under study (Murdock, 2009; Olsen, 2005; Kelly, 2000). Peters (1999) notes that there is decreased stigmatization of having children outside of marriage, yet beliefs that young mothers should not receive social assistance – or conversely, women on social assistance have no right to have children – are still firmly entrenched in Canadian public opinion.

Recipients of welfare payments or social assistance programs are typically regarded as the ‘undeserving poor’ who are negatively stereotyped as being ‘lazy’ in their work ethic and ‘irresponsible’ in their life choices (Longhurst, 2008). Young mothers are often stigmatized as “welfare moms” (Kelly, 2000) or “welfare queens” (Mollborn, 2011) who continue to have children in adolescence and afterwards in order to collect government benefits. Stapleton (2010) discusses how these women are often considered to be “inadequate mothers of unruly children” who, in turn, are destined to repeat the “cycle of dependence” (p. 10).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the general public’s attitudes about teen childbearing are often divided along racial lines, with persistent radicalized stereotypes of black and Latina ‘welfare moms’ in the United States (Mollborn, 2011), and of young Aboriginal mothers in Canada (Olsen, 2005, Murdock, 2009). Despite the common perception that racist attitudes are declining in Canada, recent reports have indicated that Aboriginal people continue to face the most distorted stereotypes of any non-white group in Canada (Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study, 2011; Editorial, 2011). Olsen (2005) contends that persistent “decades old” discriminatory attitudes towards young Aboriginal mothers are still actively affecting young women (p. 30). According to Barman (1997), Misperceptions of Aboriginal women are rampant because they are help to the patriarchal model (p. 239). Chabot and colleagues (2010) pointedly state how gender

biases about young women's sexuality and ageism regarding teenagers' capabilities as parents, combined with a history of oppression and racism, increase the potential for negative perception and stereotyping of Aboriginal teenage parenthood (p. 208)

Most concerning is the fact that young Aboriginal women who become mothers are often over represented in pathologizing terms, and under-represented in structural analyses (Kelly, 2000; Salmon, 2005). Decades of research, policy responses and public discussions about early childbearing among young Aboriginal mothers have been primarily focused on the "problems of dependency," and the costs and consequences this 'dependency' poses on the government and public at large (Salmon, 2005, p. 28). Kelly (2000) contends that one does not choose to be born female or Native, therefore these are now considered to be "illegitimate grounds for discrediting a person" (p. 62). She furthers her argument by noting that in a society that is thought to be meritocratic, it is generally thought people can be faulted for being poor and/or receiving social assistance, as they are seen as choosing to not take advantage of the opportunities that are available to them (Kelly, 2000). As such, the accepted stereotypes associated with the behavior of "welfare mothers" are predicated on the belief in the incompatibility of dependency and "good" decision making (Solinger, 1998).

## **2.6 Young Motherhood and the Good Choices Discourse**

Kelly (2000) contends that the most persistent, widely accepted negative stereotype associated with young mothers is that they are people who make bad choices, especially if they are seen as breaking with the commonly held societal and moral values. The author notes the unstated assumption in this discourse is that most adolescent mothers are personally responsible for their choice to live the "teen mom lifestyle" - "the term lifestyle implying something freely chosen"

(p. 48). This “good choices” discourse omits the material and cultural conditions that influence the decision making process (Kelly, 2000) in favor of upholding social and moral values of the traditional family structure.

The good choices discourse can be aligned with the “good-girl” life plan (Addleson, 1999), which assumes young women will make the ‘good’ or ‘right’ choice to follow the ‘normal’ sequence of events to the passage of adult status. This strategy commonly entails completing post-secondary education and establishing a career before choosing to “settle down” with a partner (husband) to begin a family. Young women who deviate from this plan are often judged as being irresponsible for making the ‘mistake’ of becoming pregnant at an early age (Chabot et al., 2010).

The good choices discourse provides a seemingly “non-moralistic language” to those who teach and train students to make “rational, informed decisions” (Kelly, 2000, p. 48). But the moralistic language utilized in the discourses about the importance of avoiding teenage pregnancy often reflect purported middle class values (Chabot et al., 2010). This discourse begins with the assumption that all women share a common vision of how their lives should unfold, and that this is the path that all young women desire to follow. Policies and programs that reflect predominantly white, middle class norms often neglect to acknowledge alternative life courses, and in turn neglect to support young women who fall outside the mainstream perception of a ‘proper’ life-trajectory (Best Start, 2007).

Previous studies (Furstenberg et al., 1991; Addleson, 1999; Arai, 2009) have demonstrated there are various ways of succeeding in future-oriented possibilities, and the pathways to a ‘successful life’ are surprisingly diverse. Although young mothers may be at a

disadvantage at first in comparison to their non-childbearing peers, huge variability exists in a young mother's life course. Addleson (1999) contends that while young mothers are not seen as following the set path or 'route to responsibility,' they do take on 'adulthood' responsibilities at an earlier age than was expected of them. She also notes the question of how and when people are expected to grow up in North American society. A firmly held notion in general society is that responsibility is supposed to follow a certain pattern, yet if the preconditions for 'adult' responsibilities are not available, a young person might find other pathways to adulthood status (Addleson, 1999). In some cases, having children during adolescence is a means for a young woman to access housing and social services that she might not have had the opportunity to otherwise (Stapleton, 2010; Arai, 2009, Murdock, 2009).

Kelly (2000) has noted that the 'good choices' discourse has been used by some in an attempt to avoid further stigmatizing teenage mothers as persons. The stigma is focused instead on the practices of young mothers, such as the choice to keep and raise their children (p. 47). However, it is doubtful this distinction between people and their behavior can be maintained, since the stigmatization of teenage childbearing would also be transferred to the children of young mothers (Kelly, 2000). Additionally, rather than reduce stigma, the individuals who tend to be condemned by the 'good choices' discourse for having made 'bad choices' are often female and poor, a member of a racialized 'caste' or both (Kelly, 2000, p. 62). As such, Kelly (2000) notes this discourse serves to make invisible the social and structural barriers that can limit already marginalized group's abilities to access opportunities to begin with (p. 63). Debating the relevance of early motherhood solely from the perspective of the "good choice" discourse is simplistic, and neglects to take into account the lived realities of many young women.



Young mothers face decisions bounded both by their external circumstances, as well as their “internalized filters on the world” that make some possibilities inconceivable, others improbable and a limited range acceptable (Kelly, 2007, p. 10). Like all individuals, women who become young mothers weigh their choices within the contexts of their cultural, political, economic and geographical circumstances. Devries and colleagues (2009) outline different levels of influence on the decision making process that include structural factors related to the broader social environment; interpersonal factors from the community; school and family; individual factors of life history and behaviors; and situational factors that occur at the time of a decision (p. 855). An appreciation of the circumstances in which an individual makes choices allows for an understanding of the complexity of this process.

## **2.7 Young Motherhood and Structural Factors**

As a structural factor, geographic location plays an immediate role in an individual’s ability to access services. Rural youth in Canada remain poorly served by sexual and reproductive health services, and access to abortion remains limited or non-existent in some provinces and all territories (Maticka-Tyndale, 2008). Government policies involving cuts to essential services adds another constraint to the choices available to young women living in these areas. In BC, cuts have been made to family aid, poverty aid and legal aid, as well as to midwifery programs, maternity wards and clinics offering birth control and abortion services in over 20 rural communities (SCYBC, 2005). Bella Coola is one of these communities, despite it having one of the highest teenage childbearing rates in the province (BC Stats, 2008).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, rural locations tend to be socially conservative, with rural residents giving less support to issues surrounding premarital sex and abortion rights

(Culter & Jenkins 2000). A young woman's reproductive choices might also be limited by a parent or guardian's belief that contraception might encourage promiscuity. Privacy is another privilege that is not necessarily enjoyed in a smaller community, and many young people may feel embarrassed or ashamed to access birth control services from a person they might know, or who will likely know other family members (Chabot et al., 2010; hooks, 1999). In this environment, lack of access to services is often coupled with poor sex-education programming due to the absence of a province-wide sexual-health strategy and/or comprehensive sexuality and reproductive health education programs (Yee, 2009).

When sexual health classes are available in rural areas, they tend to be offered intermittently, meaning students who are absent that day, or who leave high school before completion, do not have many opportunities to receive school based sex education (Chabot et al., 2010). Previous reports on young parenthood and youth sexual health (Anderson, 2002; Olsen, 2005; Best Start, 2007; Murdock, 2009; Devries et al., 2009) indicate that sex education is not something that young women generally experience at home either. In her study of young Aboriginal motherhood, Murdock (2009) reported that many of her participants found conversations regarding sex and pregnancy as awkward and uncomfortable, and as a result, they tended to avoid discussing sensitive topics. Other women indicated they anticipated negative reactions from their parents or guardians when asking for information about sex or contraception (Murdock, 2009).

In these same studies, discussions surrounding the topic of abortion revealed powerful interpersonal factors that influenced women's feelings about the issue. Opposition to abortion from the young mothers themselves, and from their mothers, grandmothers or other family

members, strongly influenced a woman's choice on what to do about her pregnancy (Murdock, 2009). Furstenberg (1991) argues that in a society that promotes family, many women will decide to keep a child, regardless of the perceived situation that child is born into:

In an era when contraception is widely available and abortion is still legal, many would say that it hardly seems credible that parenthood can be unplanned, much less wanted. But would the rationalists also contend that teenagers who contract STD's or AIDS are choosing to do so, given that knowledge about risks is high and information about prevention is widespread? (p. 134).

Chabot and colleagues (2010) found that nearly every young mother who was interviewed characterized having an abortion as the 'wrong' choice for themselves, as well as for 'dealing with' the consequences of having sex in general (p. 210).

Often, young Aboriginal mothers identified with pro-life beliefs, and felt that this belief was widely shared in their communities, particularly on reserves (Kelly, 2000; Anderson, 2002, Olsen, 2005). Murdock (2009) reports that a few participants considered abortion as an option, but were either too far along in their pregnancy, or had decided against an abortion after some consideration. However, several participants indicated they would want their own daughter to consider abortion if she became pregnant during her teenage years, due to the challenges she would likely face as a young mother.

While these studies indicate the majority of participants did not believe in abortion, they also relay the reluctance young women had to disclosing their pregnancies out of fear of what repercussions they might face from their families, partners and communities. The reported reactions from the women's family members varied from immediate disappointment and anger to acceptance and support, and in some cases excitement (Stapleton, 2010; Murdock, 2009; Olsen, 2005). Arai (2009) observed that young mothers will typically receive less judgment and more

support from their families when young parenthood is more common in a family history. The author also noted that teenage pregnancy is correlated with family backgrounds in which young motherhood was common: “It is often observed that the daughter of a teenage mother is one and a half times more likely to become a young mother than the daughter of an older mother” (p. 30). In communities where early marriage and/or motherhood is the norm, adolescent pregnancy is not usually viewed as a problem in need of prevention, and families are usually supportive of teenage mothers (Geronimus, 2004; Longhurst, 2008; Best Start, 2007).

Anderson’s (2002) research on Aboriginal youth sexual health has revealed that teenage pregnancy is viewed as a social norm in many Aboriginal communities, particularly in those located in northern or rural areas. When asked to share their view of the phenomenon, many adult participants commented on how attitudes towards teen pregnancy have changed in the communities, and for the better: “Non-judgmental attitudes can be seen as beneficial and positive for the youth, in that there is little shame in pregnancy” (Anderson, 2002, p. 42). The author also notes that pregnancy in adolescent populations may not be entirely acceptable to many parents, but if these parents were teen parents themselves, it may seem “normal” to their children to not delay pregnancy until they are older (2002, p. 43).

In her study with young Aboriginal mothers on Vancouver Island, Olsen (2005) reports that whether her participants came from a supportive family or not, they had believed they would successfully complete high school, and perhaps go on to further their studies, before having children. Some of these young women were the first in their families to finish high school or

pursue post-secondary education, and expressed feeling guilt over delaying their future education and career plans (p. 87). The author contends that while family responses may have involved initial disappointment in the change of a young woman's life course, some if not all family members responded with acceptance, along with a hope that a teenage mother would eventually return to school and successfully complete her education (p. 88). Big Eagle and Guillmond (2009) contend early motherhood may increase the vulnerability of an Aboriginal woman who may already be disadvantaged socio-economically by reason of her cultural background and gender. The authors note that while teenage motherhood is an important issue for First Nations communities in Canada, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples report is surprisingly silent on the topic (p. 54).

Previous studies (Rains, 1995; Kelly, 2000, Murdock, 2009) have raised questions regarding the nature of secondary school systems and the lack of programming that is consistent with having a family. Rains (1995) observed a variety of disjunctions between schooling assumptions and the family-starting process in communities where beginning a family early (late adolescence) is considered a norm. For example, young parents must leave their community and family support base if they are going to pursue post-secondary education. Additionally, school non-completion is not considered to be deviant in communities where it is the usual course of action, or within families that do not stress formal schooling (Berger et al., 2006; Richards, 2011). Studies have noted such attitudes towards schooling are commonly held in Northern, rural and reserve communities (Schissel & Witherspoon, 2003; Bowlby, 2005; Richards, 2011).

Ball (2004) notes that perhaps most conspicuously, Aboriginal people in rural and remote areas, particularly those on reserves, have not yet benefited from main-stream (especially

postsecondary) education, as it focuses on education and practices that tend to be appropriate in urban white communities. As such, the complex history that exists between Aboriginal populations and the formal education system in B.C. must be considered when examining retention and completion rates for Aboriginal students in schools (Barman, 2003). Although the long era of enforced residential schooling for Aboriginal students is now over, its negative impacts on “self-concept, social cohesion, and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and culture” still remain (Ball, 2004, p.458). This history is still very much a lived reality for Aboriginal communities, and as such, many Aboriginal parents continue to have challenging relationships with formal educational institutions (Battiste, 2000).

Furthermore, studies of education in rural Canada have demonstrated that many adolescents view formal education as a means of accessing a wider range of economic opportunities, yet such opportunities are often dominated by educational policies of larger urban areas that overshadow the needs of rural and remote communities: “Educational institutions operating in regions which are less economically vibrant, tend to educate young people for employment opportunities which exist elsewhere” (Corbett, 2007 p. 7). This system tends to be based upon standardized outcomes rather than on programming that might make an immediate meaningful contribution to the community.

This model of schooling involves a variety of implications for rural areas in BC, as these communities are experiencing a long-lasting transition period. Historically these regions have been vulnerable to the boom-bust cycles of a resource based economy, and recent economic downturns in the forestry industry have resulted in a dramatic increase in the need for social assistance (Markey et al., 2005). Further social and economic changes have occurred due to the

provincial government's decision to re-structure healthcare, social service and education systems (Chabot et al., 2010; LNTG, 2010; Wild, 2005). The availability of training programs, education and learning opportunities are seen as being vital to capacity building in rural communities. Yet there is concern about possibilities in the future local labor market, given that educated residents may leave their communities for school or work opportunities and not return if local jobs are not available, or wage rates are not competitive (Markay, et al., 2005). These processes are of concern to rural residents, as they lead to the loss of community and extended family ties that are highly valued in these communities (Peters, 1999).

For a young women living in rural BC, the inequalities in the availability of safe, affordable and reliable birth control and abortion services, coupled with the uneven distribution of educational services and employment opportunities may increase her perception of very few positive future prospects apart from childbearing (Salmon, 2005 p. 30). Aboriginal youth living in these areas also have additional structural and historical contexts to contend with, as the social reorganization resulting from colonization, as well as the trauma suffered by residential and boarding school survivors, have profoundly influenced indigenous communities (Devries, et al., 2009). First Nations parents must cope with the legacy of colonialism, institutional racism, and poverty (Kelly, 2000).

Guimond and Robitaille (2008) have noted that from the perspective of a largely urban, non-Aboriginal society, there is a strong temptation to interpret the choice of Aboriginal teenage girls to have a child as a poor one. Yet the authors question whether one can reasonably speak of bad choices when considering those living in reserve communities that are virtually cut off from the rest of Canadian society, where the reality is that education, employment and housing can be

deficient, and sometimes outright lacking (2008, p. 51). Debating the issue of early motherhood without taking into consideration the lived realities of young Aboriginal women is overly simplistic, and revealing of an ethnocentric vision of “good” decision making practices (Guimond & Robitaille, 2008; Murdock, 2009; Kelly, 2000).

Kershaw (2004) proposes that the language of choice facilitates the articulation of neoliberal principles that convey political neutrality, and individualizes responsibility for social inequalities. The author notes that within this framework, government and public figures who disapprove of adolescent pregnancy are also complicit in restricting both reproductive and social services in rural communities (2004). Furthermore, rather than support programs and policies that support health, education and economic development through community infrastructure, these figures bolster the perception that young mothers are irresponsible women who have made poor choices (Kershaw, 2004). Kelly (2000) contends that this discourse fails to acknowledge the complexity of the human decision making process, and it is precisely the complexity of these women’s lives that needs to be examined in order to include the factors influencing their choices (p. 50).



## **2.8 Summary**

This study is an attempt to address the gap in research regarding the lived experiences of young mothers in rural BC. In doing so, I hope to contribute to a growing field of literature that moves away from deficit based understandings of teenage parenthood towards a more open and thoughtful discussion of the structural and situational factors young mothers in rural BC are living within. I realize this study is small in scope, but I hope it has potential for dispelling stereotypes about teenage parenthood, particularly for the community under study.

### **Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework**

The background knowledge provided by the literature review, along with previous visits to the study site, allowed me to develop some working hypotheses about possible situations I might encounter in the research setting. For example, previous studies indicate that young mothers often face various structural and situational challenges, and visits to the research site revealed young parenthood was often viewed through the lens of negative stereotypes. This information led me to consider concepts that could help make sense of this study's findings. In reading some of the works of Bourdieu and Young, I noticed both theorists analyze key processes involved in the production and perpetuation of social orders that influence individual and group behaviors, as well as dominant discourses.

This chapter provides an overview to two particular frameworks that provide a sensitizing frame for this research, and the means for analyzing my data. In the first section, I give an introduction of Bourdieu's Logic of Practice, where I highlight his concepts of capital (economic, cultural, social and symbolic), habitus, and field. The second part of this chapter discusses Iris Young's framework of the Five Faces of Oppression, and highlights Young's delineation of the aspects of oppression, and how she distinguishes them from the concept of domination.

#### **3.1 Reading Bourdieu**

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has argued that human beings act and make decisions within particular contexts created by our past actions and decisions, and in social worlds that are already shaped by our broader racial, gender and class relations (Kelly, 2007). Bourdieu has often been read as a determinist whose research demonstrates the destiny of actors prescribed by

“asymmetrical, vertical ties of power relations in socially determined acts” (Moi, 1999, p.269). However, Kelly (2007) contends that Bourdieu’s work has been taken up by a number of critical feminists as he does not “reduce the self to the effects of discourse” (p. 9). Dillabough (2004) asserts that Bourdieu has proved to be a particularly astute guide in helping to identify the “complex social processes implicated in intersecting axes of inequality (class, race and gender) in order to challenge liberal and essentializing theories of (gender) identity” (p. 491).

In *The Logic of Practice* (1990), Bourdieu expressed his frustration with the split in academia when it came to the study of human practice: “Of all the oppositions that artificially divide social science, the most fundamental, and most ruinous, is the one that is setup between subjectivism and objectivism” (p. 25). According to Webb and colleagues (2002), Bourdieu accepts that subjectivism is useful in that it draws attention to how agents negotiate various attempts by governments, bureaucracies, and institutions at being told what to do, how to behave, and how to think. The authors also contend that Bourdieu opposed a subjectivist approach because it fails to take into account the close connections between the objective structures of a culture (which include the values, ideas, desires, and narratives produced by cultural institutions such as the family, religious groups, education systems and government bodies), and the specific tendencies, activities, values and dispositions of individuals (p. 33).

McCall (1992) puts forward a double reading of Bourdieu’s work; in the ‘first’ reading determinism can be seen where “occupational and educational status act as primary determinants of social class position;” and the ‘second’ reading of Bourdieu “exposes how real principles of selection and exclusion are hidden behind nominal constructions of categories such as occupation and educational qualification” (pp.839- 842). Hughes and Blaxter (2007) insist that

McCall is not suggesting that the first reading is wrong and second reading is correct, but rather that she is arguing that “both readings confirm much feminist knowledge about the gendered relations of social domination” (p. 109). The authors believe that the interrelation between positions (first reading) and dispositions (second reading) offers possibilities for understanding social change (2007, p. 109). Furthermore, Hughes and Blaxter contend that Bourdieu’s work also illustrates the lack of concern with conflict and oppression found in dominant positivistic theories: “Bourdieu’s theoretical viewpoint is explicit. Like positivist social researchers, Bourdieu believes in social facts. Unlike positivists, for Bourdieu these facts are not neutral. They are brutal and concerned with inequality between social actors” (2007, p. 108).

For Bourdieu, theoretical notions are not simply filters that process social practices, but are instead technologies that are transformed and rethought as they are applied. Bourdieu (1992) saw theory as a ‘tool’ to be used with empirical data in order to enable an understanding of social problems and difficulties:

These tools are only visible through the results they yield, and these are not built as such. The ground for these tools...lies in research, in the practical problems and puzzles encountered and generated in the effort to construct a phenomenally diverse set of objects in such a way that they can be treated, thought of, comparatively (p. 160).

The conceptual framework of the Logic of Practice can be used as temporary constructs to provide evidence for, as well as demonstrate the specific properties of social groups and practices (Webb et al., 2002). This theory will provides a useful tool for examining social contexts in which women who became young mothers in Bella Coola can or cannot access the needed resources to attain their desired educational or occupational goals.

### 3.2 Logic of Practice

According to Bourdieu (1990), individuals follow the intuitions of a logic of practice. This practice is the product of an enduring exposure to conditions through which individuals “anticipate the necessary immanent in the way of the world” (Bourdieu, 1990, p.11). The logic of practice operates in the context of real social constraints, where individuals base their decisions on an assessment of their life chances and “reasonable” options (Corbett, 2007), or what Bourdieu calls “coherent” and “convenient” options (1990, p. 91). Bourdieu’s theory is designed to make sense of how people react and interact with the structural influences in their lives (Webb et al., 2002). In order to fully understand individuals’ logic of practice, researchers are required to clearly understand the context in which these practices happen (Corbett, 2007).

In a Bourdieuan framework, practices can only be accounted for by “bringing to light successively the series of effects which underlie them,” and proposed the following formula in order to analyze these effects:  $[(\text{habitus})(\text{capital})] + \text{field} = \text{practice}$  (1984, p. 101). This formula provides a rich frame for a conceptual and empirical analysis of individuals’ practice of logic within institutional (educational) systems:

By incorporating the concepts of capital, habitus (dispositions) and field into the analyses of educational systems and the individuals within them, differences in dispositions toward education, the role of capital in decision making, how social and cultural resources are developed and structured within the family-school setting, and how resources are converted into educational capital can be explored (Andres, 1993, p. 133).

Bourdieu’s concepts of capital, habitus and field offer interpretive tools for identifying how individuals, located in social practices (including class, gender and ‘race’), are also able to

“muster resources that can be utilized in different ways across different contexts” (Allard, 2005, p. 66).

### **3.3 Capital**

For Bourdieu, the primary differences distinguishing the major classes of existence derive from the overall volume of capital possessed by an individual (Andres, 1994, p. 121. Bourdieu (1986) defines capital as: “accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its ‘incorporated,’ embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e. exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor” ( p. 105). ).

Capital is the “set of actually usable resources and powers” that exist in several forms, such as economic, cultural, social and symbolic (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 114). Bourdieu (1992) remarks that capital is an “energy of social physics” (p. 122) that can exist in a variety of forms that have the capacity to produce and reproduce themselves, and under certain conditions and exchange rates, can interconvert from one into another (Swartz, 1997, p. 78). All forms of capital take time to accumulate, and are a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible (Bourdieu, 1986).

Skeggs (1997) contents that in Bourdieu’s model, the structure of social space is given by the distribution of the various forms of capital, along with the distribution of their properties which are capable of conferring strength, power and consequently profit on their holder (p. 8). The structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents “the immanent structure of the social world, i.e. the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 105). In this sense, all the

forms of capital can be used “like trumps in a game of cards” and “are powers which define the chances of profit in a given field” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 230). It should not be lost in this conversation that the different forms of capital Bourdieu identifies are essentially metaphors in that they are not descriptors of empirical positions (Skeggs, 1997). However, Moi (1991) argues that the concept of capital is useful because it enables the identification of interests and benefits of particular groups.

### **3.3.1 Economic Capital**

According to Bourdieu (1986) the different types of capital can be derived from economic capital, but “only at the cost of a more or less great effort of transformation, which is needed to produce the type of power effective in the field in question” (p. 113). He contends that:

The dominant fractions are what they are if and only if the economic principle of stratification asserts its real dominance, which it does, in the long run, even in the relatively autonomous field of cultural production, where the divergence between specific value and market value tends to disappear in the course of time (1984, p. 583).

For Bourdieu, economic structures shape decisively cultural arenas; the acquisition of economic capital makes the investment in cultural capital possible, as it allows for the investment of time needed to accumulate cultural capital (Swartz, 1997).

### **3.3.2 Cultural Capital**

Of the many forms of capital defined by Bourdieu that contribute to the reproduction of the structure of power and symbolic relationships between classes, cultural capital has received the most attention (Andres, 1994; Grenfell & James, 1998). This concept covers a wide variety of non-financial resources or social assets parents provide to their children - for example verbal

facility, general cultural awareness, aesthetic preferences, knowledge of the school system and educational credentials – in order to promote educational success and social mobility beyond economic means (Swartz, 1997, pp. 75-76). For Bourdieu, cultural capital acts as a social relation within a system of exchange that includes the accumulated cultural knowledge that confers power and status (Grenfell & James, 1998).

According to Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital can exist in three distinct forms: in the embodied state (in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body); the objectified state (in the form of cultural goods); and in the institutionalized state (in the form of academic qualifications) (p. 106). Embodied capital accumulation begins in early childhood, when cultural distinctions are consciously acquired and passively inherited through socialization: “The investment of inherited cultural capital returns dividends in school, rewarding those with large amounts of incorporated cultural capital and penalizing those without” (Swartz, 1998, p. 76). The acquisition of institutionalized cultural capital is dependent upon this previously acquired embodied cultural capital, which enables the student’s ability to receive and decode the information and training offered by the school (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). In this way, the educational system contributes to the reproduction of the social structure through its sanctioning of the hereditary transmission of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986 in Andres, 1994).

### **3.3.3 Social Capital**

Social capital is a resource based on connections and group memberships (Skeggs, 1997).

Bourdieu defines social capital as: “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides



each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word” (1986, p. 110). Social capital consists of obligations or connections that provide access to resources:

Relationships and memberships in formal and informal groupings (family, friends, peer groups, school or community organizations), plus the kinds and quality of interactions and social identities constituted through such memberships (duty-based, voluntary or institutional) add up to potential or real support and access to valued resources (a safe place to live, job or entry into higher education) (Allard, 2005, p. 65).

Social capital establishes a network of relationships that can be considered “investment strategies,” through which individuals’ establish or reproduce social relationships that build capacity for mobilizing an individual’s capital(s) (Pidgeon, 2008).

Social capital encompasses the power accrued through one’s position in regard to networks of relationships with family, friends, acquaintances and colleagues (Bullen & Kenway, 2005). The volume of social capital available to an individual is determined by the size of the network of connections that an individual can mobilize, as well as the volume of capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed by each of those to whom the agent is connected (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 110). This model allows for various combinations of capital, such as high economic and low cultural capital, however the value of an individual’s social capital is relative, and the status and power that the capital accrues is not always transferable to different fields (Bullen & Kenway, 2005).

As such, an analysis of social capital cannot be separated from an examination of social exclusion: “Contributory factors such as low socio-economic status, illiteracy, minimal levels of prior educational achievement, deprived geographic regions, and inter-generational poverty are

all highlighted as salient contextual features” (O’Brien & Fathaigh, 2004, p. 11). In this sense, the social space is influenced by the acknowledgement and maintenance of social capital through the use of cultural, symbolic, and economic capital, which in turn maintains the value of symbolic power relations that constitute the structure of that social space (Pidgeon, 2008).

### **3.3.4 Symbolic Capital**

Symbolic capital is the form the different types of capital take once they are perceived and recognized as being legitimate. Skeggs (2004) asserts that legitimation is the key mechanism in the conversion to power, as capital has to be regarded as legitimate before it can be capitalized upon (p. 17). Bourdieu (1990) describes symbolic capital as being “misrecognized capital” (p. 118) in that it legitimates differences in social class and importance, but it is misrecognized because it is not seen as a form of capital. Instead, symbolic capital tends to be viewed as someone’s natural or inherent quality rather than something that has been acquired through inheritance, or a learned behavior (Webb et al., 2002).

According to Skeggs (1997), the social space we occupy has been historically generated, and if the transmission of capital over time is introduced, we can see how from birth, we enter an inherited social space from which comes access to - and acquisition of – differential amounts of capital assets (p. 8). The author also observes that we inherit ways of understanding in that we inherit the meanings associated with social positions and positions in knowledge. Considering each kind of capital can only exist in the interrelationships of social positions, they bring with them either access or limitation to which capitals are available to certain positions: “Our social locations influence our movement and relations to other social positions and hence our ability to capitalize further on the assets we already have” (Skeggs, 1997, p. 9). Individuals with only

limited resources to trade have less ability to increase and/or convert their capital assets, meaning they will not enter a level playing field (Webb et al., 2002).

### **3.4 Habitus**

Most simply, habitus is a system of dispositions that are created and recreated as objective structures and personal history converge (Andres, 1994). The habitus is a product of history, which produces individual and collective practices – more history – in accordance with the schemes generated by history (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 54). The dispositions of habitus are the product of class-specific conditions of primary socialization, yet the action they generate is not a direct expression of this prior socialization (Swartz, 1997). Instead, practices emerge from the intersection between habitus and the objective structures (fields), and reflect the structure of that encounter: “In practice, it is the habitus....which accomplished practically the relating of these two systems of relations, in and through the production of practice” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 78).

In one sense, habitus is social inheritance, but it also implies habit in actions: “The habitus is a system of dispositions – a present past that tends to perpetuate itself into the future by reactivation in similarly structured practices, an internal law through which the law of external necessities, irreducible to immediate constraints, is constantly exerted” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 54). Bourdieu’s concept of habitus captures the idea of agency-within-limits: “Human beings act and make decisions within particular contexts created by our past actions and decisions and in our social worlds already shaped by our broader racial, gender and class relations” (Kelly, 2007, p. 9). Individuals come with their own generating structures, inculcated in the process of their own development in the world, and this habitus forms affinities or dis-affinities with the structural relations (fields) which surround them (Grenfell & James, 1998 p. 25).

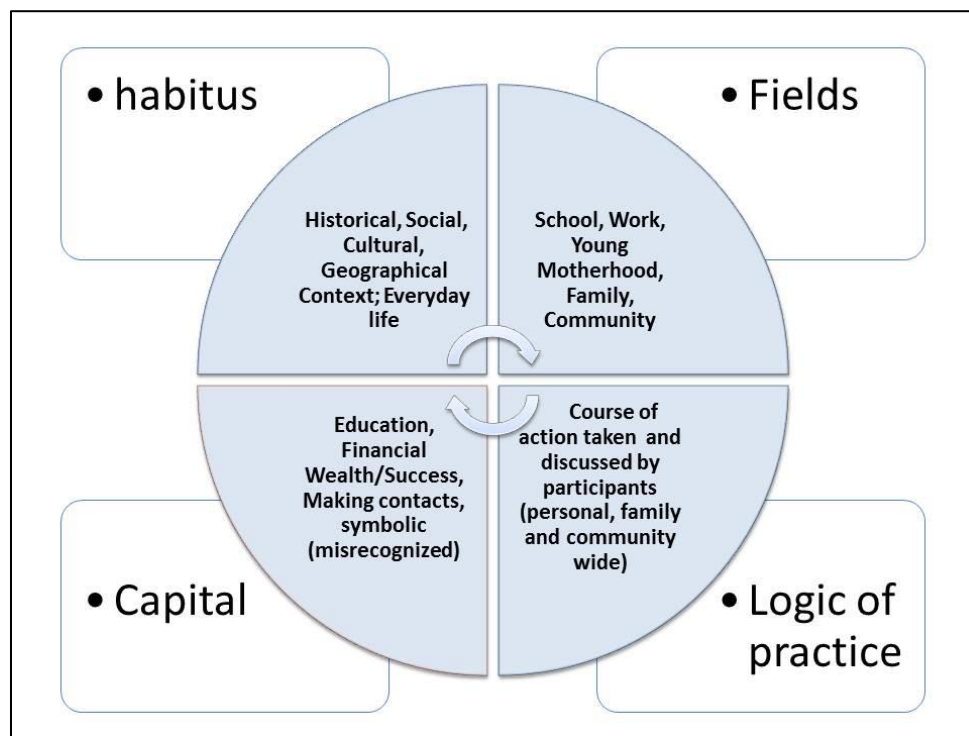
Hughes and Blaxter (2007) contend that in conceptualizing habitus, Bourdieu aimed to transcend binaries (determinism/freedom; individual/society): “An analytic attention to habitus and different forms of capital in a field may enable agency to enact strategies for change” (p. 110). Reay (2004) argues that Bourdieu’s later work provides a broader conceptualization of habitus that weaves together conscious deliberation with unconscious dispositions so that we can “attempt to grapple analytically with aspects of identity such as our personal and political commitments” (p. 438). In his work *The Weight of the World* (1999), Bourdieu documented a great deal of striving, resistance and action in his interviews with many ‘poor and dispossessed’ French citizens, who were searching for ways of changing and transforming their lives. These interviews relay a sense of the myriad adaptations, responses, reactions and resistances to ‘the way the world is,’ in which Bourdieu often linked action aimed at changing current circumstances with the movement of habitus across new, unfamiliar fields (Reay, 2004).

### **3.5 Field**

According to Bourdieu, the social world consists of multi-dimensional spaces of intersecting fields, where individuals (agents) are defined by their relative positions in this space (Bourdieu, 1991 in Andres, 1994). Agents are positioned in the field according to the overall volume of the capital they possess, as well as according to the composition of their capital (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 231). Accessing the specific capitals offered by any given field depends upon an agent’s positioning. Individuals of various positions in the field are oriented to the strategies that may be used in their struggles to either defend or better their positions. The art of estimating and seizing “potential opportunities” requires the possession of the necessary capital and habitus (dispositions) related to a given field (Andres, 1994, p. 133). Bourdieu (1983) is careful to note that the original position occupied by each agent influences the usefulness or

success of implementing these strategies. Through these social fields agents learn the “rules of the game” needed to successfully navigate social spaces (Webb, et al., 2002). The field determines the ‘rules of the game,’ while capital will determine the players’ relative force in the game” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 98). Bourdieu’s (1984) Logic of Practice (see Figure 1 below) accounts for the social, historical, and cultural (and I would add geographical) contexts within which people live, which becomes ingrained in the habitus of a community and reflected in people’s actions. These contexts frame the decisions people make based on the options they see as being available in various fields.

**Figure 1:** Visualization of the Logic of Practice: [(habitus)(capital)] + field = practice



Skeggs (1997) observes that just as metaphors of capital provide a framework for understanding power and exchange in the reproduction of inequality, metaphors of space have a similar explanatory value for understanding movement through social space and restrictions on

it: “Metaphors of spaces and places such as location and positioning enable distribution and allocation of resources and peoples to be framed” (p. 12). When individuals are unfamiliar with the (often unspoken) rules of the game belonging to a field, they may be stigmatized by those with the most capital, and refused entry into that social space (Webb, et al., 2002). Bourdieu (1977) considers this process to be a function of symbolic violence, where agents with less capital are subjected to forms of discrimination through maintained social structures. However, agents who are subjected to this form of violence (treated as inferior, denied resources limited in their social mobility and aspirations), as well as those who inflict these forms of violence perceive such situations to be the “natural order of things”(Webb et al., 2002).

Bourdieu (1994) claims that the power of his theory rests on misrecognized dispositions and processes (Grenfell, 1996). Just as with symbolic capital, misrecognition is the key to the function of symbolic violence, in which the social order that already serves the interest of the dominant agents is being perpetuated due to the perception that the existing social order is fair (Bohman, 1999). In this sense, symbolic violence imposes the idea of legitimacy of the social order through its being embedded in the very modes of action and structures of cognition of individuals (Bourdieu, 1977). As such, Bourdieu’s work illustrates the lack of concern with conflict and oppression found in contemporary social structures (Hughes & Blaxter, 2007).

Within this framework of oppression, Bourdieu (1984) asserts that power works by establishing difference, and binaries that are set up in opposition to each other are misleading, and eventually become more real than the processes they aim to represent (Grenfell, 1996). Bourdieu accepts a “deep structure” of binary differentiation of social life, in which “binary

symbolic distinctions correlate with social distinctions turning symbolic classifications into expressions of social hierarchy” (Swartz, 1997, p. 87).

According to Bourdieu, symbolic systems can be thought of as a form of “classification where connections between the cognitive logic of polarity and the social logic in exclusion and inclusion are established,” however it is not clear that binary codes are the fundamental building blocks of culture, since everyday practices are not always marked by such clear distinctions (Swartz, 1997, p. 87-88). For example, McCall (1992) posits that gender symbolism is both rigidly enforced and yet contested in actual practices, and it is precisely this multiplicity of gendered practices that Bourdieu’s structure of binary differences overlooks. Here, Iris Young’s (1990) work on the structure of oppression and how it mutually affects culture and political economy will be employed to help frame a discussion of structural and discursive inequalities.

### **3.6 The Five Faces of Oppression**

Iris Young (1990) suggests that while structural oppression involves relations among groups, these relations do not always fit the paradigm of conscious and intentional oppression of one group by another (p. 41). As such, oppression is a more complex process than one group oppressing another, but instead the exercise of power by society over certain groups. The author observes that as a structural factor, oppression often happens unnoticed, and even unintentionally: “oppression designates the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer... because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society” (1990, p. 41). Young (1997) asserts that social theorists who observe oppression as a ‘unified phenomenon’ may exclude groups or over-simplify injustice, and therefore expresses concern about “the groups that lie in the middle of the continuum, subject to political, economic and cultural injustices” (p. 51).

Given this, structural oppression involves relations among groups, yet these relations do not always fit the “paradigm of conscious and intentional oppression of one group by another” (Young, 1990, p. 41). Building on Foucault (1977), Young suggests that in order to understand the meaning and operation of power in modern society, it is necessary to go beyond the model of power that conceives of it as ‘sovereignty:’

...a didactic relation of ruler and subject, and instead analyze the exercise of power as the effect of often liberal and ‘humane’ practices of education, bureaucratic administration, production and distribution of consumer goods, medicine and so on. The conscious actions of many individuals daily contribute to maintaining and reproducing oppression, but those people are usually simply doing their jobs or living their lives, and do not understand themselves as agents of oppression (pp. 41-42).

Young (1990) asserts that only a plural explication of the concept of oppression can adequately capture the multiple ways this phenomenon plays out. As a result, she has offered five distinct categories of oppression.

The first category of Young’s theory of oppression is exploitation, which “...consists in social processes that bring about a transfer of energies from one group to another to produce unequal distributions, and in the way social institutions enable a few to accumulate while they constrain many more” (Young, 1990, p. 53). Young discusses classist and radicalized structures of exploitation (through menial labour), as well as the gender-based exploitation of women, in which ‘women’s work’ often goes unacknowledged and is therefore under compensated (p. 51). The second category is marginalization, which Young describes as “perhaps the most dangerous form of oppression” in that “a whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination” (Young, 1990, p. 53). Marginalization exists most explicitly in material deprivation and the



potential link to dependency, wherein “the distribution of social-support does not eliminate large-scale suffering and deprivation, yet whose recipients risk the suspension of their basic rights to privacy, respect and individual choice” (p. 54).

Powerlessness is the third face of oppression, which refers to a systemic inability to exercise power in the sense of control over one's own actions. Young (1990) considers the injustices associated with powerlessness as “inhibition in the development of one's capacities, lack of decision-making power, and exposure to disrespectful treatment because of the status one occupies” (p. 58). Those who are powerless are often living in poverty, working in exploitative labour markets, and tend to be marginalized through social welfare systems. Young discusses the first three faces of oppression as having distributional consequences, but are fundamentally functions of the social and economic division of labor (Allen, 2008). These three categories of oppression refer to structural and institutional relations that delimit people's material lives, and are a matter of concrete power in relation to others – of who benefits from whom, and who is dispensable (Young, 1990, p. 58).

By contrast, the fourth and fifth categories give prominence to cultural oppression rather than social or economic relations (Allen, 2008, p. 160). Young (1990) names the fourth face of oppression as cultural imperialism, referring to how “the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the Other. Cultural imperialism involves the universalization of a dominant group's experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm” (pp. 58–59). Young (1990) argues that those who experience cultural imperialism find their identities essentialized, and “undergo a paradoxical oppression, in that they are both marked out by stereotypes and at

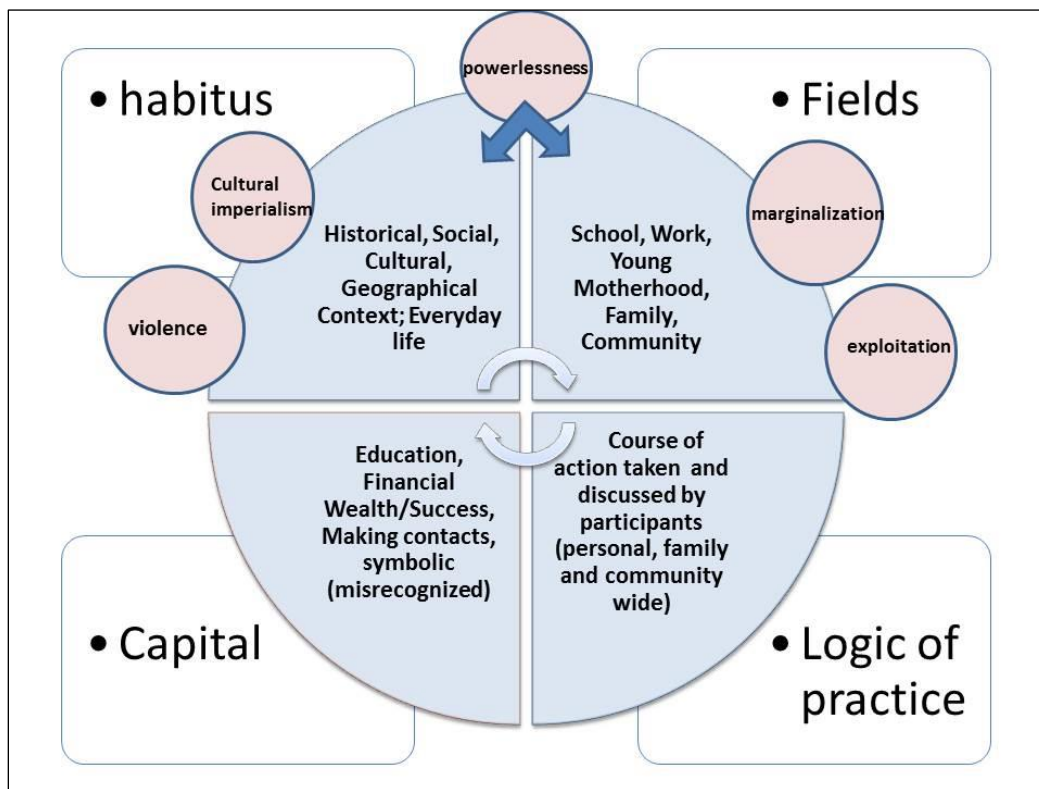
the same time rendered invisible” (p. 60). This process serves the injustice of the oppressed group’s own experience and interpretation of social life finds little expression in the dominant culture, while at the same time, the dominant culture imposes its interpretations of social life onto the oppressed group (Young, p. 60).

The fifth and final face of oppression is systemic violence, which includes both physical violence and more mediated forms of harassment, intimidation or ridicule derived from the intention to damage or humiliate a person or group (Allen, 2008). Young (1990) observes that violence and harassment are not typically considered matters of social injustice by theorists (p. 61), yet she counters this silence by defining violence as a social practice that carries with it the systemic character of being ‘private’ or individualized acts: “What makes violence a face of oppression is less the particular acts themselves, though these are often utterly horrible, than the social context surrounding them, which makes them possible and even acceptable (Young, 1990, p. 61). Moreover, systemic violence approaches legitimacy in the sense that it is almost anticipated, and therefore tolerated. The general public finds violence unsurprising because it happens so frequently that it exists as a constant possibility at the “horizon of the social imagination” (p. 62). This general acceptance of the phenomenon also intersects with cultural imperialism, as systemic violence directed towards groups is a direct effect of how groups are viewed; the discrimination of a group is taken up with the embodiment of irrational violent acts (p. 63).

According to Young (1990), the application of these five criteria to the situation of oppressed peoples and groups makes it possible to compare oppressions without reducing them to “a common essence of claiming that one is more fundamental than the other” (p. 64). Given

this, Young's theory of oppression can be read as an overlapping force with Bourdieu's Logic of Practice (see Figure 2 below). In the following visualization, the Social and Economic Faces are grouped with Bourdieu's Fields, and the Cultural Faces with habitus. The face of powerlessness can exist as being a part of both the habitus or a field, and a further discussion of this double role is presented in Chapter 6.

**Figure 2:** Bourdieu's Logic of Practice with Young's 5 Faces of Oppression



The avoidance of exclusionary and reductionist implications of the concept of oppression allows for a comprehensive and fruitful analysis of discriminatory practices while avoiding the trap of ultimately unproductive disputes about whose oppression is most basic or fundamental (Allen, 2008). Young's pluralistic approach to the concept of oppression also denotes that oppression is not a single and/or unified phenomenon: "different factors or combinations of

factors constitute the oppression of different groups making their oppression irreducible” (1990, p. 42).

Allen (2008) contends that Young attempts to delineate the distinct aspects of oppression within her framework of the five categories by distinguishing oppression from domination. As such, she defines oppression in terms of institutional or structural constraints on self-development, and defines domination in terms of institutional or structural impediments to self-determination: “Although all who are oppressed are also dominated, not all who are dominated are likewise oppressed” (Allen, 2008, p. 191). Even relatively enabled people (those who are not exploited, marginalized, or powerless in social and economic structures) are subject to structures of domination: “They experience themselves as subject to the unreciprocated authority of others. They find their actions constrained by structural or bureaucratic imperatives that often seem both to result from no one's decision and to serve the interests of a specific set of agents (Young, 1990, p.78). Domination can affect anyone purely as a function of their position within economic and social relations of production and authority in society (Allen, 2008).

### **3.7 Summary**

Both Young and Bourdieu write about the internalization of social norms as a systemic process that cannot be attributed to one particular individual, organization or social relation. These theorists also identify institutions as playing a key role in producing and perpetuating the social order that already serves the interests of the dominant group. Bourdieu and Young's theories will be useful in framing the overall themes that emerged in this research, and help to think socially and politically about the different levels of structures influencing the decision making process.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

The focus of this thesis is the presentation of a case analysis of the factors that influence young mothers' decision making with regards to their family, school and work based goals and needs in the setting of the Bella Coola Valley. In this chapter, I provide an overview of my research design, along with an explanation of why a case study approach using qualitative data collection methods are appropriate for this investigation. A detailed description of the social, economic and cultural history of the research setting is provided to give the reader an understanding of the contextual conditions relevant to the case of educational experiences of young mothers in Bella Coola. In the second section of this chapter I outline the methods used to gather, organize and analyze the data from this research, and I discuss the ethical considerations and sampling difficulties that influenced the research design.

### **4.1 Research Design**

This project was an exploratory case study (Merriam, 1998; Stake 1995; Yin, 2003) with sixteen women in the Bella Coola Valley who had given birth to at least one child during their teenage years. Within the framework of qualitative research, a case study approach was the most appropriate way to investigate a narrow field of interest in a relatively short span of time, while concurrently contextualizing the case in wider circumstances. As the purpose of this study is to better understand the educational experiences, decisions and needs of young mothers in Bella Coola within a social, historical and cultural context, a case study employing qualitative data collection methods works well.

According to Yin (2003) a case study should be considered when the focus of the study is to understand “how” and “why” questions, coupled with a desire to cover contextual conditions

believed to be relevant to the phenomenon under study. Stake (1995; 2005) also insists that case study is a work that is focused on learning more about, and developing a better understanding of, a particular case along with giving close attention to the influence of its social, political and historical contexts. This project examines the educational experiences of women who are or were young mothers, and the factors that influence their decision making with regards to their family, school and work based goals and needs. The case is the educational experiences of young mothers, but the case could not be considered without the contexts of school settings, work settings, young motherhood and the affairs of everyday life, since these are settings that influence the decision making process.

In an effort to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between young motherhood and formal education in the research setting, this study explores the answers to the following questions:

- How do women who first became mothers in their teens in Bella Coola describe their experiences with education and parenthood? How do these experiences influence their decisions related to education and employment?
- How do these women define educational success within the context of their community?
- What pathways are seen as being available to access educational and career opportunities?
- What factors do women who became teenage parents in Bella Coola identify as valuable for enhancing school programming in their community?

## **4.2 Research Setting**

The site for this research project was the rural coastal community of Bella Coola, BC, which is located between the mountains and inlets of the central Pacific Coast. The valley area consists of a population of 2000 residents, of which approximately half are of Aboriginal descent (BC Stats, 2008). The majority of the population in the Valley is living in town and on the reserve located at the mouth of the Bella Coola River (Kramer, 2006). Current INAC population estimates the membership of the Nuxalk Nation is approximately 1400 people, with nearly 900 of those living on reserve (Nuxalk Nation, 2011), although traditionally the Nuxalk population numbered in the thousands and lived in at least forty-five distinct villages located throughout the Valley (Mackay et al., 2006). Kramer (2006) notes that archeological records and Nuxalk origin stories converge around the fact that the Nuxalk have been in the Bella Coola Valley for nearly 10 000 years.

The first recorded contact with the Nuxalk in European history is from 1793, when Alexander Mackenzie arrived in the valley. Trading posts were established in the area by numerous interests, but the majority of traders were seasonal visitors to the area who had little interest in establishing permanent settlements (Wild, 2004). During this time the Nuxalk, like many Aboriginal groups in British Columbia, experienced drastic population decimation due to exposure to diseases brought into the Valley by outside settlers and explorers. After the smallpox epidemic of 1862-64, it is estimated that Nuxalk Villages were devastated to approximately 300 survivors. The remaining Nuxalkmc either relocated on their own to survive, or were forcibly removed by the Department of Indian Affairs in 1902 to form a reserve that is now known as Bella Coola (Nuxalk Nation, 2011).

Immigration (non-Nuxalk) to the region was sporadic and often temporary for the next century, until a group of Norwegian settlers were given land grants in the mid to late 1800s (Barker, 1992). During the mid-1890s, eighty four Norwegians arrived in the area as a result of newspaper articles that had been published in the United States by a Norwegian immigrant who had visited the area. Attracted to the landscape that reminded them of the fjordlands, the group of immigrants came to the Valley to begin a utopian religious community (Kramer, 2006; Wild, 2004). The Norwegians drew lots for the land, cleared trees to establish farms and founded the town of Hagensborg sixteen kilometers away from the village of Bella Coola (Markey et al; 2006).

As European settlement in the valley continued to develop, residential and public schools, were established. The first one-room school opened in Bella Coola in 1920, and by 1926 a public school was established for all students in the community, but segregated elementary schooling in Bella Coola began in 1930, when the reserve received its own eight grade facility. Nuxalk students who wished to continue their secondary schooling could attend the local public high school up the valley, which they almost never did: “As it was, most on-reserve and residential school students did not make it past the sixth grade, preferring to work for pay or for their families as trappers, fishers, cannery or loggers” (Kramer, 2006, p. 68).

At this time, government Indian Agents were enforcing the 1894 amendment to the Indian Act which required Native children to attend school, and many Nuxalk children were sent out on steamships to attend residential schools in Alert Bay, Chilliwack, 150 Mile House, Port Simpson, Fort Rupert and Port Alberni (Kramer, 2006). Aboriginal parents were not complacent in having their children placed in these schools (Fournier and Crey, 1998), and there are several



reports of Nuxalk parents fighting government Agents strongly enough to succeed in keeping their children out of these schools (Kramer, 2006).

Previous studies (Haig-Brown, 1988; Furniss, 1992; Fournier and Crey, 1998) have documented the purposes of mandatory attendance of Aboriginal children at these schools. The deliberate policies were to sever generations from each other in order to stop enculturation, and forcibly assimilate Aboriginal children into the mainstream culture (Fournier and Crey, 1998). Furniss (1992) describes how Canadian residential schools were modeled upon the American policy of ‘aggressive civilization’ which envisioned “the consolidation of Indian tribes onto reserves, the abolishment of tribal society and traditions, and the permanent settlement of individuals in their own homes and tracts of land” (p. 25). Cultural oppression became a formal government policy (Haig-Brown, 1988), and missionaries took advantage of “the apparatus of the state to advance their own form of religious colonization” (Furniss, 1992, p. 27).

The Nuxalk Nation has published information on its website about the effects of residential schooling in the Valley: “Mission run residential and day schools undermined traditional systems of education, and coupled with laws that outlawed traditional culture, language and identity, the traditional education system of the Nuxalk people was severely disrupted” (2008). Barker (1992) notes that many Nuxalk left the community as adults after becoming alienated from their culture during the long years away at mission-run residential schools. However, Nuxalk culture was not irretrievably lost, as members of the Nuxalk Nation struggled to retain and build upon their traditions, even though the circumstances made doing so difficult: “Many returned to the community as adults, and struggled as adults to relearn Nuxalk

and to pass on the stories, titles and other prerogatives of their own ancestral families” (Barker, 1992, p. xxxiii).

In 1987, the Nuxalk Nation opened a band controlled school where many initiatives have been developed in order to accommodate the “best of two worlds” in the curriculum. Educators at the school are working to restore many of the traditional teachings by providing classes on Nuxalk language, history, carving, potlatches, art and other related knowledge, while at the same time meeting government curriculum standards (Nuxalk Nation, 2009). Furthermore, the Central Coast School District, of which Bella Coola is a part, has also signed an Aboriginal Educational Enhancement Agreement with the BC Ministry of Education in order to ensure all Aboriginal students achieve social and academic success (BC Ministry of Education, Districts with EA’s, 2009).

Current relations between the Nuxalk and Norwegian settlers’ descendants have been described as cordial but distant, particularly due to unresolved land claims (Kramer, 2006). Wild (2004) posits that despite its small population and geographic isolation, Bella Coola residents have never held or worked towards a common vision, and there is still a strong and very separate sense of Nuxalkmc, Norwegians and ‘outsiders’. However, Wild also acknowledges that several community members are making attempts to close the gap in communication between these groups.

Currently, the community of Bella Coola is facing a number of social issues including high unemployment, crime, substance abuse, high teen pregnancy rates, and lower high school graduation rates in comparison to those in similar-sized rural, remote, and isolated communities in British Columbia (CRHR, 2008). Previous research conducted in the setting report that

unemployment, substance misuse, family violence, sexual abuse and racial discrimination are pertinent issues that confront community members (Bopp & Lane, 2000; Thommasen et al., 2006, CRHR, 2008). These statistics are not the only representation of the community, but at the same time these social aspects must be given careful consideration when examining educational issues in the Valley.

It is difficult to ascertain precise data for the socio-economic profile for Bella Coola, as BC Stats suppresses detailed information regarding the Central Coast due to the small population size. According to the most recent BC Stats population data available (2006), the Bella Coola Valley ranks fourth in lowest income levels out of the 78 provincial regions. Unemployment in the Valley as a whole is 12%, and 29% on reserve, in comparison to the provincial rate of 6%. The area's economy has historically been resource based, and over the past decade Bella Coola has been experiencing the "bust" phase of the "boom-bust" resource-extraction life cycle, resulting in a steeply declining economy (Markey, et al., 2005, p. 42-43). Currently the majority of community work involves local governance, education, social service delivery and health services. Attempts are being made to diversify the area's economy, with emphasis being placed on tourism, agricultural and entrepreneurial activities (CCRD, 2009).

Education is seen as playing a vital role in the plans to revitalize Bella Coola and help the Valley take advantage of the opportunities available in newer employment sectors, especially in areas such as technology. School District 49 encompasses the Bella Coola Valley, and while it is a large area geographically, it is amongst the smallest school districts in British Columbia in terms of student enrollment. Although population and enrollment numbers are smaller, several public, independent and adult education schools are available in the Valley (SD49 Website). I

was informed by several school administrators that students tend to “bounce” between the public and independent school systems through the academic year. The region continues to have one of the lowest literacy rates in the province, as well as one of the highest rates of high school non-completion rates for 18 year old students – 49.3% from 2007-2010 versus 29% provincial rate during the same time period (BC Stats, 2010). Yet in spite of its population size and remoteness, the Literacy Now Task Group reports that the Bella Coola Valley possesses considerable educational assets, where schools, government and not-for-profit organizations, the Nuxalk Nation and community members are attempting to work cooperatively to improve literacy and learning outcomes (2010).

A review of the BC Stats Local Health Area report reveals that Bella Coola has the second highest teenage pregnancy rate in the province. From 2007-2009, the local age-specific fertility rate in the area was 100 live births per 1000 women between the ages of 15-19, whereas the provincial average was 26.3 per 1000 (BC Stats, 2010). According to the provincial data available, total fertility rates have been consistently higher in the Bella Coola Valley from 1987 to 2010 than for any other region except Teenage Fertility Rates (TFR) in the Nisga’a region over the same time period (BC Stats, 2011). TFRs in the Bella Coola Valley are highest in the 20-24 age group. Community support for young mothers is primarily recognized through Healthy Beginnings extended parenting support programs (CRHR, 2008). Several daycare options are available in the Valley, yet the area representative from the Williams Lake Child Care Resources and Referral organization indicates there is a need for more childcare spaces for parents who are attending school or working (Howard, 2006).

While teenage pregnancy seems to be regarded as something of a social norm in the community, the schools in the area do not have a specific policy regarding educational programming for young mothers. School practices that deliberately exclude teenage mothers may be absent, but due to the constant state of flux of students among the schools, these institutions might not have the capacity to accommodate certain student populations to the full extent that is needed at this time.

#### **4.3 Participant Criteria**

The participant criteria for this study were women who had given birth to at least one child during their adolescent years while living in the Bella Coola valley. The initial criteria were narrower during the planning stages of the study. The participant criteria I had originally intended to use in this study included young mothers and fathers from both Native and non-Native heritage. Through conversations with my supervisor, it was decided that the scope of the study should be narrowed considering the time constraints I would be working within. As I had already organized my volunteer position at the two Nuxalk schools, the participant criteria was focused to Aboriginal women between the ages of 15-30.

Once I arrived in Bella Coola, I realized the participant criteria required further adjusting. After initial conversations with a service provider in town, it was brought to my attention that a historical divisiveness has existed in the community. Wild (2006) describes this situation as, “a mix of Nuxalkmc, Norwegians and ‘outsiders,’ all possessing their own ideas of how the valley should –or should not- be developed” (p. 253). I was advised that by only focusing on one of these groups, I could be unintentionally reinforcing divisiveness within the community. I also received several suggestions about altering the originally set age parameters, giving

consideration to several women over the age of thirty who had shown interest in participating in this study.

In studies that incorporate adolescent memories from adult informants, Bilken (2004) cautions that memory can be full of contradictions as it suggests adults might easily access youths' perspectives even if they are far removed from their teenage years. However, the author also notes that memories should not be simply viewed as research bias, since "memory is intrinsic to ethnographic work because memory is part of the human experience, and humans as the "research instrument" in this kind of research" (Bilken, 2004, p. 728). Cuadraz & Uttal (1999) also advise that it is beneficial for researchers to diversify their samples in exploratory studies in order to develop a deep understanding of social processes "that do not assume the typicality/normality of a homogenous social group" (p. 167). Through opening the criteria I hoped to access a wider demographic of participants who could communicate a variety of experiences, interests, goals and needs within the contexts of young motherhood and education.

#### **4.4 Sampling and Recruitment**

A non-probabilistic sampling design was used in this study, since a complete sampling frame is not available for the target population of women who have given birth during adolescence. Participant recruitment included purposive strategies aimed at engaging women who met the participant criteria of the study. During the early stage of my stay in Bella Coola, I met with various service providers (public health nurses, Healthy Beginnings, Strong Start, MCFD, school counselors and alternative program coordinators) in the valley to inform them of my research, and to ask for their assistance in informing eligible participants about the study. I also asked

research participants to pass on my contact information to prospective participants if they felt comfortable doing so.

The main method of recruitment was to place information posters (see Appendix B) about the study in the local newspaper and community newsletters, as well as posting information posters in public areas. I had initially listed my email address as my contact information on the recruitment poster, but I soon learned that computer and internet access were limited for many people in the valley. After several unsuccessful attempts at participant recruitment, I was informed that the primary form of communication in Bella Coola is cell phone texting. Once I acquired a cell phone and included my number on the recruitment posters, I began receiving texts from women who expressed interest in participating, as well as requests for more information about the study. Texting also proved to be the most efficient way to organize interview times and locations with most participants.

#### **4.5 Participants**

Sixteen women between the ages of 18 to 55 participated in this study: two women in their teens; seven women in their twenties; three women in their thirties; three women in their forties and one woman in her fifties. With the expectation of one woman who had given birth to her first child at 20, all of the women had given birth to their first child when they were between the ages of 14 and 19. Of the sixteen respondents, fifteen indicated they were of Aboriginal (Nuxalk and Heiltsuk) ancestry, and one indicated she was of non-Aboriginal ancestry. Seven women were employed full time while two were working part time; five women had full time mothering and household duties, and two women were attending school full-time. Fourteen participants had finished high school, and thirteen had completed some post-secondary training or professional

certification. Due to this research being conducted in a small community and the findings eventually intend to be accessible to all community members, participants cannot be further identified in order to maintain their anonymity and thereby protect confidentiality.

The women who took part in this study spoke to a variety of experiences and backgrounds in the community regarding education, work experience, family relationships and community relations. Although the findings are not generalizable to the experiences of all women who became young parents in Bella Coola, this smaller sample size provided meaningful information for in-depth analysis.

#### **4.6 Consent Process**

Before undertaking this project, I sought consent in writing to volunteer and conduct research in the setting from the school principal and learning centre coordinator, as well as from the Nuxalk Chief Elect. The proposal for this study was also reviewed by the University of British Columbia's Research Ethics Board in order to ensure that this research was designed and conducted in a manner that would protect the rights of participants. All administrators granted permission for this study to take place.

During the time the study was conducted, prospective participants were offered the opportunity to review the consent form (see Appendixes C and D), interview questions (see Appendix E) and research information handout (see Appendix F) before arranging an interview appointment. The handout was designed specifically for younger participants in order to explain key terms in research vocabulary, and the rights of research participants, in accessible, non-



academic language<sup>1</sup>. A list of community services (such as counselors) and their contact information was also made available in the event that a participant became upset by any part of the interview process. Several participants requested this information in advance, but the majority of participants looked over the forms when I met with them.

Before commencing the interview, I reviewed the consent form with each participant and asked if there were any questions about the interview procedure, confidentiality agreement or post-study data storage. A few participants were familiar with this process as they had participated in previous studies conducted in the area. The majority of participants had not participated in a research project before. Most expressed confidence in their desire to participate, and did not communicate any concerns during or after the consent and interview process. Out of sixteen respondents, four women mentioned their initial hesitation in participating as they were concerned with issues surrounding confidentiality. This may have also been a concern with the other twelve participants, even though they did not mention it directly. Participants were offered the opportunity to choose their own pseudonym, but all of the women told me they were comfortable with an identifier being chosen for them. Given this, I assigned pseudonyms in alphabetical order to coincide with each participant's interview code (see Appendix A).

Participants were assured that stringent steps would be taken to ensure confidentiality, and they were reminded they did not have to divulge any information they were not comfortable with sharing. Palys and Lowman (2000) maintain “researchers have a special ethical obligation to protect the privacy of research participants... safeguarding the *identity* of participants is the

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<sup>1</sup> This form is adapted from the original *Know Your Rights With Research* created by the Youth Sexual Health Team. Permission to use and adapt the form was granted by Dr. Jean Shoveller.

researcher's primary concern" (p. 41). In order to ensure confidentiality, any information that could identify a participant has been left out of, or altered, in this thesis.

After each participant agreed to the conditions of the study, she signed the consent form. Participants were given a copy of the consent form with the transcript of their interview. The form contains my current contact information, along with the contact information for my research supervisor and the UBC Office of Research Services. I also included a personal note with each form encouraging participants to contact me, my supervisor or the university if they had any questions or concerns about the study.

#### **4.7 Non-Participants**

During the recruitment process, four women refused to participate after initially having expressed interest in the study. One of the women gave the reason of time constraints, and two of the women declined without disclosing their reasons for doing so. Another woman initially agreed, but contacted me within twelve hours to withdraw from participating, indicating that she did not want to discuss unpleasant memories. Two women below the age of majority indicated they were interested in participating, but they experienced difficulty in receiving parent or guardian approval. Two other women contacted me with the intent of participating in this study, but they were unavailable during the time the interviews were being conducted in the research setting.

#### **4.8 Methods of Data Collection**

Data collection methods for this study consisted of participant observation of the community, informal interviews with community members, and semi structured interviews with respondents.

#### **4.8.1 Participant Observation**

From September to December 2010, I lived in Bella Coola town-site and volunteered at two schools, one K-12 and one adult education centre, where I established a weekly schedule where I volunteered as a teacher's assistant and tutor for a total of approximately 150 hours. I also attended social events in town such as movie nights, basketball games, a potlatch and holiday celebrations in order to get a 'feel' for the community, as well as introduce myself to a variety of members in the research setting.

Throughout this time I kept a detailed journal where I documented the events and conversations I witnessed and took part in. The purpose of the observation was to familiarize myself with the routines of the research setting, as well as provide an approach for yielding insights about the phenomenon of young motherhood and educational engagement in the community. These notes and observations are written in the first person point-of-view, and additional digital copies of all notes were made regularly to ensure they would not be lost in the event of a problem with my computer

Although this method provides certain unique opportunities for collecting case study data, some concerns have been expressed with regards to potential biases and invalidity of observational data (Ridenour & Newman, 2008). Specific concerns include how focusing on the present may blind the observer to important events that occurred before entry on the scene; confidants or informants in a social setting may be entirely unrepresentative of the less open participants; and observers may change the situation just by their presence (Silverman, 2001; Yin, 2003).

To counter these concerns, Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) insist that relationships between the field researcher and people in the setting do not “disrupt or alter ongoing patterns of social interaction,” but instead offer the opportunity to understand the more subtle, implicit underlying assumptions that are often not readily accessible through observation or interview methods alone (p. 3). Denzin (1970) describes the advantages of observational work as not being bound in field work by pre-judgments about the nature of the problem, or by rigid data gathering devices, and is useful as “a field strategy that simultaneously combines document analysis, respondent and informant interviewing, direct participation, observation and introspection” (1970, p. 186).

Participant Observation also offers the researcher an opportunity to see how she and the research project are seen by others. Throughout my time in the research setting, I was engaged in conversation by a variety of community members who were interested in “who I was” and “what I was doing” in Bella Coola. After giving a brief description of my project, my conversation partner would typically offer their opinion and ideas on the phenomenon under study, and some would also comment on the role research can play in the community. These conversations were also struck up by some women who did not meet the participant criteria, but who wanted to speak with me about the role young motherhood has played in the lives of their friends and family members.

#### **4.8.2 Informal Interviews**

Non-structured, informal interviews were conducted with several community members who worked closely with young mothers in the community. These conversations were held with four individuals who worked in the fields of health, service programming, parenting classes and education. More than one informal interview took place with two of these individuals at different

times during my stay in the research setting. The topics discussed during these conversations included: health and social concerns, access to programs, financial resources, and how to encourage participation in sex education and parenting classes. These conversations lasted approximately thirty minutes to an hour, during which I asked questions for clarification, took extensive notes and summarized the key points of our conversation with participants to ensure I had correctly understood what had been said. I asked my conversation partners for their permission to write about the information shared in our discussions in my research project. After each session I re-wrote the conversation notes using a word processor, along with a detailed summary of the meeting and the key points discussed.

#### **4.8.3 Semi Structured Interviews**

Interviews were conducted at the time and place of the participant's choice. Younger participants were offered the opportunity to partake in friendship pair interviewing in order to avoid any potential discomfort or intimidation they may have felt throughout the interview process (Deirdre Kelly, personal communication), but these respondents told me they considered this option to be unnecessary.

The interview questions developed out of the guiding research objectives, and from concepts found in the related literature within the area of study. At the same time, the questions were also designed to be open-ended and general enough for participants to respond in their own way. As the interview schedule developed, I sent multiple drafts to my contacts in Bella Coola in order to assess the suitability of my questions. Once I arrived in the community, I conducted a pilot interview with a woman who works with young mothers through the school, who offered valuable input in her evaluation of the interview schedule.

The interview schedule was loosely separated into five topic ‘sections’. The first section consisted of general questions about the respondent’s current occupation and daily life; the second involved questions pertaining to the participant’s educational experiences and career goals; the third section was structured around the participant’s experiences of young motherhood; the fourth focused on the community’s relationship with formal education; and the fifth section involved questions about the interview itself.

Interviews were designed to be 45 to 60 minutes in length, and in practice the interview lengths varied between 15 minutes to almost two hours. Each interview took place in the location of the participant’s choice. Fifteen of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, and one interview was conducted by phone. All formal interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. Following each interview, I wrote a detailed summary of the appointment in order to document the main aspects of the interview after the session. These notes include descriptions of the physical setting and social atmosphere, the rapport between me and the respondent, and my overall impression of the interview.

All participants were provided with a verbatim copy of their interview transcript along with a note requesting that the respondent contact me if she wished to discuss her interview, or have a part of the transcript omitted from the study. One participant contacted me to make a correction, and another participant indicated that she wished to have a portion of her interview omitted.

#### **4.8.4 Researcher Role**

My primary roles in this study were as participant observer and interviewer. As a participant in the community, even as one who would be considered an ‘outsider,’ I made an attempt to take part in everyday school-related activities, as well as community events. As I became a somewhat

regular fixture in classes, at Healthy Beginning luncheons and around town, I was regularly engaged in conversations regarding day-to-day topics. During this time I also had several in depth, one-to-one conversations regarding some of the social issues that are present in the community that stemmed from an individual asking a general question about this study. On occasion my conversation partner would ask that our discussion remain private, and other times I was the one to ask regarding privacy, or permission for our conversation to be included as part of my data collection.

As the interviewer, I made attempts to provide respondents with a comfortable interview setting while engaging them in conversation. All participants knew I was a graduate student who was conducting this research as part of my program at the University of British Columbia. Through casual conversations before and after the interviews, participants often asked why I chose Bella Coola as my place of study. As we talked, they came to know my reasons why I chose this setting, as well my own educational background. While I am not certain how this information may have affected respondents' comfort level, I was under the impression that all participants seemed to feel at ease during our interviews.

#### **4.9 Data Analysis Procedures**

All the interviews were recorded digitally, and I transcribed them as soon as possible following the interviews. I chose to listen to the interviews again during my first read through of each transcript in order to hear the interviews in detail, and listen to participants' intonations in their responses. While listening to the interviews, I made notes of the salient points of emerging themes that might inform my analysis. Following this, I imported the interviews into Atlas.ti<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> A computer program designed for qualitative data analysis.

where I read through each interview several times, coding certain statements, ideas and descriptions of events that related to my initial conceptual framework. At the same time, I also paid close attention to significant themes emerging from participants' responses to questions about their experiences. Some of these themes emerged from conversations started through the interview questions, and others were generated through topics participants raised outside of the interview questions. I have grouped the majority of these codes into 'family' themes. I kept a detailed record of my coding process and noted which codes grew out of a 'family' or generated its own category, as well as when and where some codes and their families overlap or contrast. I applied the same coding process to my interview, informal interview and field notes.

The excerpts selected from the interviews and field notes have been selected to highlight and build upon concepts described within the literature related to the study, as well as to illustrate emergent themes developed from participant's responses. I have presented certain words in participants' quotations in all capitals in order to convey inflection in a statement. Minor changes have been made to some of the quotes from the transcripts to facilitate clarity for the reader.

## **4.10 Ethical Considerations**

### **4.10.1 Power Imbalance**

In designing and implementing this study, I was conscious of Kvale & Brinkmann's (2009) insistence that the research interview is "is a specific processional conversation with a clear power asymmetry between the researcher and participants" (p. 33). The authors note that there does not need to be any exertion of power by the interviewer in order for participants to feel they should express what they believe the interviewer-as-authority wants to hear.



In attempt to negotiate this space, I informed respondents that I was interested in learning about their experiences and opinions, and that there were no “right” or “wrong” answers to the questions I was asking. I found I was most conscious about this process with younger participants, and with respondents who seemed a bit apprehensive when we first met to conduct the interview. During the interviews, the majority of respondents seemed comfortable in exercising their right to not answer questions, and when asking me for clarification of a certain topic under discussion. Overall, participants seemed self-assured in discussing their experiences.

#### **4.10.2 Researcher as ‘Outsider’**

Previous research (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000; Haig-Brown, 2010; Smith 2012) has questioned the role of researcher-as-outsider, particularly in the context of Indigenous participants and non-Indigenous researchers. These works raise the question of how a researcher of outsider orientation can “really understand” if they have not shared in, or been a part of, the experiences of research participants? In response, Narayan contends that instead of debating the role of outsider-research, it is more useful for researchers to “focus our attention on the quality of relations with the people we seek to represent in our texts” (1993, p. 671 in Bishop, 2005, p. 113). Furthermore, Bridges (2002) argues for the importance of retaining a role for outsider research in all communities, on the condition that “one must operate under appropriate ethical constraints and on the basis of proper human respect and care” (p. 72). Hooks (1999) contends that writing about experiences of groups different from our own has value:

It is important for all of us to work at learning more about one another, and such learning is often best expressed in concentrated work and study on another group... Learning about other groups and writing about what we learn can be a way to unlearn and challenge structures of domination (p. 46).

At the same time, she also cautions researchers engaged in this type of work to be aware of their own social positioning, particularly when academic work has been taken up as the ‘authoritative’ voice on a particular subject.

As a white woman in my early thirties who does not have any children, I would like to acknowledge my position as an outsider to both the Bella Coola community, as well as to the experiences of young motherhood or indigenous colonization. As such, I realize I can never fully understand the experiences of the women who participated in my study, nor do I aspire to do so. My intention is to utilize this research as an opportunity to challenge assumptions, and learn about the different experiences that participants shared with me. Fine and colleagues (2003) write about the need for researchers to “come clean at the hyphen,” meaning researchers interrogate the logic of their practice in writing the coproduction of narratives “collected” in the study (p. 195). In this thesis I am presenting one understanding of young mother’s educational experiences in Bella Coola, along with the development of my own comprehension of the phenomenon under study from an unfamiliar place of knowing.

As a graduate student and an outsider, I was sometimes regarded as someone who might impose her own priorities upon the community. While conducting separate research projects in Bella Coola, both Kramer (2006) and Wild (2004) describe being ‘made suspect’ by their outsider status, at least until community members became more familiar with their projects. At the beginning of my stay in town, I received the opportunity to promote the study at the annual ‘toddler fair,’ where a woman asked me what I had “come here to preach” upon learning of my affiliation with a university. However, sentiments such as this gave way to a more positive reception over time, particularly when service providers demonstrated support for this study. As

I became more of a familiar face during my stay I was repeatedly asked if I “had enough interviews yet,” coupled with offers of assistance in the recruitment process.

#### **4.11 Representation**

Throughout this process I often contemplated how best to represent the experiences of each participant, but discussions of social and personal trauma in some of the interviews quickly developed into a contentious issue for me. I had an understanding that social issues would be a factor in my research and analysis, but I had not anticipated how strong of a presence these events would have here. I became acutely aware of the ethics surrounding analysis and representation of this data, particularly given that this research involves groups that have been “historically vulnerable to research” (Smith, 2005, p. 86). For Smith (2005), researchers tread on “tricky ground” when negotiating the “spaces between research methodologies, ethical principles, institutional regulations, and human subjects as individuals and as socially organized actors and as communities” (p. 85). Fine and colleagues (2003) pose the question of what it means to uncover “some of what we have uncovered” and “how do we handle this information?” (p. 182). After careful consideration, I made the decision to include a discussion of these issues in the following chapter, with an explanation of how I intend for these issues to be presented and read.

#### **4.12 Confidence**

While a common concern regarding case study research is that small cases provide little or no basis for scientific generalization (Yin, 2003; Stake, 2005), they have legitimacy in exploratory studies in areas lacking extensive research (Berger et al., 2006, p. 186; Stake, 1995). Other studies that have focused on young motherhood (de Jonge, 2001; Olsen, 2005; Salmon, 2007;

Murdock, 2009) employed qualitative methods and small sample sizes in order to gain in-depth information and the most insight into what is happening with the phenomenon under study. Stake (1995) uses the term ‘intrinsic’ to describe a case study where research is undertaken due to a genuine interest in the case. The purpose is not to “come to understand some abstract construct or generic phenomenon,” but rather to better understand the case of interest (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 548).

Although this sample was small and nonrandom, participants expressed a variety of opinions regarding the roles that pregnancy and motherhood played in their educational careers and occupational pathways. Stake suggests that certain *petit generalizations* can be drawn in case studies; generalizations that are modified and refined that regularly occur throughout the study, rather than an entirely new generalization (1995, pp. 7-8). He furthers this argument by insisting that the “real business” of case study is particularization, where the researcher comes to know a particular case well, placing emphasis on understanding the case itself (1995, p.8).

#### **4.13 Validity**

Stake (2005) contends that case study method is ‘a part of scientific methodology’ and insists upon conventional approaches to scientific rigor (p. 460). The use of multiple sources of data collection can enhance confidence in the study findings, as such an approach enables methodological triangulation (Denzin, 2009). While triangulation is mostly associated with quantitative or positivist studies, qualitative researchers have suggested that the term is not to be taken as literally as it implies. Instead, the technique is a reminder of the need to corroborate findings and to “encourage researchers to use a wide possible range of techniques, rather than rely too exclusively on single sources of data” (Wolcott, 1999, p.220).

The use of multiple methods to examine the same dimension of a research question can serve as “an assembly of reminders about the situated character of action...where it reveals the existence of public and private accounts of an agency’s work... here interview and field data can be combined to make better sense of the other” (Silverman, 2001, p. 235). However, Silverman cautions that the ‘mistake’ in data triangulation occurs when a researcher uses data to adjudicate between accounts, using one account to undercut another, which ignores the “context-bound and skillful character” of social interaction (2001, p. 235). Yin (2003) suggests that when done well, the triangulation of data will support the findings of the case study through converging lines of inquiry (pp. 98-99).

In an effort to enhance confidence in the findings, I have worked to triangulate the data from observations notes, informal and formal interviews. In this thesis, I attempt to give a more detailed picture of young mothers’ educational experiences by studying the situation from more than one standpoint. Although member checks have not been conducted, I returned to the Bella Coola during the writing of this thesis, where I was able to re-examine, question and discuss my findings with others in the research setting.

When focusing on the dependability of results in qualitative research, previous works (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Fine, 1994; Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998; Wolcott, 1999; Guba and Lincoln, 2005; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) have discussed the importance of researcher reflexivity. Ensuring the position of the researcher is described is of the utmost importance when “human beings are the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, and interpretations of reality are accessed directly through their observations and interviews” (Merriam, 1998, p. 203). As such, I have attempted to articulate my position in this study through my description of the

perspective I brought to this research, and how it has been shaped by my professional, academic and personal experiences.

#### **4.14 ‘Limitations’: Time Constraints and Forces of Nature**

In order to conduct this study, I relocated from Vancouver to Bella Coola from September to December 2010. I had prepared to live and volunteer in the community for fourteen weeks, and had planned to organize my time in such a way that was most beneficial for data collection, considering I had been told that it might take several weeks until potential respondents felt comfortable enough to volunteer to participate in the study. I soon realized that the most well thought out plan must be adaptable, as life sometimes throws unexpected challenges one’s way. During the last weekend of September, a heavy rainstorm caused a “flood of record” in the Bella Coola Valley. Within twelve hours, the Central Coast Regional District had declared a local state of emergency and issued the evacuation and relocation of at least 100 people from their residences, myself included.

Called the “flood of the century” and “the worst flood in living memory”, the natural disaster flooded much of the community, cut off Highway 20 and the airport, causing school closures and program disruptions for over a week. Understandably, previously arranged interviews and meetings were postponed as residents attempted to cope as best they could in the given situation. Throughout this event, I contemplated postponing this study until a more opportune time, but I met a variety of community members through my involvement with flood relief efforts, many of whom offered support and encouragement for me to stay and continue with this project. I was very fortunate to receive assistance in problem solving and in formulating new timelines that enabled the study to continue under these constraints.

#### **4.15 Transferability**

Transferability refers to the extent to which research results can be transferred to another context or setting. As an intrinsic case study, this research project was designed as a means to better understand the role young motherhood plays in the educational choices of women living in the research setting. However, Yin (2003) suggests the goal of the case study is to expand and generalize theories, rather than be a representative “sample” intended to enumerate frequencies: “The case study relies on analytic generalization, where the theory then becomes available to others to test and apply in another context” (p. 10). A single case study also has the potential to be extended further into a multiple or collective case study as it is hoped that this process will lead to “better understanding, and perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases (Stake, 2005, p. 446). As such, the findings of this study might be transferable to women who have experienced young motherhood from similar backgrounds in a comparable community in British Columbia.

#### **4.16 Summary**

This study was designed to gain a better understanding of young mother’s goals and needs in regards to family, education and employment. A detailed history of the social and economic history of the research setting provides context for the research findings, which is necessary to consider when examining young mothers’ decision making processes. Previous studies (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2003) indicate that case study method, paired with qualitative data collection, is appropriate for an investigation that concurrently examines the phenomenon within the wider social, political and historical contexts.

## **Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion Part 1, Field of Education**

The purpose of this research was to investigate the educational experiences of women who became young mothers in Bella Coola. In this chapter, findings related to participants' educational histories are presented in relation to their experiences as young mothers, and how adolescent parenthood has affected their life trajectories. This study also aimed to identify barriers and supports that participants must take into consideration when making decisions regarding their education and careers. As such, relationships between economic, education and personal situations and social support networks have been observed. The interaction between influencing factors and decision making processes will be discussed.

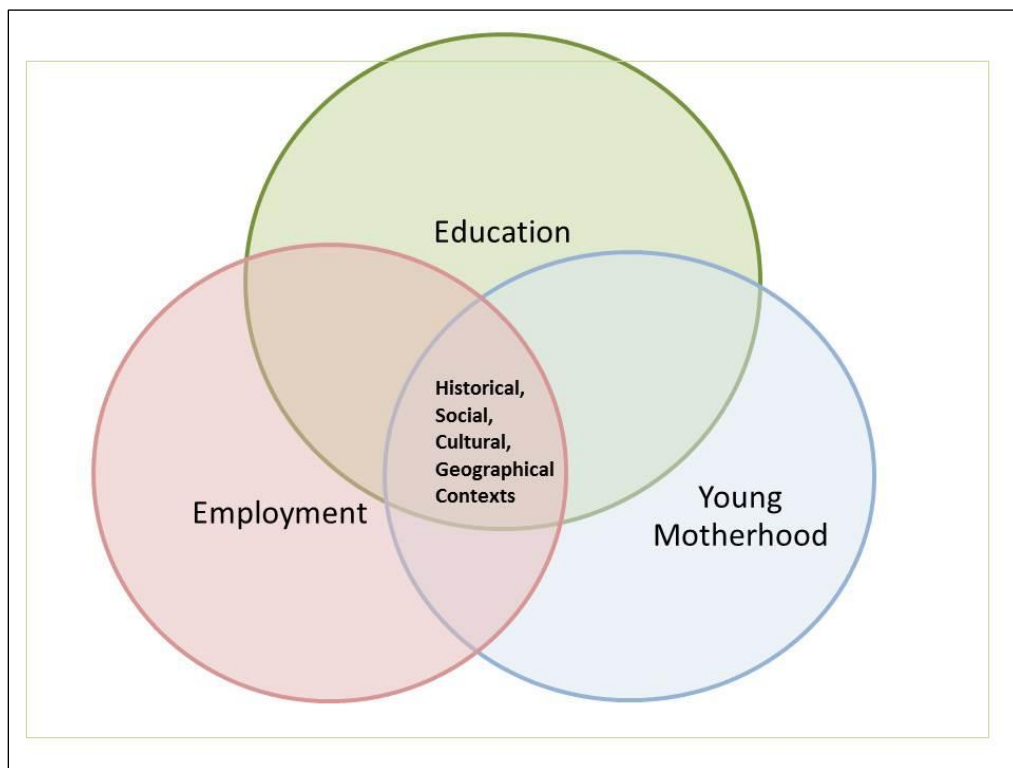
Chapters 5, 6, and 7 are organized according to the research questions set out in the interview schedule, and the broad themes that emerged in my analysis of the interview transcripts. A table of the findings discussed in the following three chapters is presented in Appendix G. In the first section of this chapter, the good choices discourse will be revisited. The works of Bourdieu and Young frame some of the more salient themes in this study. The second section of this chapter addresses the participants' experiences with formal education, and how their pregnancies affected their schooling. And finally, the third section focuses on participants' employment experiences, and their goals related to career development through educational opportunities. Highlighted information from the interviews include the supports, challenges and goals the women discussed.

In Bourdieu's framework, the overarching themes of Education, Employment and Young Motherhood in the findings chapters can be read as fields, and the contexts that decisions are made within are part of the habitus (see Figure 3 below). In the visualization below, the habitus



is centered within the overlapping fields as it is central to the decisions made within the given fields. Young's Faces of Oppression are woven throughout the fields, and they help to illuminate how oppression is rooted in historical events and policies, which have deeply impacted the Nuxalk population in the Valley. Young's theory also frames the discussion of challenges and choices in the field of Young Motherhood.

**Figure 3:** Fields of Education, Employment and Young Motherhood



### 5.1 Making ‘Good’ Choices

As discussed in the Literature Review of this thesis, the “good choices” discourse often designates young women (especially those who are economically disadvantaged) as being “at risk” of leaving school early or becoming young parents, due to their making “bad” choices. Checkland and Wong (1999) contend that this framework is limiting in that it does not make room for a sense of trajectory and change that may take place over the course of a person’s life,

wherein certain issues and need shift in importance as women continue through their life cycle. According to Addelson (1999), this is particularly relevant for young mothers because they do not remain teenagers for long, although they might be cast in that mode for years.

Overall, the general feeling among participants was that of happiness or satisfaction with regards to their decisions around becoming a parent during adolescence. Additionally, the women also reported a general sense of satisfaction with the choices they had made with regard to their parenting decisions. The women who took part in this study were proud to be parenting to the best of their ability, and all expressed a positive outlook for the future of their children. They also hoped to impart to their children certain knowledge and skills they wished they had obtained at an earlier age that would have helped them plan their education and career choices. Amanda disclosed how she continuously works to instill her children with a sense of self-respect as a means of influencing their decision making practices: “That’s what I always tell my kids. You know you have to do it for number one and you’re number one in your life. The choices you make now are going to affect your future, not mine.”

Checkland and Wong (1999) argue that the “good choices” discourse has been oversimplified by linking choice to full responsibility without any knowledge of circumstance. Instead, the authors advocate making distinctions between the questions of whether or not a choice was made, and the question of what conditions made the choice the appropriate and normative course of action for the decision maker: “This reframing of ‘choice’ involves consideration of equality of opportunity, so the question cannot be answered without an “appreciation for the context in which the people under consideration make their decisions” (p. 180). As outlined in chapters 5, 6 and 7 of this thesis, many participants spoke to the challenges

they faced in their experiences with schooling and parenting, some of which had been compounded by discrimination and prejudice from people in positions of relative power. Several participants openly discussed their understandings of their lives, and how their decisions had been shaped by their situational and social locations, and acknowledged they were making the best of their situations with the abilities and opportunities available to them.

Choices are not irrelevant, but instead of “worshipping the mere fact of choice” (Checkland & Wong, 1999, p. 178), policy makers, interest groups and the general public might acknowledge systemic inequities that affect individual choice, and become more informed and sensitive to the broader social conditions that require a collective effort to change (Best Start, 2007). Burns and colleagues (2007) note a growing recognition that personal life “choices” are greatly influenced by the socio-economic environments in which people live, learn, and work. When such environments are found to be oppressive, people need to believe that they can act to make changes in their lives, and they may best be able to do so once they can articulate the places of constraint in their lives (LaRoque, 1994). This analysis of the educational experiences of women who have become young mothers in Bella Coola has been positioned in historical, economic and social contexts. As such, the material context within which these women are “making sense” can be linked to “the very efforts to reflect upon and transform those conditions” (Weiss & Fine, 2005, p. 67).

## **5.2 Theorizing Choices**

Bourdieu and Young offer frameworks for analyzing how people are making sense of the historical, economic and social contexts within which they live. Both theorists examine the process of production, perpetuation and transformation of social orders that influence decision

making processes of individuals and groups. Bourdieu's theory takes into account individual, collective and structural aspects of everyday practices, wherein individuals actively engage in creating their social worlds, but "the structure of those worlds is already predefined by broader racial, gender and class relations" (Bourdieu & Waquant, 1992, p. 144). According to Young (1990), a person's particular sense of "history, affinity and separateness, even the person's mode of reasoning, evaluating and expressing feeling are constituted partly by his or her group affiliations" (p. 45). Reay (2004) notes that as individuals negotiate their self and group identities within their social world, "We begin to get a sense not only of the myriad adaptations, responses, reactions and resistances to 'the way the world is', but also of individuals struggling to make the world a different place" (p. 437). Given this, individual and collective aspects must be taken into account when examining the conditions within which people are making choices in their lives.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, Bourdieu's Logic of Practice is designed to help understand how we react and interact with the structural influences in our lives (Webb, et al., 2002).

Bourdieu (1984) proposed the following formula for identifying practices within structural systems:  $[(\text{habitus})(\text{capital})] + \text{field} = \text{practice}$  (p. 101). According to Bourdieu (1995), a "network of dependencies" between each factor will always exist (p.11). The level/amount and form of capital dictates the level of participation in the field, however the use of capital in any given field is determined by the habitus. In consideration of this, various capitals and fields are present throughout the following discussion, yet the concept of habitus is the most useful interpretive tool for identifying social practices and resources across different contexts.

Bourdieu's habitus is a system of dispositions that produces individual and collective practices that are influenced by the specific history within which the habitus developed

(Bourdieu, 1997; Andres, 1994). Reay (2004) contends that Bourdieu views the dispositions that habitus makes as the products of opportunities and constraints that frame individuals' earlier life experiences (p. 433). As such, thoughts and behaviours are almost automatic once they are internalized into the habitus (Bourdieu, 1991). Webb, and colleagues (2002) note that for Bourdieu, the most crucial aspect of habitus is that it naturalizes itself and the cultural rules, agendas and values it makes possible (p. 40). Given this, habitus is a means of viewing structure as "occurring within small-scale interactions and activity within large-scale settings" (Reay, 2004, p. 439). And when viewing these structures, Hughes and Blaxter (2007) contend that paying analytic attention to how habitus interfaces with a field may build capacity for agency to enact strategies for change. Throughout this chapter, the habitus of the research setting will be discussed as interacting with the fields of education and employment. Young's theory is incorporated throughout in order to best examine the systemic and social conditions that influence individual and collective practices in the research setting.

### **5.3 Education: Before Pregnancy**

At the time of their interviews, fourteen of the sixteen participants had completed their high school education, six of whom had returned to secondary school as adults. Six participants had finished high school as adolescents, three of whom took "time off" from school when they had their children; two women completed their diplomas without any sustained break in attendance after giving birth, and one woman had completed her high school before becoming pregnant. Three participants had not finished high school, but had completed other professional training programs as adults. Only one respondent was an adolescent completing her high school degree.

Out of the sixteen interview participants, eight reported that they had enjoyed school, or thought school was “ok” or “alright” before becoming pregnant. Monica said she “really enjoyed the work” but that she was also “just being a teen too.” She also mentioned that was not able to focus completely on her education due to family responsibilities: “I raised my brother and my sister. Pretty much had them, raised them, so yeah it was a struggle but it was good, I enjoyed it.” Diane and Paula said they liked high school, and both planned on pursuing post-secondary education. Faye discussed how she had been very “goal oriented” during high school, and had planned on attending college: “At sixteen I was in grade ten, and it’s like ok I’m serious. I need to pull up my socks and get it done. All my friends like, my older friends were succeeding, going on to college, and I was like, ‘that’s what I want to do’ I want to get there.’ I had a plan to graduate and then help my parents for a year... then my plan was to go to Abbotsford and go to the Trinity College there. But I met my husband at a summer job in ’97, so it kind of threw a wrench in my plan.”

Two women reported disliking school for a variety of reasons before they became pregnant. Beverly reported that she: “got really bored in school in grade 10 and just quit.” Jennifer stated she had found high school to be “pretty boring” and she strongly disliked the institutional aspect of education:

I thought it was a waste of time...I decided in Kindergarten I hated school, and I never changed my mind. Leaving school did not bother me one little bit. I never liked education. I never liked the way teachers approached it or anything. We just got moved along, shoved along, shoved along with all the rest of it... But you know, it was – I’ve seriously never really liked the system at all.

Several women discussed the ambivalence they had felt towards high school: “I didn’t take it that seriously. I was still kind of young. I was YOUNGER, so you know. I always felt like I

didn't have to try until grade ten, eleven, twelve. It was like, oh you know, these years don't count" (Kate). Both Amanda and Charlotte mentioned that securing employment became more important to them than continuing with school. Emily mentioned that she "didn't care" about school, but continued attending mostly for the social aspect:

I was there because my friends were there. I didn't have any goals. I didn't really care. I honestly, one hundred percent believed I was not going to graduate. It wasn't a goal of mine. I didn't care. I didn't care at all. I was just there because I had to be there. My grandparents had pushed me to stay there, pushed me into the classes that I took.

Hannah mentioned that she enjoyed the social aspects most appealing about high school: "Just being around friends all the time. I thought school was just school."

During my time in the research setting, students at both the K-12 school and the adult Learning Centre mentioned the social aspect of school as being the most important factor for regular attendance. Several younger students (Grades 8 - 11) often indicated they were 'bored' with school, mostly because of the material not being applicable to their real life situations, and they would prefer to leave school if it were not for a parent or family member who insisted on their attendance. These students told me the reason they came to class was to socialize with their peers. (Observation notes, September 8, 2010; October 4, 2010; November 4, 2010; November 16, 2010). The Education Director of the adult Learning Centre mentioned that social interaction was very important for students, and for many school primarily existed as a "place to go in the dead of winter" to see friends and family, and secondarily as a place to "get some work done" (Observation notes, September 13, 2010).

Olivia reported that she enjoyed attending school for academic and social reasons, but she “hated school” due to prejudice she encountered when attending the public school: “There was lots of prejudice. LOTS... and I think most of the kids my age felt the same way. And older. There’s lots of prejudice with the teachers, and they showed it.” She was not the only participant or community member to disclose experiences of mistreatment, and issues of prejudice and discrimination is discussed in depth later on in this chapter.

#### **5.4 Education: After Pregnancy**

For several participants, their education became important to them after they became pregnant. Kate mentioned that she started taking school seriously after having her daughter in grade 10: “I think if anything it just made a more positive effect, because I wanted to try harder, because of her. It was like, I have a daughter now. I have a responsibility. I HAVE to do good in school. I have to go to college. I guess it was more of an incentive, I guess, to do better than what I probably would have.” Grace thought her attitude towards school changed for the better after having her son: “I wanted that much harder to finish school. Before I had him I kinda didn’t really (PAUSE) I was there just doing work, not really learning. And then after I had him I wanted to finish. Get done as soon as possible.” Hannah decided to pursue post-secondary programming after having a child: “I just knew after I had my son that I had to do something. I had to get my education.” Emily said her attitude towards her education changed completely after her pregnancy: “Honestly, I think if you look at my grades before I got pregnant, they were JUST passing. Once I got pregnant? EVERYTHING changed! Once I got pregnant it was, ok now I’m not getting an education for just myself. I have to think about this baby.”



A few of the women found that pursuing their education gave them a more positive outlook on their lives, and they wished to pass the experience on to their children: “You know, for me it’s been a positive change to have, and it’s really encouraged me more to be a better role model for my children” (Amanda). Quinn found that returning to school proved to be inspiration to live by example for her kids: “I want to be a good role model for them, you know finish, and show them and give them a good life too. Show them you can have this. If I can do it, you can do it. So I’m really looking forward to just keep pushing myself to set a good example for them.”

Some of the women mentioned they had always intended to finish high school before becoming pregnant, but then needed to take time away from their studies in order to raise their children. Monica found that continuing her education while caring for a newborn child was too challenging: “I took just a year off. Tried to go back like, right away when she was born, but I found it was too hard for me. Just trying to struggle, like raising her.” Kate told me that she had to leave school for a brief period due to health reasons, although she did not want to:

Yes. I dropped out that year I was pregnant. And I think a lot to do was because of my health. I was really low on iron, and I had thyroid problems, so I was like, sleeping all the time. And I never made it so I just ended up withdrawing. It was not something I really ever wanted to do, because (PAUSE) ever since I was younger I wanted to be the first one in my family not to drop out of school (LAUGHS). But I made a really big point in going back. I made sure I went back. I wasn’t going to just like, ‘Oh maybe next year.’ I made sure I had to go back.

After leaving high school in the tenth grade, Beverly had returned to school to finish high school when she became pregnant: “I was starting the school year and I found out I was pregnant. And so I decided that I would take my daughter, raise her until she got to school age, and then I’d go back to school and finish my grade 12.”

Faye had completed her high school diploma, and had planned on pursuing post-secondary education before she learned she was pregnant. Although she had to alter her plans, she continued to pursue educational opportunities where they were available:

I was planning on going to university and college, but after I had my son it just kind of (PAUSE) I had him a year after I graduated from school, so I was only nineteen years old. And I kinda was like, you know, why? I should've took precautions, I want to get my education, and it just didn't happen though. It did kind of change. I became a mother and that was all that mattered. ...But I felt very, like, very strong willed about getting an education somehow. Through any way I can possible. So I did little courses here and there throughout the year. I did food safe courses and first aid courses and things like that to help me with a local job, or work in the hospital or in a restaurant. Kind of any way I could get something under my belt.

Several women did not return to school until later in adulthood. Amanda had left high school in the eighth grade and then briefly attended an Adult Basic Education program in her late teens, but never returned to finish her high school diploma: "Because when I thought about it, I was already pregnant and it was too late by then to go to high school." At the time of our interview, Amanda had recently returned to school as a woman in her 40's in order to facilitate a career change, and she spoke about how her attitude towards school had completely changed: "I really, REALLY enjoy going to school, I do. I love going to school. I just wish we could make a career out of school (laughs)...But now, today I feel (PAUSE) I just feel it's so important because of the struggles I went through without my education. Oh my god, it was hard." Olivia, also in her forties, discussed returning to school to pursue a career change later in life, and found that she enjoyed the learning environment more as an adult: "We were all in one group and we were all different ages... And we all did group work, so it made it a lot more interesting. That's

because we worked together in groups.” Jennifer remarked that she enjoyed attending programs as an adult far more than when she was a teenage student: “Whenever I did go back to school as an adult I was always really good at what I did. ‘Cause I didn’t HAVE to. I wanted to... and it was geared towards what I was interested in.”

Charlotte left school after becoming pregnant in the eleventh grade, and did not consider returning to complete her high school diploma: “Well, unexpectedly I was pregnant, and we just started life from there. And then everything moved fast. We’ve had another daughter, maybe two years after that. Then our life of building our own home started at the same time. So, everything was moving quite fast, and it’s never been my (PAUSE) my thought to go back to school. Wasn’t really a priority issue when I was growing up.” While she has taken courses related to her work in the health profession, she acknowledged that she has come across specific challenges without having completed her formal education: “Because I can’t help my kids with their own homework. I’m still at the limit... I think just ‘til now I know that the education is important. But throughout my life I knew WORK was important. And whatever work I got I learned from experience.” Charlotte mentioned that she had made a plan to upgrade her English and computer skills in order to pursue more training in her field.

## **5.5 Education and Family**

While education was not a typical part of most participants’ family habituses, almost all participants mentioned that certain family members pushed them to continue with their schooling. Grace said her father had completed his high school education, and was “dead set on all of his kids finishing school” also. Faye shared that father was insistent on his children pursuing their education since he did not have the opportunity to do so: “Dad’s like, ‘No I don’t

want my children to be like me and not have one. Not have a future, and not have a job'... My mom has her grade 12. And she had one year of college and she got her ECE and she's always furthered hers. I think that's why my dad, he knew my mom could help us through education 'cause she had hers, and it was just like, ok." Emily said that her grandparents "pushed" her to graduate, but their pressure did not resonate with her until she became pregnant: "Oh big time. My grandparents pushed me to graduate because only one of their children graduated... So for me to graduate was HUGE, and I think that had been drilled into my mind since I was younger. It really pushed me AFTER I had my daughter. But before then, them telling me about school and stuff, I was like, 'Yes! I heard you! I don't want to listen to you anymore,' sort of deal."

Quinn discussed how not many of her family members had completed high school, but her parents were still supportive of whatever grade level she or her siblings had reached: "Not a lot of us graduated...as long as we tried we were happy." She also mentioned that her parents did not share much about their own education and the difficulties they had experienced: "I haven't really talked much with them about it... They also got sent out to residential schooling, so it was a little bit harder for them back then (Quinn)." Hannah told me that her grandparents had attended residential school for some of their elementary education, and how she felt that had impacted her family's attitude towards education: "But I think that was through residential school, again. They struggled here... That was a big huge effect on, I guess my family life and the way we grew up and stuff. Like, with my grandparents only going to grade five and three, and then they both had to leave to go to work, and they had eight kids." Amanda discussed how her mother's attendance of residential school impacted her own life decisions: "It's just the way we grew up. What we had to see growing up. I think that has a lot to do with your future. It has a

big effect on your education. How you were raised and what you see when you're growing up. The environment you're in."

## **5.6 Education and Children**

Nine of the sixteen participants stated that they hoped their children would pursue higher education. Amanda mentioned that she was "fighting tooth and nail" with her children to ensure they complete their high school education and pursue further training: "It's just a struggle trying to stress to my own children how important it is to get your education...I'm trying to (PAUSE) I'm trying to just stress to them every day when I tell them. You're going to hear it. Because I told them, like, I struggled my WHOLE life because I didn't go to school." Irene said she "definitely" wanted her children to attend university, and Monica said she wanted her daughters to achieve the "highest" level of education possible: "and I really want them to pursue and continue on with their education and go higher than grade twelve." Emily mentioned she would like her children to achieve "some type" of post-secondary education, as long as they are satisfied with their studies: "I don't really care what it is, as long as they enjoy it...I definitely want them to have some type of training. I'll educate them better than my grandparents did on what's out there. I think they'll have a lot more opportunity to just go out there and be able to figure out what they want to do."

Diane wanted her children to pursue "at least university" level training, but she also mentioned she would be satisfied if they completed whatever training they had pursued: "You can't force them to do something, so I would want them to finish at least whatever they decided to go in for. It's really up to them. As long as they get some education. I'm hoping they'll at least graduate. After that you could hope further. So I could hope at least they do some kind of

degree.” Nadine mentioned she would be satisfied if her children completed their high school education: “If they go further than high school that’s awesome. But I’m going to let them make that choice.” Charlotte said that she and her husband stressed that education was important to their children, especially since they had not completed high school themselves. However, she also mentioned that she learned to accept her children’s career choices throughout the process: “And us directing them for their education, and accepting what they wanted as a career was not always in our best interest of what they found, but now that we know that we can’t butt heads with them, accept them for what they find in their own careers. But they are exceeding in their education. In trades. Yeah, and that’s fine also (Charlotte).”

### **5.7 Education in the Community**

Overall, participants felt that community views of educational and career training programs were becoming more favorable. Monica felt that it was becoming more common for younger people to finish high school and continue to post-secondary: “I mean a lot of people understand that now you can’t really get anywhere without your grade twelve, or higher. So a lot of people are back in school. A lot of my young friends that I have went off to college and I’m really happy for them.” Kate found that more community members were becoming interested in their education: “I think – well the vibe I get from everyone is that it’s important. You need to finish school. A lot of even the older people in my family who dropped out are trying to get it now. They know.” Olivia mentioned educational awareness was growing in the Nuxalk community: “I’m pretty sure that everybody that I know is for more education, because we need more people in our world to be trained in teaching, in medicine, in everything. Because we’re going to be around here forever, and we need to be self-sufficient. And I’m pretty sure that all our people feel that way. We need to be self-sufficient and able to grow as a people.”

However, Grace found that while many younger community members she knew saw education as a necessity, some older ones were not as supportive of schooling: “Some people are still looking back in the old days when you didn’t need schooling to do a lot of stuff.” Jennifer mentioned that while community attitudes were changing, certain ‘old timers’ in the community continued to have the mindset that university education is for “the privileged class” and not “the working class,” and those students who pursue further education might be seen as “getting too big and high” for the town. Emily stated that many of her peers had not yet completed their high school education or pursued other courses or training, leading her to believe that education might still not be a “big deal” for some community members: “It’s easy for people to stay at home and collect welfare. I don’t think anybody really strives for it. I don’t think it’s that important. I don’t think anybody cares about their education.”

Faye felt that community attitudes towards education might not be as positive as they were a decade ago due to a generation of students leaving school to pursue work or parenthood responsibilities instead: “I feel it has changed from when I was a teenager... The reason why is because they haven’t furthered their education, so they don’t know how to support their children. So I kind of think it’s at a halt right now.” She also suggested that more family-oriented education programming could be effective in offering multi-generational school-based support: “So I think the passion needs to be more implemented through adult education. If we can reach out to parents, and they can reach their children.” Charlotte found that many adult community members who had not completed their schooling felt that they were viewed as not having valuable knowledge or input to share with the community: “Because we do lose people if they don’t have the education. [It’s Like]“They don’t want me to help”. I didn’t find it useful because they’re lost at the certain education level.”

According to Reay (2004), Bourdieu points out that the operation of habitus regularly excludes certain practices that are unfamiliar to the cultural groupings to which the individual belongs (p.433). Bourdieu (1990) employed the working class as an example wherein an individual will be far more likely to make a virtue out of necessity than attempt to achieve ‘what is already denied’ (p. 54). In many rural areas, the acceptance of educational challenges and opportunities offered through formal schooling can amount to rejecting a powerful and well known community based habitus (Bourdieu, 1990 in Corbett, 2001). Bourdieu noted that the capital accrued from educational institutions only has value “in fields that recognize and share that value” (Webb, et al., 2002, p. 111).

Looker and Andres (1998) posit that community level habitus must be considered when exploring the decision making processes of rural students. According to Corbett (2001), the dynamics of choosing an educational or life path in particular communities is not always coherent, and the decision to stay in rural places represents integration into the community habitus. As outlined in Chapter 2, not much importance was placed on formal education in the research setting, given the history of resource-based industry cycles, as well as its remote location (CCRD, 2009; Wild, 2006). Academic qualifications (or institutionalized cultural capital in Bourdieu’s framework) were historically not valued as being important to the social structure or transmission of knowledge. And specifically for the Nuxalk community, formal education has historical ties to repressive government policies (Kramer, 2006; Nuxalk Nation, 2010).

According to Smith (2003), a school’s habitus is partly the result of institutional habituses that many not be part of the past and present of pupils or teachers (p. 465). Ball (2004) contends that as the curriculum is principally standardized to suit the dominant societal group, it privileges



the capital and interests of this group: “Perhaps most conspicuously, people in rural and remote areas, and particularly Aboriginal peoples on reserves, have not yet benefited from main-stream (especially postsecondary) education, as it focuses on education and practices that tend to be appropriate in urban and/or white communities” (p. 458). Central to Bourdieu’s thesis is that educational institutions, rather than being socially neutral, are part of a larger universe of symbolic institutions that reproduce existing power relationships: “The culture that is transmitted and rewarded by the educational system reflects the culture of the dominant class” (Andres, 1994, p. 122). As cultural capital is acquired primarily through the family, those who do not have the various forms of capital that are valued by the institution will have more difficulty “fitting in” and subsequently, getting through school (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990 in Pidgeon, 2008). Smith (2003) contends that students from backgrounds of significantly different habitus than the school habitus may not feel comfortable attending classes in such an environment.

## **5.8 Support and Barriers**

In this section, the support participants received is described, followed by the barriers some of the women faced as young parents.

### **5.8.1 Childcare**

The majority of participants reported lack of childcare as the most prominent barrier to accessing education or employment opportunities. Nadine mentioned the lack of affordable daycare as a support that is needed in the community: “Daycare is very hard to come by, or very expensive. The daycare here alone costs five hundred and fifty dollars a month. It’s what it was costing the last time I tried to enroll my child for daycare. And that’s three quarters of the family allowance (LAUGHS) and I can’t afford that.” Grace discussed the challenges she encountered

with transportation, since she was attending the public school, and the only daycare service available is through the Nuxalk independent school: “With the bus schedule I had no one to watch my son while I was at school, and I enrolled him in the daycare. But the bus schedule didn’t work and the principal at [public school] said they would not drop me off in four mile to pick up my son from daycare. Because if they did that they’d have to let everyone else stop off in four mile, and they’re not going to bend the rules for me.” Childcare was an issue that also affected certain high school age students who did not have children themselves, but had younger siblings who needed to be cared for during school hours while parents were working or out of town (Notes, November 12, 2010).

In the face of childcare challenges, participants discussed their family and partners as being crucial to their support system. According to Charlotte: “family is everything.” The majority of participants listed one or both of their parents and/or grandparents, and siblings as the most important people in their lives, and who had helped influence the women’s future plans. Diane: “I think because if it wasn’t for my family I wouldn’t have made it as far as I did. Like, they’re always helping me whether it’s with your kids, or just moral support, you know, when you want to give up.” Amanda mentioned that her kids were her strongest supporters in her decision to return to school as an adult student: “It’s my kids that really keep me going... They’re always encouraging me, go and do it mom, I know you can do it. You did this one, you can do this one. So that really, really helps.”

Nine of the women mentioned that their mothers or grandmothers were their primary childcare givers, and that they would not have been able to attend school if it were not for that support: “I was real fortunate to have my gran, my grandmother there to babysit her when I was

in school. So she babysat her from when she was three months old. During the day she'd bring her up to me so I'd feed her and then she'd go back home with her" (Monica). Some of the women mentioned they would offer childcare services to relatives for extended periods of time (over the course of a weekend, for example) as a means of support: "Spending time with the grandchildren helps the mother to get the time that she needs too" (Beverly). Olivia mentioned she helped raise her niece's children during her free time: "On the weekends I have her kids and it doesn't bother me one bit, 'cause she's trying to work."

Three participants also listed the support of their partners as being fundamental to their school completion: "I was on the verge of dropping out. If it wasn't for my husband, he was the one that pushed me. I had a lot of difficulties being pregnant and trying to finish school. So for a few months there I did home schooling... He came, picked up my homework and then dropped it off, and talked with my teachers and principal, so he had a big part in everything (Quinn)." Emily told me the only reason she thinks she graduated high school was because of her boyfriend, who was of age to receive social assistance to stay home with their child, allowing her to return to school: "Once we had her I had to choose one of us first, so I had a month with her, and I went right back into grade 10. So he dropped out of high school and stayed home with her... I'm glad he had as big a role in her life as he did, because I went to school every day." Faye mentioned that her husband was a major support in her ability to begin her career: "He was a stay at home dad and he supported me with my job. He was like ok, do what you need to do to further yourself. Anything extra I could do, he was a support, and he's just always been." Faye also discussed the importance of having a supportive relationship with her partner when they both were planning to continue their post-secondary studies: "So what we're going to do is

stagger it. He'll go for one year, then I'll go for one year. Just so we can both have (PAUSE) one of us can be home with our children while the other one goes to school. Then have full support.”

Almost all community members discussed family as a positive resource in their lives. In only two separate conversations did I hear the suggestion of the concept of family might not be a positive influence in the community. One man was quite cynical about the atmosphere in town, and felt that a fear of success existed throughout the Valley. His reasoning was there's generations of people who haven't gone very far. These people want their kids to succeed, but not to “show them up” (Notes, September 14, 2010). One woman expressed frustration at the ‘love of family’ by referring to it as a type of pathology that holds individuals back from moving forwards with their lives (Notes, November 17, 2010). While some participants and community members disclosed experiencing difficulty with certain family members, family bonds were described as being important and positive overall.

### **5.8.2 School Support**

Some of the women found certain teachers or administrators to be strong links in their support network, helping them to complete high school. Diane mentioned these relationships in the context of benefitting from attending school in a small community: “Well, it's a strong community. You get to know your teachers...and it does help. I got little gifts from some of my teachers when my daughter was born because I was in their classes. And they'd ask ‘Oh how's your daughter doing?’” Emily found the school to be “really supportive: “They helped me out a lot. They gave me two spares, so that I had time to do homework at school and not at home. Because that was the biggest issue was, well when I go home I have the baby all night, ‘cause

[partner's name] had her all day. So I need help with that. How can I get extra help with finishing my homework if it's not being done at home?"

Overall, young mothers seemed to receive positive reception if studying at Acwsalcta or Learning Centre. The teachers, assistants and administrators I spoke with were keen for the students to complete their studies, and were amenable to young mothers bringing their children to school (Notes, September 20, 23 and 25; 2010). The director of Healthy Beginnings believed integration of young mothers in the school was key - the girls would 'have a place' at the school, and being there with little kids could be an effective method of "birth control" for other younger girls who are thinking of getting pregnant (Notes, September 10, 2010).

## **5.9 Discrimination and Barriers in Schools**

Even though many participants found a support base with teachers and administrators in their schools, several women reported incidences of discrimination throughout their high school careers. Emily found most staff at her high school to be supportive: "The principle, the counselor, most of my teachers ... They did whatever they could to help me." However she reported that one teacher was insistent that she should not take his classes:

The first week of school he pulled me aside and said I was wasting his time, I was gonna fail no matter what, and I should just stay at home and be a mother to my baby. And he said that to me three times before I finally dropped out of his course. He really did not want me in there... And he was like, 'You know, I'm going to be marking your work and I know for a fact, and you know, that you probably didn't pass that test, or that quiz, or the homework I send home, you probably aren't going to get done. And I just don't want to have to be listening to excuses about my baby was sick.' So it was like, ok... So I dropped out and I didn't tell anybody about it, which I really regret.

Emily referenced this experience as the most prominent barrier to achieving her academic goals: “I cried so much after that, because I felt as though the nursing was just such a far reach that I wouldn’t be able to ever make it. I was pretty crushed. I will always remember that teacher.” When asked why she did not report her teacher, Emily said her self-esteem had been severely affected by “somebody telling what I feel is true,” and to share that information with anyone else would have been “embarrassing.”

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Olivia told me that she disliked school because of the prejudice she faced from teachers at the public school. Some of the women from both older and younger generations discussed having similar experiences at the same institution. Grace reported being in a challenging school environment before she became pregnant: “I was going before I was pregnant, and it was hard because a lot of the teachers there were really (PAUSE) Not a lot, a couple of my teachers were really, I’d say, prejudiced towards Natives. So it was really hard there. I think I had two teachers that were like that...But then again, you know, you’ll always run into people like that in your life, so you just kinda got to shrug it off.”

Beverly reported being harassed by other students at the public school. Hannah shared how she had been verbally and physically harassed by several white, male students: “It was racist. It was very hard for me to make it through with a few of the guys.” Hannah mentioned that the harassment came to a breaking point where she turned to using violence herself: “I took it into my own hands. I fought a lot...I just wasn’t going to let anybody stand in my way, you know, and take that education away from me.” When asked about how education is viewed in the community, Jennifer reported that she found the school system had a long-standing history of institutionalized racism:

Well, it was kind of a caste system in a way. It was the Norwegians and the Indians. That's basically what it was. And so the Norwegians were the elite. Nothing was too good for the Norwegians. So they really believed in education for their kids, but they always believed in, you know, if there was a job to be had they were going to give it to a local. It was the small town mindset. And so they believed that the Norwegians were very superior people (LAUGHS) they still do basically.

According to Beverly, the most challenging barrier for members of the Nuxalk community was the long-standing practice of teachers to disregard learners who deviated from the norm: 'That's one of the hardest things that I've found with the Native reserve. With formal education. They don't take into consideration people learn in different ways. And they expect you to follow their rules, their way of learning. And I found that a lot of kids fall through the cracks because of it.' She referred to practices of (sometimes unintended) institutionalized racism that went unquestioned in many schools: 'They have this preconceived idea that they can come in and, oh these students should be able to read. Ok? Colonization happened, what, 200 years ago? How do you change the genetic makeup of a person in 200 years? You cannot do it. How long did it take the non-Native people to learn to write? To learn to read? They've had a lot more years of experience with it.'

For the most part, I found staff and administration at the Nuxalk operated schools to be compassionate educators who were dedicated to their students. However, some non-Aboriginal employees of the school were dismissive of the colonial history that exists between Aboriginal populations and the formal education system in B.C. I was informed by a few of these teachers that they wished the Nuxalk community would 'just move on already,' from historical injustices (Notes, September 26; November 12; November 17, 2010). In these conversations, systemic and social injustices stemming from this history were often overlooked, and students' home cultures were pathologized instead.

As mentioned in the methodology chapter of this thesis, previous research in the community (Kramar, 2006; Wild, 2004) reported a distance or communication gap between the distinct population groups living in the Valley. Upon my arrival in town, I was informed by a public health nurse that the community has been trying to break down the barriers between the white and Aboriginal populations for a number of years, but relations were often tense. A particular area of contention for the white population was that Nuxalk mothers had their childbirth travel expenditures for childbirth covered by the government, while white mothers had to ‘pay out of pocket’ to leave town to have their babies (Notes, September 10, 2010). An assistant at the school spoke of the tendency for non-Aboriginal people believed that the Nuxalk living on reserve had everything handed to them on a “golden platter” – meaning government funding and programs - but insisted that it isn’t so, as evidenced by anyone who spends any time on or around a reserve (Notes, November 4, 2010).

In her research on relations between Indigenous peoples and other Canadians, Regan (2010) contends that sentiments such as these are not uncommon in Settler (non-Indigenous) discourses: “Because we cannot change the past, we try to ignore it. Talking about the burden of history makes us feel frustrated and overwhelmed. We don’t know how to put the past behind us, so we get stuck in destructive monologues instead of engaging in meaningful dialogue” (p. 20). The author challenges non-Native Canadians to unravel comfortable assumptions about the past in order to confront and transform the colonial attitudes that are “woven into the fabric of Canadian history in an unbroken thread from past to present” (Regan, 2010, p. 6). While Regan’s work focuses primarily on government and post-secondary institutions, this issue of historical power relations is also enacted in high school classrooms. Most prevalent in educational system is the power held by curriculum developers, textbook publishers, teachers and administrators –



all of which exercise power over determining levels of intelligence or normalcy (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Corbett, 2007; Shields, 2007).

According to Webb and colleagues (2002), education is of crucial importance to Bourdieu because it is the mechanism through which the values and relations that make up the social space are passed from one generation to the next (p. 105). The authors note that throughout his research, Bourdieu wanted to see education promote social change, but his research found the contrary (p. 107). Many policies and reforms have been devised at the federal and provincial level to address current and historical biases in the schooling system, yet it can be argued (as many teachers, students, parents, administrators, and academics have) that the curriculum in the school system continues to be standardized and based upon years of Anglo (and French) Canadian tradition. As such, the public education system privileges the interests of this group, while at the same time perpetuating the power relationships implicit within it (Shields, 2007, p. 19). As the curriculum reflects the dominant discourse and practices of Canadian society, students who are unsuccessful at navigating this system will likely encounter additional barriers to future success.

Within Young's (1990) framework, cultural imperialism would be the face of oppression at work in this situation: "Since only the dominant group's cultural expressions receive wide dissemination, they become the normal, universal, and thereby unremarkable" (p. 59). As mentioned in Chapter 4, cultural oppression and colonization were official government policy until a recent time in our national history, and many Aboriginal students continue to have challenging relationships with formal educational institutions (Haig-Brown, 1988; Furniss, 1992; Battiste, 2000). In light of this, the Nuxalk Nation have developed educational initiatives through

operating Acwsalcta school and Lip'alhayc Learning Centre as a means of restoring traditional teachings, while at the same time meeting government curriculum standards (Nuxalk Nation, 2009).

While this developed has brought hope to the community for a better education for Nuxalk students, Acwsalcta has also faced a number of difficulties: "Over the years the school has witnessed tremendous turnover in teaching and administration staff, an exodus of students into the public system, a disheartening of dedicated teachers and staff, the cancellation of cultural programming, a lack of local curriculum development and emphasis being placed on the BC curriculum" (Coltman, 2002, p. 2). The school administration has made efforts in hiring Aboriginal school administrators, teachers and have attempted to ensure a Nuxalk teaching assistant is involved in every classroom (Notes, September 7, 2010), yet even with these ameliorations, Acwsalcta is still experiencing difficulties developing and implementing the philosophy and goals of the NIB's *Indian Control of Indian Education* (Coltman, 2002).

Cultural Imperialism, while not named directly as such, was discussed in several non-formal interviews and conversations with community members. A white teacher at Acwsalcta disclosed that he felt 'pretty cynical' about the operational structure of the school, since it was maintained as part of the reserve system. He felt this system was a continuing form of colonialism that "exists as an industry to support white people" (Notes, September 14, 2010). While the Nuxalk nation technically operates their schools, the funding, staffing and curriculum requirements continue to be structured by provincial and federal governing bodies – all fields where Aboriginal people are still underrepresented. Consequently, he noted that white educators and administrators from outside the Valley can 'cycle' through working at Aboriginal schools,

while many local Aboriginal community members might struggle to acquire a position at their own Nation's school (Some non-Aboriginal teachers had settled permanently in the Valley, however this number was not equal to the number of teachers who came and went after one to five years).

Young's (1990) face of Marginalization is closely tied to cultural imperialism in this situation. In Young's framework, marginalization refers to the exclusion of certain groups of people from the labour market: "Those who are unable to get and keep steady employment – because of disabilities, education levels, age, historic discrimination, lack of jobs in neighborhoods, the conditions of poverty, etc. – are experiencing marginalization" (Hinson & Bradley, 2060, p. 3). In a community with few employment opportunities, Acwsalcta is viewed as a site that should provide work first and foremost to local and Aboriginal workers. However this was not always the case, for the most part due to historical, political and economic circumstances.

In 2004, Acwsalcta gained Independent school status, where the Nuxalk Nation retain the right to offer an alternative (cultural) education to the public school system, and gain the ability to grant Provincial High School (Dogwood) Certificates to school graduates (BC Ministry of Education, 2009). Gaining Independent school status also required the school to employ certified teachers in order to grant high school completion certification. Given that post-secondary attendance is a more recent trend in the Valley, particularly for the Nuxalk community, not many locals are hired as teachers or administration at the school. Additionally, I was informed by a teaching assistant that while the cultural department educators (art, music and language) had received training, they did not require a Bachelor of Education to teach at the school, but these

teachers were paid less than their ‘regular’ school counterparts (Notes, November 4, 2010). The TA expressed disappointment over a Nuxalk school not valuing cultural teachings as much as the standard curriculum: “Who’s school is it?”

It should be noted that the Valley’s public high school also experienced a high turnover rate of teachers who came from outside the community. Many of these teachers were hoping to ‘put in some time’ in the rural community in order to build seniority hours, and then relocate to more urban areas (Notes, November 27, 2010). The public school system also offered cultural Nuxalk cultural classes, but I did not have the opportunity to speak with any of the teachers who worked in that program. All participants who reported experiencing racism or discrimination from teachers had attended the public school, although one woman noted that the administration was supportive and fired the offending teacher. Two participants of Aboriginal heritage reported not experiencing any problems from staff, administration or other students at the public school.

### **5.9.1 Peer Pressure, Boredom and Judgment**

Several women who were parents to teenagers maintained that peer pressure was of great concern to them. Amanda felt that her kids were easily influenced by their peer group to disengage from their education: “I think it was just basically peer pressure because she saw a lot of her friends going oh I didn’t have to go to school today.” She also felt that peer pressure was a key factor in her kids’ draw to “partying.” Yeah. I think that’s basically the biggest hurdle here is peer pressure. And alcohol and drugs. ...My kids are a prime example. Drinking. Not doing any heavy drugs, but smoking pot and stuff like that.”

Beverly discussed boredom as a causative factor for student disengagement from school: “I feel that a lot of students do get frustrated. A lot of what I’ve heard from a lot of people.

Friends, older people, younger. What are you doing quitting school? Oh, I can't stand going to school anymore...I'm getting so bored with it. Yeah you're getting bored with it well something should be done about the curriculum. And then every year the curriculum doesn't change."

Amanda also referenced boredom as a motivating factor for youth involvement with drug and alcohol experimentation: "build a little community or a little rec centre for our kids. Because this place is just SO unbelievable. It's just wander, wander, wander.... I think that's going to be a really big encouragement for our kids and their education. Get them off the street, get them away from the pot and the drinking."

Hannah discussed gaps in community initiatives as a challenge for implementing youth programming that would engage young people and "keep them out of trouble:"

I think that the community needs to, you know, they do all these programs and they ask, 'what do you want? What do you want?' But they never really go through with it. They bring it so far and then they put a big gap, and then they'll go back to it again. They'll redo everything they did, and then they'll put another gap in there. It's like, well you keep doing these, like why? Find a way to start helping. A lot of them are in trouble with the law. A lot of them are pregnant. Young parents. A lot of them start drinking, smoking, stealing and it's just horrible.

The need for quality recreation programming for young people was a topic that was raised in several conversations with community members, teachers, administrators and health care providers. During my stay in town, I would often see youth wandering around town on any given night. Students told me that typical activities included attending basketball games or watching television, and if those options were not available, they would go looking for a party (Notes, November 12-14, 2010). Some educators spoke about the need for motivated students to leave the community, as 'getting out' meant they would be removed from 'trouble' or 'bad

influences.’ When asked about the possibility of ‘good students’ returning to town as a possible role model, one teacher felt that these individuals would be ‘pulled back in’ to the lifestyle of substance use and partying (Notes, October 30, 2010).

According to Corbett (2001) the messages rural youth receive through the course of their educational careers in community schools are highly mixed. Students come to understand the limited prospects that their communities hold for them, and they also encounter a “mobile discourse – wherein successful people are mobile and unsuccessful people are ‘stuck’ where they are (Corbett, 2001, p. 304). In his study, Corbett found that teachers played a prominent role in the dissemination of the ‘mobile discourse,’ and similar findings were made in this study. Considering that many of the teachers were ‘outsiders’ to the research setting, it stands to reason that their habituses would differ from those of their students. Given this, Corbett (2001) suggests that teachers and students may often understand one another’s position (habitus), and they simply reject each other’s agenda. Some teachers attempted to work within the community habitus as they encouraged students pursue post-secondary education through a various means, including distance or online learning so they could stay in town. Some other teachers were of the opinion that successful students would need to leave town in order to ‘go somewhere,’ or ‘go further’ in life, since they felt the Valley had a negative influence on residents in terms of lifestyle and attitude.

For Bourdieu (1990b), habitus derives from cultural conditioning, but it is not a “fixed essence” operating like a computer program that determines mental or behavioral outcomes (p. 130). As agents construct their own version of the world under certain constraints, they strategize choices within life circumstances and social relationships. The choices people make are subject

to change as their circumstances do, meaning that decision making processes are more complex than a “good” and “bad” binary (Webb, et al., 2002). Regan (2010) notes that it is relatively easy for members of privileged groups to judge the apparent inability of marginalized groups to rise above certain ‘poor’ conditions, and it is equally easy to think “we know what is best for them” (p. 11). When teachers dismiss students’ home and/or community habitus in favor of what they perceive to be ‘good’ life choices they (perhaps inadvertently) neglect to take into account the social and political realities of being a minority in the dominant culture. Given this, Smith (2003) contends that if student achievement, school effectiveness and school improvement are assessed on the basis of external assumptions about desired goals, “clearly those schools will be identified as ineffective, and their pupils' achievement seen as inadequate” (p. 467). The author notes that teachers are more readily able to (re)construct and (re)enact their roles in learning communities, which can bring about a space for change within the institutional habitus (Smith, 2003).

### **5.9.2 Programming and Location**

Some of the women mentioned the limited availability of programs as a barrier to achieving their educational and career goals. The geographic location and isolated nature of the community were listed as the most prominent challenges related to limited program resources. Beverly discussed the challenge in accessing courses in Bella Coola due to the area’s remote location: “Another thing is the isolation and not being able to get a hold of the internet enough to be able to talk with the teachers and get some sort of instruction.” Beverly did not have access to a computer at home, and she found she was unable to access public use computers, as they were only available through the learning centres or the library during standard workweek hours: “There’s no place that’s open that has the internet in the evenings.” Emily discussed the unavailability of certain

courses she wished to complete while she was in town, but she was unable to find a service that offered both the courses and computer lab access.

Hannah felt that the quality of programming offered in the community could be improved upon, especially in comparison to outside communities: “Well I think the education here, though, could be better. Way better. More advanced. I think that it’s behind a couple of years.” She also mentioned that her high school education had not prepared her for the academic requirements of her college program: “I realized I missed out on a lot of stuff... I just kinda got pushed forward. And I missed out on learning how to use a computer, and I didn’t know how to do the math properly or read properly” (Hannah).

Emily mentioned that she and her partner were considering relocating to a larger community in order to access school programming for their children: “There’s just different opportunities that I would like them to explore, and you can’t here. I love it here but, you know, education wise I think it would be better just to be somewhere bigger would be a little bit better.” Beverly discussed how one of her children wanted to pursue a career in heavy duty mechanics, but the program requirements were not offered at any of the schools in the Valley. Three high school students shared that they wished to develop their computer skills, one in the area of graphic design in particular, but no one was available to teach these particular skill sets (Notes, September 17 and November 9, 2010).

## **5.10 Education and Employment**

All participants discussed education as being necessary to gaining access to employment opportunities. According to Grace: “I think it’s really important nowadays. Because you can’t really do a whole lot without your education. It’s really beneficial to a lot of things... I believe



you need school, or your high school, to do pretty much anything now, work wise.” Nursing, teaching, homecare and counseling were the most discussed career choices. Several women discussed pursuing accounting and business management certifications, and a few women expressed interest in furthering their studies in criminal justice or law studies, and culinary studies respectively. Two participants mentioned they might consider pursuing a graduate degree, but they were most interested in building a career in their chosen fields first.

Some of the women acknowledged that work is difficult to come by in Bella Coola, even if they have achieved education credentials or job training: “I try to look for a job. But it’s Bella Coola. There’s not much around here (Diane). Kate mentioned that she was interested in pursuing more training in the design field, but she recognized that she would not find work in her field in her home community: “I really loved it, but I’m not sure, ‘cause then again I want to – one of my goals is I want to live here. (LAUGHS) So, either do that and I could come back and make somewhat of a living, but that’s not really what I want to do. So I’m still undecided.” The Healthy Beginnings program manager stated she firmly believed in the implementation of a job share program in the community in order to build employment skills and “give kids a goal to work towards” once they are finished high school, since they will have an employment opportunity to look forward to. Faye also referenced a job sharing program as creating incentive for young mothers to have a positive outlook for their futures: “Rotate that position so then they have a reason to get out of bed. Ok, I have a job to go to. They’re not scrounging, they’re not looking for a job. Create a job for the young mothers so then they can support their children.”

I heard similar opinions about the relationships between education and employment from students and educators at both the K-12 school and adult Learning Centre. Many students

expressed hope for accessing better job opportunities through achieving school credentials. At homework club meetings, a few high schools students expressed interest in pursuing post-secondary education, noting that this path would be a way to ‘get out’ of the Valley in addition to developing skills and obtaining work (Observation notes , November 2 and November 4, 2010). These same students also discussed the possibility of returning ‘one day’ to be with their families, but they first wanted to achieve economic stability for themselves. Education was not always seen as a necessity by students who planned to stay in town. Some who planned to stay mentioned that they felt education was not as important as developing and maintaining contacts that could provide employment opportunities. (Observation notes, September 10; September 13; September 25, 2010)

Kate felt that education could help create a more positive environment in the Valley, especially within the Nuxalk community: “...if people had their education and they were all working, so I think it would definitely make the community I guess stronger and just better.” For all participants, academic credentials were seen as being necessary to accessing employment opportunities. Economic capital was most important for their ability to access necessary resources to achieve their desired goals in a range of different social contexts. Economic capital was of immediate importance since it was required to access basic necessities such as food, clothing and shelter. It was also fundamental to accessing higher education or career training through post-secondary institutions. In this sense, institutionalized cultural capital and economic capital were linked, as doing well in high school allows access to higher education and funding opportunities for university attendance, which in turn creates access to better career opportunities in acquiring economic capital and financial stability.

## 5.11 Cultural Education

The only form of classroom education that was discussed outside of the context of career building was lessons in the Nuxalk language. Charlotte said learning to speak Nuxalk was one of her top educational priorities: I think for my own education would be to have my own Nuxalk language back... I want to know my own ancestors history.” Monica said she was grateful for her grandmother caring for her daughter for many reasons, one of them being language instruction: “It was good to have my gran there because she was able to talk to her. She just talked to her straight in Nuxalk, so my daughter had an understanding of the language. Which was good, because I never had that. I don’t really know our language, I’m still learning, but she knows a lot more than I do.”

Many members of the Nuxalk community spoke openly with me about wanting to (re)connect with their historical traditions. Several language and culture revitalization initiatives were underway during my time in the research setting, including a plan for the development of a Nuxalk curriculum that would be certified by the Ministry of Education to be used throughout the district (Observation notes, September 7, 2010). I learned through conversations with various community members that there’s a lot of grasping for understanding of past culture, along with a struggle to determine where to go from this point, and how best to move forward (Observation notes, September 17, 2010). Interestingly, I had separate conversations with two Nuxalk women who were keen to develop projects and research associated with land use and traditional cultural expressions (art, dance, canoe trips), however both expressed frustration at not being taken seriously by men in the community who were influential in those respected spheres (Observation notes, November 4 and 16, 2010). These two incidents were the only times information like this was brought to my attention, and I did not have the opportunity to explore this situation any

further. At the debut screen of the local film *Cry Rock*, a notable figure in the Nuxalk community spoke to the audience about the need for dialogue around how to improve – and sustain – Nuxalk culture, as well as the health of the community. He acknowledged that these topics are difficult to discuss, but these conversations are necessary to ‘move forward’ (Observation Notes, September 17, 2010).

### **5.12 Post-Secondary Education**

Education is seen as playing a vital role in the plans to revitalize Bella Coola and help residents capitalize on developing opportunities in newer employment sectors. Given this, a growing trend for employment in the Valley, as demonstrated in the teaching practice, is the requirement of post-secondary credentials. Webb and colleagues (2002) have documented how formal educational qualifications tend to be highly valued within more fields, and it is becoming more difficult to succeed in many fields without the cultural capital such qualifications provide (p. 111). While the perusal of educational credentials was a growing practice in the Valley, post-secondary education was still seen not entirely seen as an immediate actuality for some community members: “A lot of people are still trying to finish their high school” (Kate).

A few women in formal and informal interviews discussed struggling with feeling capable of pursuing different education or career pathways on a personal level. Self-elimination from education or work opportunities had been reported more often by participants in an older age demographic (forty and older) in comparison to younger respondents. Amanda and Jennifer explained that they felt unable to pursue coursework as younger women due confidence issues in terms of engaging with the material or school environment. These women also disclosed that their partners during this time were unsupportive and resistant to their perusal of coursework or

job training. While these women believed education was important, they felt inhibited by time and costs required to complete any formal courses. Beverly, Charlotte, Faye and Olivia discussed this phenomenon taking place at a community level for adults in their late 30 to mid-50s. Many community members in this age bracket were employed during the ‘boom’ industry cycle, and some had left high school before completion in order to gain employment. These women also disclosed that they felt men in this age group were more resistant to pursuing educational or vocational training than women, due to a matter of lowering self-esteem or pride in admitting the need for educational or vocational training at their age.

In the field of education, Bourdieu & Passeron (1979) observed that pupils from low economic backgrounds typically do not see post-secondary education as a realistic option for themselves, and consequently refrain from even applying. Self-elimination as a type of exclusion is the work of habitus: “It occurs when individuals adjust their aspirations to their perceived chances of success... Individuals also exclude themselves from specific social situations in which they feel uncomfortable because they lack familiarity with specific cultural norms” (Andres, 1994, p. 130). Additionally, Smith (2003) contends that institutional habitus is at play in post-secondary institutions even more so than in high schools: “If there is a high degree of congruence between institutional... and class habitus of the clientele, students from backgrounds of significantly different habitus may be deterred from seeking entry (Smith, 2003, p. 467).

In a Bourdieuan framework, habitus and field are mediating factors that “both enable and constrain the exercise of individual agency as well as wider structures of power” (Colley, 23, p. 94). However, Corbett (2001) found that young people experience multiple and sometimes competing habituses that are mediated by class and gender, even in small, close-knit

communities. Local habitus is often called into question by outsiders who are not rooted in the geographical or social place of the community (Corbett, 2001). As such, individuals find themselves trying to balance competing discourses of localized education with the increasingly national and globalized nature of the curriculum. Additionally, education is commonly seen by outside teachers as a right of any individuals who makes the “right” choices: “The importance of good deciding making is the hallmark of contemporary educators’ idea of what schooling ought to provide” (Corbett, 2001, p. 277). Corbett (2001) notes that the difficulty with this view is that it fails to address the varying levels of access mediated by factors of class, race and gender represent in a school environment.

### **5.13 Financial Issues**

Most participants reported that financial support was one of the most important resources required to pursue their goals. Several women acknowledged they would most likely need to access student loan funding if they could qualify. Jennifer mentioned that she would not object to taking on debt if it enabled her to focus on her program: “Quite frankly, I would like to get a student loan if I could. I don’t want to have to worry about how I’m going to have to be carrying these workloads. I would just want to totally focus and concentrate on my schooling. And if I felt that would have to stop to go to work at McDonalds or something to help pay for my schooling, that would be really difficult.” Beverly expressed concern over the necessary requirements to qualify for loans or bursaries; “How many people do you know that, if they’ve been raising kids and stuff like that, have a very good credit rating? So you can’t really get loans, student loans, you can only get like bursaries and stuff like that. And you have to apply for them and you have to know the deal. And a lot of people get lost...in paperwork.”

The majority of Aboriginal participants acknowledged they received some funding through their respective Bands, although this amount might not be enough to fully cover costs: “I know with our Band it’s nice that we are covered. I understand that it’s not very much, but it sure helps to cover our book cost, and our living cost. But that’s where grants and student loans come in” (Monica). Emily mentioned that certain limitations were also placed on Band funding: “Because you get living allowance from the Band if you’re in school but not throughout the summer. And I still took courses through the summer time but they didn’t fund students through the summer.”

Corbett (2001; 2007) maintains that social class is a problematic issue affecting access to post-secondary education, particularly with increasing tuition and living costs. For individuals in economically depressed areas, attending university or college typically means must forego (admittedly limited) known job opportunities in a known place of residence in order to participate in a typically unknown experience for questionable returns (Corbett, 2001, p. 299). All participants felt that going (back) to school was the ‘right thing to do,’ however some felt that it might not prove to be as fruitful as they hoped for Emily and Hannah expressed concern at being unable to secure full time employment in the Valley, even though she had achieved the necessary credentials for their respective lines of work. Other participants disclosed similar concerns about higher education pursuits, especially in consideration of the financial costs and time spent away from family support. In an effort to in an effort to help familiarize Nuxalk students with university or college campuses, the director of the learning centre organized tour of several institutions in BC’s interior. He noted that the majority of adults in the community had little to no experience with such environments (Notes, September 8, 2010).

## 5.14 Relocation and Mobility Issues

Discourses surrounding educational choice generally assume mobility, and in single industry and rural communities the “norm” is a tendency to stay in the community, whereas leaving is moving into a foreign space where outcomes are unknown (Corbett, 2007). Training for most employment opportunities are not available in the research setting, and very little – if any – supports were in place for those who want to study away from the Valley. Several participants raised the issue of relocation as a barrier to pursuing post-secondary education or other training programs. Participants who left the community to pursue further schooling or training opportunities reported experiencing many challenges throughout the transition period. Hannah reported periods of loneliness, Diane and Charlotte reported feeling socially isolated. Most participants expressed concern over access to childcare in a larger town or city, and disclosed that they generally do not trust anyone besides a family member or close friend to care for their children. Kate reported feeling uncomfortable or uncertain about the safety of her children in an urban environment, particularly in the context of childcare: “I still don’t feel comfortable – they feel like strangers to me... Growing up in a small town, I guess.”

Relocation was discussed as a barrier to pursuing post-secondary education or other training programs. Hannah found moving away from Bella Coola for a brief period to be very difficult as she was separated from her main support system of family and friends. Quinn mentioned that she would like to complete a program through UBC, but she expressed some anxiety over leaving a small centre for a much larger city: “I’m not ready to move yet. I don’t really want to (PAUSE) I’ve lived here in a small town all my life, so moving out to a big city is kinda scary. I’m raising a child of my own when I haven’t really been out of Bella Coola much.” Amanda was concerned about the consequences of “uprooting” her family for six months in



order for her to complete a program. The Healthy Beginnings program manager told me she believes the best practice for the community is to “bring people into town” to complete training for a group of people, as relocating can prove to be difficult and cost prohibitive for many community members.

Four participants also reported experiencing challenging childcare situations when they moved out of town to attend post-secondary programs. Diane and Kate both found it difficult to access reliable, affordable daycare during the time they had relocated. Both women discussed how their respective mothers had looked after their children in Bella Coola (one child each) while they attended school elsewhere in the province. Kate mentioned that she experienced moments of doubt about the living arrangements: “It was really hard without my daughter. Like, ‘What am I doing? I should just quit and go back home and see her. She’s too little for this. I’ll just come back to school another year.’” However, she also contrasted these feelings with the challenges she faced of juggling school with parenting responsibilities when her toddler came to visit: “You really want to do your homework because you don’t want to FAIL (PAUSE). You definitely don’t want to fail, but then you don’t want to just keep ignoring this little girl who is just being cute.” Emily mentioned that she could not find daycare that suited her class schedule, or partner’s work schedule, which resulted in her mother relocating to join Emily’s family to provide childcare.

In his study on education in rural communities, Corbett (2001) found that family ties and employment opportunities are the principal influences constraining post-secondary participation among rural youth. Additionally, the author notes that many rural students had a definition of ‘the good life’ that rests upon “rural values of community, family, close contact with nature and

personal autonomy; values these students thought they would be unable to realize in urban environments” (Corbett, 2001, p. 19). In this study, participants discussed similar factors as being motivators to their desire to stay in their home community, particularly family. All participants in formal and informal interviews referred to family as an important factor in their own lives, as well as for the majority of community members. The director of the Learning Centre expressed concern universities attempting to recruit Nuxalk community members, as they do not consider flexible scheduling for family and community events when organizing programs for Aboriginal students. He felt that inflexible programming was the primary reason so many Nuxalk students choose to turn away from post-secondary institutions: “school is just one phase of life. The school won’t be there for them for the rest of their lives, but family will” (Notes, September 8, 2010).

According to Kuokkanen (2004), academic research often addresses the issues of invisibility, marginalization and under-representation of certain student populations in universities and colleges, yet from the perspective of the academic institution, these concerns are often defined in terms of inadequate achievement, retention and attrition. The author notes that the representatives of educational institutions usually focus on the students when seeking solutions to ‘retention problems’ rather than on themselves, the institution and the structures, discourses, practices and assumptions that operate in the academy. (Kuokkanen, 2004, p.1). Given this, Kuokkanen (2004) suggests a shift in the school’s community of practice instead of trying to mainstream students (particularly those of Indigenous heritage) into the conventions of the institution. According to Smith (2003), organizations can continually construct and re-construct their own habituses, allowing for institutional change to take place (p. 465). In this sense, educational institutions are capable of ‘doing their homework’ in addressing flaws and

programming in order to offer a welcoming environment to students from various backgrounds (Kuokkanen, 2004; Pidgeon, 2008).

The completion of secondary education and/or perusal of post-secondary studies was considered to be important to all participants. Some of the women were critical of certain aspects of school, but they did not reject education itself, as they stressed that it would play a significant role in assuring their future career choices. Almost all participants who had completed some form of education were the first ones in their immediate families to do so. While educational completion may not have been a norm for participants' families, most of the women mentioned how their parents or grandparents always stressed the importance of education (academics or trades) in order to increase the chances of obtaining a 'good life.' Although relocation for education or training was often a difficult transition, hope was expressed in formal and informal interviews for people to get their education, and then come home to work for their community.

### **5.15 Summary**

Overall, participants were highly motivated to further their studies as a means of securing better employment in order to provide for themselves and their children. The women had mostly found positive experiences in their schooling, however they also faced a number of challenges associated with being a student-mother including childcare and financial concerns.

## **Chapter 6: Findings and Discussion Part 2, Field of Employment**

In this chapter, participants share information about their past experiences and future goals in the field of employment. Participants' educational goals are discussed in relation to work opportunities, and participants' attitudes towards social assistance are addressed. The 'boom-bust' economy of rural BC is revisited, and participants' views of the gendered division of labour are discussed.

### **6.1 Field of Employment**

Obtaining meaningful work was a critical concern for participants, along with the community as a whole. In keeping with the statistics discussed in the literature review, respondents also acknowledged that not many job opportunities existed in the Valley. Historically, the area's economy has been predominantly based on resource extraction, however the community can no longer rely on logging and fishing as it used to (Markey, et al., 2005). Some people in town felt that post-secondary education did not hold much incentive since the local economy was still slow. During an informal interview, the public health nurse in town asked "Why would education be desirable if there are not jobs?" Currently, the fields with the most employment opportunities are local governance, education, social services and health services, and investments are being made in tourism and agriculture (CCRD, 2009). Many of these positions were being filled by people recruited from outside the Valley, and participants were motivated to complete and/or further their studies in order to obtain or retain jobs.

Most participants were working at balancing a number of activities in their lives, including work (part-time or full-time), school or coursework, childcare, health issues, and coping with poverty. At the time of their interviews, 6 women were working full time, 4 part

time and one was self-employed (she set her own schedule). Two of the women were full time students, and two listed full time mothering duties as their current work situation. Almost all participants discussed the importance of education in relation to job opportunities at an individual and community level. All participants were hoping to secure employment in a field that was interesting and meaningful to them, and that would also provide a stable enough income to support their families. Most women also hoped that higher levels of education throughout the Valley would better job opportunities for the community as a whole.

Scarcity of employment in the Valley was an issue raised in both formal and informal interviews. A few of the participants were actively looking for work, but were experiencing difficulty in finding anything: “it’s Bella Coola. There’s not much around here” (Diane). Several participants (Amada, Beverly, Charlotte, Faye, Hannah, Jennifer and Olivia) reported they had spent periods of time rotating through whatever positions had been available to them at the time. Amanda and Emily mentioned that while they had secured employment at the time of their interviews, their partners were unable to do so. They were of the opinion that both men and women were affected equally by unemployment in the community. As full time employment was lacking in the Valley, many people engaged in seasonal work that was considered to be part of the informal economy as a way to make a living (Markey, et al., 2005).

In their study on behavioral patterns of rural youth, Brandau and Collins (1994) found that many people from rural working class backgrounds choose community life and integration into ‘unskilled’ or ‘semiskilled’ marginal employment and social assistance over migration to more stable and lucrative urban opportunities (in Corbett, 2001, p. 19). Family and community connections were the primary reasons why residents stay in the Valley, even during times of

great economic instability. Participants acknowledged they had support networks of family and/or friends to help with ‘hard times,’ whereas they had no safety net when they left town and were out on their own. Amanda, Diane, Emily, Hannah, Jennifer and Kate discussed the difficulties they had experienced when they relocated to other areas for employment and training opportunities. These women eventually returned to Bella Coola in order to be close to their families, even though stable and meaningful work was difficult to come by.

While employment might be difficult to achieve in Bella Coola, several participants felt that completing their education was an important step in securing employment. Some of the women talked about securing employment that would be meaningful, but also lucrative enough to support their families and achieve economic independence from social assistance programs: “I think it [education] will build up different jobs and everything for the people in the community, so they’re not on welfare” (Quinn). Amanda was determined to access more employment opportunities through continuing education, and make a living wage: “I do NOT want to go back on welfare. Been there, done that, you know. It’s just not enough to survive on.” Olivia mentioned that she had stressed to her kids that education was “very important” to continue past high school in order to earn a living: “There’s no way I was going to allow my kids to sit around and collect welfare. There’s no bloody way. You go out, you make a living, you earn it. You don’t go and sit around and do nothing. You’re not doing that in this house.”

Without further education, some women saw themselves working in low wage job sectors, or becoming reliant on welfare assistance, which is a future they wished to avoid: “Because I grew up on welfare and I HATED it. So that was one of my big (PAUSE) and in my kindergarten yearbook, all I said, ‘when I grow up I want to be a lady who works’. (LAUGHS) I

didn't care, it's just always been part of me, I've always wanted to be somebody who works" (Kate). She also felt that education could help create a more positive environment in the town, especially within the Nuxalk community:

I think it would help people to do better things, 'cause I don't think welfare has a positive effect on people around here. 'Cause you know on the first of every month you're going to hear a party. You know there's going to be some drunk people walking around on the rez. I don't think that would be happening if people had their education and they were all working, so I think it would definitely make the community I guess stronger and just better.

Emily expressed concern about not being able to find work in her home community, and that she would be required to leave if that were the case:

I love it here. I don't mind living here, but to live here I want to be able to work. I don't want to live on a welfare cheque. And that is my only issue. I can move back home and work, I'll be fine with that. My whole attitude was to graduate and make something of myself in order to support her because what else do you have here besides welfare. And I don't think welfare will cut it. For what I was looking for. I was looking for a better life for her then (PAUSE) not necessarily what I grew up in, but in general, of the general population here.

Hannah returned to school when her son was school aged in order to pursue employment in her field of interest: "I went back and I thought, 'Ok well, I need to upgrade and I need to do something with myself.' Because I couldn't live on welfare the rest of my life. And that's what really pushed me through going back to school." Hannah did secure part time work when she returned to Bella Coola, but she continued to face financial challenges. She mentioned that even though she loved her job, she sometimes felt resigned to returning to income assistance programs in order to afford her living costs: "So I still find it tough... And I said it's either food or rent, and sometimes I just go with just food... Sometimes I feel like, 'ok you know what? I only make

a little bit more than I do on welfare. I'm willing to go on welfare because they'll pay for my bills and they'll pay for this and that.”

## **6.2 Social Assistance**

Participants were driven to remain “off” the income assistance system, largely because of the negative esteem issues and stereotypes associated with it. The next section of this chapter will focus on participants’ experiences of adolescent parenthood, and the outcomes of these experiences.

As mentioned previously in this thesis, the Valley has one of the highest unemployment rates in the province, and many community members depend on social assistance. While the Valley ranks as having one of the lowest income levels in the province, participants saw accessing social assistance in a negative light. Most participants associated assistance programs with social and geographical immobility: “you don’t want to be stuck here on welfare” (Monica). Kate disclosed she despised being on welfare throughout her childhood, and Olivia insisted she would never want her children to rely on social assistance. Amanda and Emily disclosed that they would never want to return to the situation of needing welfare, as the small amount of financial assistance was not enough. Beverly, Hannah and Nadine acknowledged that they did not want to depend on social assistance programs, but they would access income assistance programs when their respective employers could not provide enough hours. These women noted that without training, most of the jobs available in town were either part time or entry-level, which could amount to less than social assistance benefits.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 4, the unemployment rate in the Valley is one of the highest in the province, and many residents have accessed social assistance. Although accessing



welfare is a common occurrence in the community, the stigma associated with being on welfare, coupled with the small amount of financial assistance, leaves residents with negative impressions of receiving assistance benefits, even if it is the only option available to them (Notes, September 10; November 4; November 14, 2010).

Contrary to the stereotype of “welfare mom” or “welfare queen,” these women did not demonstrate the traits for which recipients of government assistance are often criticized. Most participants aligned themselves with mainstream beliefs about education and work. While these women did not directly address the negative stereotypes associated with receiving welfare payments, they did speak to the need to model good work ethics and decision making skills for their children – traits that are oppositional to the dependence rhetoric that is often associated with collecting government benefits. The women who addressed the ‘cycle of dependency’ in their interviews wished to remove themselves from such a situation as they felt it was a negative cycle for themselves and the community. This cycle was discussed in several formal and informal interviews, and Aboriginal respondents felt it was particularly necessary to move away from living under government control (Beverly, Charlotte, Kate, Olivia; Notes September 10, November 4 and December 13, 2010). These women felt the development of education and skills were imperative to building resilience at an individual and community level.

Participants felt it was important to remain off welfare, but they also listed schedule flexibility and child care as being crucial to balancing their family needs with their employment needs. Caring work was valued by participants – they took pride in their work as mothers, and valued the role family played in their lives. At the time of the interviews, 11 of the women had young children, and 5 had older children (late teens or adults) and were helping with their

grandchildren or with other family member's children. In her study on women transitioning from welfare to work, Andruske (2003) notes that women's unpaid, caring labour helps create and sustain the social and economic fabric, and as such caring work should be made visible and included in social policy discourse and the design of formal services (p. 19).

Hinson & Bradley (2006) contend that women on welfare experience marginalization when they are stigmatized as non-productive members of society, "even if they care for children, sick relatives or elderly parents" (p. 3). Several participants mentioned they were fortunate enough to receive government assistance (parental leave or EI) in order to care for their children or grandchildren as a means of avoiding the high costs of daycare. Nadine informed me that more feasible financially for her to care for her children full time and pursue education part time in order to meet her living expenses: "The daycare here alone costs five hundred and fifty dollars a month. It's what it was costing the last time I tried to enroll my child for daycare. And that's three quarters of the family allowance (*LAUGHS*) and I can't afford that."

According to Young (1990), welfare redistributions do not eliminate large-scale suffering and deprivation. Even if material needs are met, the author contends that marginalization does not cease to be oppressive once individuals have access to shelter and food, because marginalized people dependent on bureaucratic institutions for support or services are: "subject to patronizing, punitive, demeaning and arbitrary treatment by the policies and people associated with welfare bureaucracies" (Young, 1990, p. 54). None of the participants who had received welfare benefits reported being treated poorly by government officials, but some mentioned that they had experienced difficulty navigating the system in terms of making application to the

appropriate governing department. According to Nadine the process was “a whole lot of paperwork” to complete, without much – if any – help available to sort out the process.

On the other hand, the patronizing and demeaning treatment could often come from within the community. In an informal interview, a community leader disclosed her disappointment in some middle-class community members who viewed those in a lower-income bracket as being ‘stuck’ in the few low wage or part-time work, or on social dependency. She noticed a tendency for those living up-Valley to associate the social problems in the area with the reserve. She discussed incidents and previous health reports that proved otherwise, but social issues that affected the up-Valley community were often ‘hush-hush’ (September 9 and December 13, 2010). Young (1990) discusses the notion of ‘policing the poor,’ wherein those receiving social assistance are judged for their dependency on the system, along with their decisions, lifestyle and how benefits are utilized. Several teachers spoke directly to me about their desire for parents to ‘prioritize’ the needs of students – new clothing instead of cell phones (Notes, November 12, 2010). While new and weather appropriate clothing are important, and cell-phone use proved to be a problem in some classrooms, a guidance counselor informed me that most parents and their children communicated with cell phones as they were easily obtained and more affordable than a home-based land line or internet connection (Notes, September 7, 2010).

As exemplified in the above paragraph, a common stereotype in the research setting was of welfare recipients, especially young mothers, being frivolous with the spending of their benefits. This discriminatory view fits with the society-wide discourse that marginalizes welfare recipients. It is plausible that some people receiving benefits may be careless or abusive of the

system, but numerous studies have proven that this type of behaviour is not typical of individuals receiving government support (Gustafson, 2011; Mollborn, 2011; Stapleton, 2010; Longhurst, 2008; Olsen, 2005). The women who discussed receiving welfare in both formal and non-formal interviews spent almost all of their benefits on housing costs, and they had routinely struggled to meet the monthly household needs of food and supplies. Hinson & Bradley (2006) note that welfare recipients often learn that ‘dependence’ is a dirty word due to the perpetuation of discriminatory rhetoric in oppressive power relations. They contend that societal worth is based on people’s earning power, and as such people who are considered ‘non-productive’ and ‘dependent’ on others are unfortunately treated as second-class citizens (p. 3).

While several participants discussed their struggles with securing adequate housing or employment, and ‘making-ends-meet,’ they did not necessarily consider themselves to be poor. Beverly was the only woman to directly name the issue of poverty with her comment: “we’re called what they call the working poor. You can’t get ahead living here. Getting the small amount that you get.” Beverly was one of seven respondents who felt that ‘getting ahead’ was particularly difficult for community members living on reserve. Hinson & Bradley (2006) contend that members from marginalized groups often experience difficulty in obtaining work – affecting their future career aspirations – and this is particularly true for Aboriginals living on reserve, as they may be marginalized by high unemployment rates and few opportunities to develop marketable skills. The authors note that multiple barriers - including low skills and education, disabilities, caretaking responsibilities, domestic violence, inadequate transportation, and housing insecurity—stand in the way of finding gainful employment (Hinson & Bradley, 2006). As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, almost all of these issues were mentioned by

participants as being barriers to educational and employment opportunities. However, these women also expressed determination to not let these incidents deter them from their goals.

### **6.3 Local Economy and Habitus**

Attempts have been made to reinvigorate the local economy during the ‘bust’ phase Bella Coola has been experiencing, but some community members feel that economic resilience will be difficult to achieve without the necessary education or skills to facilitate such a transition.

Hannah mentioned that she would like to see more local people being employed by service providers in town, but the lack of training has prohibited this from taking place: “I notice that a lot of the jobs, because we don’t have the right education, go to people who are out of town. You see that all the time.” Some concern was expressed in formal and informal interviews about the government’s role in this process, considering multiple agencies were involved in the fields of education, employment and family services. The Healthy Beginnings program coordinator stated that the Nuxalk community has a ‘brain trust’ that holds a lot of important information (historical, geographical, artistic, technical and cultural), but this knowledge is not seen as being valuable by outside standards, particularly those of the government. Consequently, she felt that many people in the Valley tended to focus on the disadvantaged situations they were in, which brought about a continued sense of low self-esteem throughout the community (Notes, September 10, 2010).

The director of the Learning Centre shared his theory of “economic imperialism” that he saw taking place in the Valley. He had seen this process take place in other rural and resource-rich towns, wherein large, and usually white owned/operated companies come into a small community, take the resources of the area and then leave. Community members are employed

during the ‘boom’ cycle, and the town is left to “pick up the pieces” when the company leaves. In his opinion, this phenomenon had a very serious impact on the mindset of the community and the self-esteem of community members (Notes, September 7, 2010). A public health nurse explained that the town was experiencing difficulty in reclaiming its infrastructure when all of the key services are being outsourced, and local people are not being trained. She disclosed that she felt the economic situation has the biggest impact on the mental health of the community, resulting in a sense of depression about what can be done to improve the economic, social and emotional health of the Valley (Notes, September 10, 2010).

In this sense, the community level habitus followed the pattern of the ‘boom-bust’ economic cycle, as it was (re)created in the field of job options. Habitus of community members would vary based on the opportunities they saw being within their realm of possibility. Service providers spoke to a sense of powerlessness many community members felt when faced with the economic choices available, particularly for community members living on reserve (Notes, September 9, 2010). For Young (1990), the face of powerlessness includes the dimension of social status as it relates to social class, noting that it directly affects individuals living in poverty, working in exploitative labour markets, and who are marginalized through social welfare programs (p. 58). Nall (2012) contends that the dominant discourse informs those living in poverty that they will only receive dignified treatment once they have earned a (post-secondary) education. The author notes this “get an education mantra” serves to cover the systematic exploitation of working class labour by both ignoring the working poor, and assuming the solution to poverty is to pull oneself up with the educational ‘bootstrap’ (Nall, 2012).

Young (1990) also notes that individuals affected by powerlessness are exposed to disrespectful treatment because of the status they occupy, which is often considered to be bereft of social respectability by those who occupy high status positions. Hinson and Bradley (2006) discuss how the notion of respectability – who has it and who does not – intersects with class, race and gender in many ways, and this is often overlooked in dominant discourses of employability (p. 3). According to McCall (1992), occupation becomes the primary organizing variable for positions in social structures when individuals are working under operational constraints (p. 840). The author lists gender, ethnicity, age and geographical place of residence as secondary principles of selection and inclusion, and contends that these ‘hidden, unofficial and real’ principles often remain hidden behind nominal categories such as educational qualifications.

All respondents in formal and informal interviews felt that achieving educational credentials was important for employability purposes. However, several participants acknowledged that social capital might be more useful in acquiring work in the field of the labor market in Bella Coola, as getting a job in an area where there are few opportunities available could be dependent on “who you know” in town. Diane commented on community members who are able to secure employment without much education or formal training: “I wonder if it [school] really matters. It does, but you see a lot of people without education are getting jobs, or people who do have an education aren’t getting any jobs. It feels like a lot of it is who you know here.” Social networks are integral to life in rural communities (Corbett, 2001; Kramar, 2006), and the social capital associated with an individual’s network can allow for strategizing in changing economic circumstances (Enns, 2008). The composition of these social networks is a key aspect of their associated capital, as the type of network will determine what kind of

resources individuals will have available to them (Enns, 2008). Several Nuxalk respondents discussed their Band as the predominant employer on reserve, and having a connection to a council member who could ‘put in a word for you’ was often seen as a viable option for securing work (Notes, November 12, 2010).

Alternately, respondents who did not have such networks or capital reported being excluded from opportunities they felt they might otherwise be able to access. Beverly and Hannah discussed how they would like the opportunity to work for the Band in their respective fields, but had not yet succeeded in obtaining even an interview, and they felt they might not have the ‘right connections.’ Enns (2008) discussed similar findings in her study of social capital in three BC communities. The author found that the strong ties that brought benefits to members of one group also worked to bar members of another group from accessing community resources. According to Enns, a community-wide conception in Old Massett is that the relatives of the Haida Band Council members in may benefit from access to those resources by means of their strong ties, “members of other families not in power may be unable to gain such access as they are outside of the clan, and have only weak ties to those inside” (p. 349). Enns noted this led to a negative effect within the community, with accusations of unfairness being leveled against the group or family in power (2008, p. 350).

Similar to Enns’ findings in Old Massett, several respondents in this study expressed frustration or disappointment at the perceived power imbalance between insider-outsider ties to Council members. During an informal interview, one Nuxalk woman reported that she had been “blackballed” by the Band administration many years ago, which prompted her to leave the Valley and pursue post-secondary education. She had returned to the community in order to



develop a land use project, but the “men on the [governing] boards’ were resistant to approve her project ideas (Notes, November 4, 2010). Consequently, she disclosed she was applying to graduate programs as a means of gaining entry in to her field, as well as credibility at a higher (Provincial) level of governance (Notes, November 4, 2010). Since this respondent did not possess the social capital to negotiate the field of local governance, she chose to accumulate cultural capital as a means of entering the field at a different level.

#### **6.4 Gendered Division of Labour**

Two respondents discussed the gendered division of labour in the Valley, and how they saw such patterns affecting the economic life of the community. One informal interview respondent her ‘dream project’ of reinvigorating Nuxalk cultural expression, but she felt her ideas were not taken seriously by community members who were influential in this field. She explained that only a handful of men were credited with leading such projects, and “they’re not interested (in supporting other projects) if they didn’t come up with the idea themselves” (Notes, November 16, 2010).

Enns (2008) contends that both work and formal leadership positions are often male-dominated in rural, resource-based areas due to men’s position within the economic sphere of the community. However, Emily disclosed how she felt Bella Coola was becoming a “woman’s working town” since the bust of the resource industry: “Not all the men can find work, or only have temporary work. [Partner’s name] never really had a steady job... He’s cut wood, and did fishing and got our basic subsidies. And so does my grandfather. Women always get work. And it’s things like nursing, or being a secretary somewhere, or they randomly get on as teacher’s aides, or substitute teachers around here.” Emily felt that her partner’s inability to find stable

work was related to the fact that he had not finished high school: “I think it was maybe four years after he dropped out he had tried to go back, and he had lost it all. He felt as though he had lost it all and that he couldn’t continue with it, so he has not graduated. Enns (2008) notes that women are more likely to stay in school, at least until grade 12, allowing them to be more qualified for such positions (p. 178). Also, several respondents in informal interviews discussed how they saw women – especially those with children – stepping into whatever work was available as a means of taking care of themselves and their families which was considered to be typical role for women to take up (Notes, September 9 and December 9, 2010).

As Emily suggested, traditional gender roles were very much a part of the habitus of the community, and this was reflected in the field of employment. In her research on social capital and resiliency in rural BC communities, Enns (2008) found that women are over represented in informal, social leadership positions, as well as filling traditional gendered employment such as maintaining childcare facilities, schools and libraries. The situation was similar in the research setting of this study, where men were still predominantly involved with work related to resource management or extraction, while the service, healthcare, childcare and teaching industries were filled with primarily female workers. Amanda was the only other respondent to discuss her partner’s struggle to find work after the logging industry collapsed, and she felt that he was too prideful to pursue a re-training program at his age: “I’m just the only one that’s bringing in the money. And it’s hard enough as it is. When I try to stress to him to go to school, he says Ah it’s too late for that. He’s only forty nine.” According to Enns (2008), the most vulnerable group in these rural communities undergoing transition are middle-aged men with low levels of formal education who are facing few opportunities and many barriers: “Retraining for the new economy is difficult with a low level of Education” (p. 179). She notes that women now find themselves in

the position of working in the ‘primary’ sector of the new economy in the former resource-extraction economy (Enns, 2008).

The women’s decisions to return to school, take up whatever work was possible, or remain on social assistance were made within particular contexts that related to their past actions and decisions. In turn, previous actions and decisions had been shaped by broader societal relations of race, class and gender. As rural life and small community habitus interface with class and gender, individuals see different sets of possibilities for what they might attain - the interplay of what school offers and what working life demands is more problematic than the simplistic ‘stay-in school’ and ‘effectiveness’ rhetoric (Corbett, 2001, p. 199). Kate mentioned how she felt conflicted about the value placed on formal education when employment opportunities might not require such training: “My sister never finished high school, but she’s very well on in her life, and she’s happy, and she has good jobs and everything. So I’m still confused about that... she succeeded even though she didn’t go the way everybody... not doing what everyone says you HAVE to do.” Kate was considering the ‘best choices’ she could make in her position, and while she valued and enjoyed school, she was concerned that higher education might not be the best path to pursue. Corbett (2001) contends that for educational and training initiatives to succeed in rural areas, they must consider the complexity of the relationship between school and work in rural communities (Corbett, 2001, p. 199).

## **6.5 Summary**

All the women who participated in this study described high school education as being beneficial towards accessing employment opportunities, and listed post-secondary education as being crucial to the majority of career plans. At the time of this study, 6 participants were taking post-

secondary or upgrading courses, and the other 10 participants discussed plans to pursue their educational goals within a one to three year span from the point of their interviews. While post-secondary credentials were considered to be an asset in the field of employment, some participants felt that attending college or university might not be an option for themselves or their children due to financial and geographical constraints. Several participants also disclosed their concerns over their partners' inability to secure stable employment due to lack of opportunity and education in the Valley. Some of the women mentioned that they felt social or family connections in the Valley were more valuable than educational credentials when it came to finding work. All participants wanted to achieve meaningful careers in their particular fields of interest, but some disclosed that they would take a less desirable position in order to remain independent of social assistance programs.

## **Chapter 7: Findings and Discussion Part 3, Field of Young Motherhood**

In this chapter, participants share information about their experiences related to young motherhood, including some of their supports, challenges and opinions on adolescent parenthood in the community. Supports and barriers the women encountered are discussed, as well as pervasive stereotypes about teenage parents. Finally, the last section outlines participants' recommendations for programming related to adolescent parenting in the community.

### **7.1 Young Motherhood**

For the most part, participants reported that their experiences with young motherhood were “difficult,” but “good” and “enjoyable” overall. The majority of the women identified balancing their parenting with their school and/or work responsibilities as the most challenging aspect of young motherhood. As discussed above, some women found it necessary to take time away from their education or career plans in order to focus on their roles as new mothers. Most women openly shared aspects of their experiences of young motherhood that were not covered in the interview schedule. Some of the topics discussed included events surrounding their becoming pregnant, relationships with the fathers of their children, and opinions of family planning practices.

The majority of participants told me they had continued their relationship with the father of their child or children. Some had married and some had not, but the women had found the support of their respective partners to be crucial to their well-being as adolescent parents. A few of the women shared that they were in long term relationships that they had formed later in life, and another woman said she was partnered with the father of her second child. Two women reported being single as young parents.

Almost all participants told me that their pregnancy had been accidental. Several participants discussed inconsistent use of birth control as the primary reason they became pregnant. Some women acknowledged that no form of protection is completely effective as they had gotten pregnant despite their use of contraception: “It’s just something that I, even though I was on the pill, it still happened” (Faye). Consistent with the information examined in the literature review, several participants mentioned that they felt embarrassed, uncomfortable or worried they would be labeled as ‘bad girls’ if they discussed the use of contraceptives with parents or guardians. Jennifer, now in her 50’s, discussed how she had wanted access to birth control but was afraid to due to being stigmatized: “We were good girls. We weren’t supposed to get in trouble. See the bad girls always protected themselves. They always got the birth control pills and stuff like that. And we were the good girls.” While the public health nurses were working towards ending the stigma around discussing issues of premarital sex and birth control (Notes, September 9, 2010), some of the younger participants (in the 20s) mentioned that attending sexual health classes still felt ‘weird’ (Kate) or ‘embarrassing’ (Emily).

Typically, adolescents do not hold much power in their relationships with the adults in their lives, and as a consequence often “lack decision making power” and may “experience themselves as subject to the unreciprocated authority of others” (Young, 1990, p. 78). Several participants mentioned they did not use contraceptives as they needed to consult with an adult in order to access birth control options, and they mentioned they were ‘nervous’ or ‘afraid’ to discuss the issue with their parents or guardians since they anticipated negative reactions: “I think they were in denial. Like, ‘she wouldn’t have sex at a young age. Oh my god!’ A whole foreign concept and they didn’t want to go there” (Emily). While health professionals were working to open a positive dialogue about premarital sex and birth control in the Valley, they

acknowledged that the general attitudes of community members to be socially conservative, and therefore less inclined to support a comprehensive sexuality and reproductive health education programs (Notes, September 9, 2010).

Some women reported that although their pregnancies were accidental, they chose to become young parents because they did not support the practice of abortion. Five participants raised the topic of abortion in their interviews in relation to their own courses of action, although none of the women ended up terminating their pregnancies. Diane and Emily reported that their grandmothers wanted them to get abortions because they were ‘too young’ to begin having children. Both women discussed how they received support for making a decision about her pregnancy. Diane said her mother was ‘alright’ about the process: “She’s like, ok here’s your choices, pick one.” Emily disclosed that a nurse at the hospital supported her with her decision, and spoke to her grandmother on her behalf: “And she said, ‘No, actually...It’s not your choice. We cannot make this decision for her. You need to leave so you do not influence her decision. She has the right to make this. I know she’s underage, but this is ultimately her decision.’” When she first became pregnant, Olivia “wanted an abortion” because she felt she was too young, but she changed her mind after discussing her options with her father. Hannah disclosed she had terminated one pregnancy earlier in her adolescence, and she did not want to repeat the procedure. Nadine stated she “was raised to not believe in abortions,” so she decided to keep her baby despite her family’s concern about her age.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, abortion was a divisive topic in town, and was primarily seen in a negative light. Nadine commented in passing that pro-life beliefs in town could be related to “why there’s so many teen pregnancies.” The procedure was often discussed as not being an

available option as it was considered to be the ‘wrong thing to do’ and would carry stigma for the young women (Notes, September 9 and September 10, 2010). Additionally, parental or guardian consent is required for a minor, and many young women concealed their pregnancies as long as they could since they were nervous or afraid to approach their parents or guardians with the news of their pregnancy (Notes, September 9 and 10, 2010). None of the participants who discussed abortion mentioned if they would want their own children to consider abortion if they became parents during her teenage years. According to Furstenberg (1991), many women in a society that promotes family will decide to keep children, regardless of the perceived situation that child is born into (p. 134). Geronimus (2004) and Longhurst (2008) both note that early marriage and young parenthood are not commonly viewed as being problematic in communities where these practices are the norm.

Only one woman disclosed that she had wanted to become a mother when she was seventeen, and she and her partner began “trying for a year” to get pregnant. After this time she decided against having a child in order to pursue a career opportunity and maybe travel, but then she discovered she was pregnant “right when I decided I didn’t want to be a mother.”

## **7.2 Reaction to Pregnancy**

Some participants reported initial responses of anger or disappointment when asked about the issue of disclosure of their pregnancy to their families. Several women mentioned that their families were upset because they became pregnant before finishing school and establishing their careers.

Faye: I didn’t intend of having children until I finished my education. Reason being is so I could support them better. Just to have that stability. So yeah, it was a surprise, and it was like, I was scared to tell my parents even though I was of age. I was nineteen years



old. My mom didn't react very well. She's like, 'How could you be so stupid!' They were so happy that I wanted to get an education and further it, and have all these degrees.

Charlotte:[it was] Very intense because it wasn't my dad's (PAUSE) he wanted me to pursue education and, how would I say, you know it wasn't his thought of me, ever getting pregnant. And he took it very (PAUSE) angry.

Two women reported that their grandmothers wanted them to terminate their pregnancies: "And then my gran would be like, you have to go for an abortion. I was like, god!" (Diane). Emily said her grandmother "dragged" her to the clinic for a pregnancy test: "My gran lost it. She started yelling and saying, 'give me all your abortion papers! We need to terminate this pregnancy, she's too young! I can't deal with this!'" A few women reported that the overall reaction from family members was disappointment (Nadine and Grace) or shock (Diane) rather than anger. All participants said that the negative reactions of family members were replaced by acceptance and support after some time.

Some women discussed how contrary to their expectations, the overall reaction from their families, and from their mothers in particular, was of surprise, acceptance or even excitement.

Kate: Everybody was surprised, I guess, except for my mom. She's like, 'Oh yeah.' I guess she knew. I didn't tell anybody right away, like for the first four months. I didn't tell anybody though, I made [partner's name] tell everybody. 'Cause I was young... I had an idea that she'd be mad, or be sad, because I'm her baby. I was afraid to disappoint her or something. I think her – out of everyone else, her reaction, I was most surprised. That's why I wouldn't tell her.

Monica: I was crying (LAUGHS) I was scared. Like, I don't know what, it was just a shock. So, I didn't know, I didn't know what to say, I was just shocked. But my family was really happy and supportive, which was (LAUGHS) I don't know, I guess ok. I wasn't too sure if I was going to carry through, but with their support I knew that I could do it.

Kate mentioned that she was the one who was most disappointed about her pregnancy since it was not part of her ‘plan.’ “My plan was to go to school, finish school, and get a job. And I was a bit, I guess, I was probably the most hardest on myself.”

Olivia said she was “angry” with herself for becoming pregnant at a young age, and that she did not want to be a parent at first: “I wanted an abortion. I didn’t want to have a kid. I didn’t want to have a baby... Because that’s the first thing I thought of right off the bat was just, ‘there’s just no way, I’m too young, I’m going to go to school, I’ve got to finish my education, I’m going to do this’... I was going to make myself better than, you know, be a welfare person. Somebody who’s just going to collect welfare and do nothing.” However Olivia said that she changed her mind: “my dad was the one that talked me into not having an abortion,” and her priorities shifted as soon as she became a mother: after I had [child’s name] it was a totally different story. I was so in love with him. He was just this beautiful little boy, and nobody could take him away from me. Not even school. I wanted him to be old enough to be able to look after, like out of diapers and everything, before I went back to school, ‘cause that was my priority.”

While adolescent parenthood proved to be challenging, all participants appeared to be satisfied with the decisions they made with regards to becoming young mothers: “Things could have been easier if I finished school also. I’m assuming. I don’t know, but I would never change my life path for that” (Charlotte).

### **7.3 Becoming a Mom ‘On Purpose’**

While none of the respondents planned on becoming young parents, a commonly held belief in the community was that many adolescent girls wanted to become mothers at a young age. I often heard this statement when I was discussing this study with white working professionals in town. In these conversations, it was common for community members to focus directly on the phenomenon of young motherhood in the Nuxalk community. Incidences of young parenthood happening ‘Up-Valley’ in the non-Aboriginal community were over-looked in these conversations (the topic was only directly addressed in an informal interview with the Healthy Beginnings coordinator). In each conversation, similar reasons were listed as to why young Nuxalk women in town were having children. The general consensus among these community members was that young women were being encouraged to have children in order to either ‘boost the numbers’ of the Nation as a means of receiving more government funding, or to have someone to love (and love them) unconditionally because their own family situation is unstable.

Kelly (2000) notes that the hypothesis of young women deliberately setting out to become mothers seems to capture the public imagination the most. The narratives of ‘on-purpose’ teenage pregnancy are often read as evidence that teenage mothers are looking for a financial ‘easy way out’ (traits associated with ‘welfare moms’), or they are ‘the girl nobody loved’ who is the victim of adult dysfunction and abuse (Kelly, 2000, p. 33-35). None of the participants indicated that they had been encouraged to have children as teenagers, and almost all women mentioned they were either nervous or scared to disclose their pregnancies to their families. In the discussion of teenage pregnancy that is presented in Chapter 8, several participants suggested possible links between childhood abuse, low self-esteem and early

pregnancy due to low self-care and inconsistent use of contraceptives. However, the possibility of teenagers having children to increase Band numbers was not mentioned by participants, nor in informal interviews and conversations with Aboriginal community members. Additionally, this hypothesis does not give any indication as to why women would have children as teenagers, rather than wait until adulthood.

Other community members, white and Aboriginal, mentioned that regardless for the reasons why, having children at any age is something to be celebrated in the community (Notes, November 12, 2010). If correct, this view would be consistent with previous studies discussed in the literature review that indicate adolescent pregnancy is not usually viewed as a problem in need of prevention in communities where early marriage and/or motherhood is the norm (Geronimus, 2004; Longhurst, 2008; Best Start, 2007). Big Eagle and Guimond (2009) contend that high fertility rates are “something to treasure” in Aboriginal communities considering many Indigenous populations were drastically reduced over the past century (p. 58). However, the authors note that young parenthood is a positive event if it happens in a positive and healthy environment (Big Eagle & Guimond, 2009, p. 57).

#### **7.4 Support**

In addition to the supports discussed in the above section, all of the women discussed how parenting as a teen proved to be challenging, however most reported that they had a tremendous amount of support throughout pregnancy and early motherhood, primarily from family members (mothers, grandmothers, siblings and cousins) and partners. “I almost feel like it didn’t have a negative effect, but that’s because I had so much help from my boyfriend, and my mom, and my sisters. They were always there. I never missed school because of her being sick, or her keeping

me up all night, or anything” (Kate). Diane mentioned that her partner’s family was also a good support system in addition to her own: “He’s got a big family and they all help out when we want to do something. And his grandparents are really involved.” Nadine mentioned that she had received solid support from the Healthy Beginnings program: “They would come up to see me at the school, instead of having to come down. Or they would give me a ride to my doctor’s appointments.”

Consistent with the studies discussed in the Literature Review, respondents from families that had a history of young parenthood typically received less judgment when disclosing their pregnancies to family members. Of the twelve participants who discussed young parenthood as being common in their family histories, five women reported that at least one family member was happy about the news of the participant’s pregnancy. Four women said at least one family member was ‘upset,’ ‘angry’ or ‘disappointed’ by the news of teenage pregnancy - two women reported that their grandmothers wanted them to terminate their pregnancies - primarily because the families wanted the young women to finish school before having children. Three women reported that their families were either ‘shocked’ or ‘disappointed,’ but were supportive nonetheless. These twelve participants reported that they received a tremendous amount of support from their own families (mothers, grandmothers, siblings and cousins) and/or their partners’ families.

In contrast, participants who did not have a family history of young parenthood reported receiving little or no support from their immediate families. These women stated family responses included “angry,” “hurt,” and “shocked,” and one woman stated her family “didn’t care” about her pregnancy. Two of these respondents were still in relationships with their

children's fathers, and had developed support networks through their partners' families. One participant also named Healthy Beginnings as the major support network for her and her children. Two other respondents left the Valley after their parents refused any aid with their pregnancies. Both women left during their pregnancies, and eventually developed support networks through friendships they had made in their new communities. While relations with parental figures remained strained, both women had eventually returned to the Valley to be closer to siblings or extended family members. At the time of their interviews, both considered the Valley to be 'home,' but they would consider relocating if an employment opportunity became available elsewhere.

Almost all participants knew other women, either relatives or friends, who had also become mothers during adolescence. Participants noted that outcomes varied for the other young mothers they knew, but a commonality in these discussions was the outcome for both mothers and their children were dependent on their level of support – the better the support, the better the outcome. Several respondents expressed concern that many young women in town did not have the support they needed, but they were uncertain as how to best address the need for mentoring young parents. The Healthy Beginnings program coordinator disclosed that the organization attempted to reach out to community members in need of support, but she noted the difficulty in extending help to women who may be most in need. In certain cases, the organization has had women ask for anonymity when accessing Healthy Beginnings' services due to violent or unstable situations at home. Consequently, the organization's staff members were unable to contact these women directly, and the coordinator wondered how Healthy Beginnings could find a way to develop support networks for women in such situations (Notes, December 13, 2010).

## **7.5 Young Parenthood in the Community**

Several participants discussed their feelings around the phenomenon of young motherhood in the community. Although she was one of the few young mothers in her peer group, Emily felt that current rates of teenage pregnancy in the community is “just the normal thing.” Several participants mentioned that other women in their families had become mothers during adolescence. Often in these situations, families were described as “very supportive” (Monica) and that they “loved children” (Kate, Nadine). Kate thought that teenage pregnancy might be seen as “a positive thing” depending on the “outcome of the situation”: “Like, you know somebody gets pregnant when they’re a teen and they don’t do anything. Like they just go on welfare and it’s not – but you know, people have a baby in their teens and then they strive to become successful (pause) It’s not viewed upon as bad.”

Olivia acknowledged that young motherhood was seen as being normal in the community, and that her grandmother had been a young parent: “I mean my grandmother had eighteen children. She started at age thirteen or something. And how the hell she did that, I don’t know.” She also mentioned that generational patterns of young motherhood might not be the best practice for some families:

I don’t know, because a lot of the kids nowadays, they’re still kids that are having babies, and it’s a syndrome. A lot of the kids that are having babies young, it seems like it’s their families have been that way, and they’re not taught any different. And they don’t have the encouragement at home that they need. Because if that was my daughter having a baby, I would be home with the baby and I’d get [daughter’s name] up and going to school. You know, you go to school. But that’s me.

Beverly mentioned that she felt there was a ‘cycle’ of young motherhood that happened in her own family, although she felt it may have been shifting towards a pattern of women becoming mothers at older ages with each generation, until her own daughter became pregnant in her early teens: “My mother was eighteen when she had me. I was twenty when I had my youngest. But my great grandmother, on my grandfather’s side, was fourteen when she had my grandfather. My grandmother was sixteen when she had my mom for her first child. My mom was eighteen when she had me. And I always assumed that my daughters would wait until they’re twenties to have theirs.”

Faye wondered if her family history had influenced teenage pregnancy in her family: “like my mom and my sisters were all quite young. One day I said to my mom, I say ‘Is it you? Is it genetics why we’ve had children so young?’” She was also quick to add that she and her sisters were not “young-young” like fifteen or sixteen, but “heading into adulthood,” which was considered young for her family. Some other participants also differentiated between ages they thought to be too young and more acceptable to be a mother during adolescence: “It was hard. It was REALLY, really hard. Eighteen and it was hard. I can’t imagine being fourteen and having a baby” (Amanda). Beverly mentioned that she found pregnancies happening at younger ages recently: “Like around here it seems like they’re younger and younger every year.” Diane felt that the average age for teenagers having their first child to be “middle teens – like sixteen, seventeen.” She also found many women were not many women were having children later in life: “there’s never many people over the age of thirty having kids here. You’re almost done having kids then.”



Consistent with the studies (Anderson, 2002; Geronimus, 2004; Longhurst, 2008; Best Start, 2007) discussed in the literature review of this thesis, teenage pregnancy was viewed as a social norm in the community, and many families had a history of young parenthood. The majority of respondents felt that young parenthood was a ‘normal thing’ in the Valley, regardless of whether young parenthood was part of their family history or not. Young parenthood was also seen as a norm by the various community members I spoke with in casual conversations and informal interviews. In many of these conversations, teenage motherhood was described as a generational ‘pattern,’ ‘cycle’ or ‘syndrome’ that has always existed in the history of the community: “A lot of the kids that are having babies young, it seems like it’s their families have been that way, and they’re not taught any different” (Beverly). The idea that young parents weren’t being taught to ‘do things differently’ - or perhaps make good choices – was commonly reiterated by various respondents and community members (Notes, September 25; October 2; November 12, 2010). However, none of the participants had intended to be young parents, and the women with a family history of young parenthood expressed their initial disappointment in becoming pregnant during adolescence.

In Bourdieu’s theory of habitus, individuals come with their own generating structures to form affinities or dis-affinities with the fields that surround them (Grenfell & James, 1998). Most participants discussed their affinity for the field of parenthood, but they had expected to enter this field as adults. Being a mom was not part of ‘the plan’ until they had completed school and found employment. Some of the women hadn’t yet considered if they wanted to be parents at the time they became pregnant, and they felt entering the field of young parenthood changed their life trajectories for the better. Only one woman disclosed that she had wanted to become a mother during her adolescence, unbeknownst to her family, and became pregnant shortly after

she decided to not have a child in order to pursue a career opportunity. Her life trajectory was also changed, but she did not regret the direction she has moved in. In most cases, participants found themselves continuously adjusting to the field of parenthood – and for some grandparenthood – for many years after their children were born.

## **7.6 Gossip and Rumors**

In addition to the barriers previously mentioned, some participants discussed judgment and gossip as some of the most challenging issues young mothers face in the community: “I think the biggest issue is the (PAUSE) I guess you could say the hurt from other people. Like, they look down on you, they judge you for being a young parent’ (Faye). Grace found a lot of labeling happening to young mothers: “Like, just because I know that’s how I was, I was talked about. My friends, when they had their kids before me. And then I was scared to tell people because I knew that there would be gossip around.” Emily told me that her pregnancy had been “tough” due to how she was being treated: “I think a lot of people didn’t know what to think of me. They didn’t know how to look at me anymore, they didn’t know what to say to me, and I know a lot of people talked about me. Not to me, but a lot of people would say oh I think it’s kind of gross, or my mom says I can’t hang out with you, seems to be a bad influence.” Emily said she moved away for a period of time in order to be in a more positive environment: “I moved, I left this town because I felt as though people couldn’t handle it.”

Faye found that the most difficult part of this experience was that people would judge her based on preconceived ideas of teenage pregnancy, or from rumors that would circulate:

And they don’t know! They don’t know your experience. They don’t know why you’re choosing to be a mother. Like, ask! Ask us. Why we chose to be young moms...Even now people go, ‘Oh my god! She’s so young!’ Ask her why. Maybe she doesn’t believe

in abortion, maybe she wants to have the child and adopt the child out.. You don't know her outlook, right? Maybe she wants to be a mom, but she just didn't know how to take the steps to prevent it.

Faye found the judgment to be “one of my biggest pet peeves,” particularly when young parents chose to have more children: “It’s like, ‘Well they can’t afford another child.’ How do you know? How do you know that?”

Not all women reported having experiences such as this in the community. Charlotte mentioned she found a strong support base in her classmates: “so I never felt ashamed or unwelcome in the school.” The issue of gossip and rumors was raised in several conversations with various community members, and it was acknowledged as being a destructive force in the schools, town and relationships (Notes, November 16 and December 13, 2010). Given the nature of this issue, it is discussed in depth in the following chapter that was created specifically for looking closely at sensitive topics that arose in this study.

## **7.7 Stereotypes**

These women acknowledged the challenges they had faced in the fields of education, employment and young motherhood, but none felt they were ‘a statistic’ or a ‘stereotype’ associated with teen moms. Interestingly, some of the participants who disclosed they had been judged also made note of certain standards or beliefs they had about young motherhood in their interviews. Faye denoted that while several members of her family had children at a young age, they weren’t of an age where it would be unacceptable to begin a family: “like my mom and my sisters were all quite young. One day I said to my mom, I say ‘Is it you? ...But not like fifteen or sixteen. Like we were heading into adulthood, so it wasn’t young-young.” Other participants

mentioned the issue of welfare dependency in relation to young parenthood, and noted that they had worked to distance themselves from that situation:

And that's what happens to all the girls in Bella Coola. They get pregnant so young, and then they get stuck at home, and then they never do anything with their lives... And I wasn't going to be one of those people. I was going to make myself better than, you know, be a welfare person (Olivia).

You get child tax plus the universal bonus. That's three hundred dollars right there, for one child. Plus welfare. You don't have to think about 'you need an education in order to be financially set.' You don't think about that anymore because you get that money (Emily).

Hannah noted that she felt unprepared for parenthood when she became pregnant, and stated that she wished youth in town would choose a path to best benefit their life plans: "Look at our youth. Our kids are having kids, and it's not right... Like, you know what, go out and do what you want to do with your life before decide you have kids." I was surprised to hear these participants reiterate dominant, stereotypical views of young parenthood, considering they had struggled against similar attitudes.

As part of his theory, Bourdieu (1991) focuses on 'invisible' forms of power and violence which he refers to as being 'symbolic.' According to Bourdieu (1991), symbolic power is "a power of constructing reality, and one which tends to establish a gnoseological order; the immediate meaning of the world (and in particular of the social world) (p. 166). Symbolic power is at work in the social discourses that tend to value 'good' or 'right' choices that often reflect purported middle class values. For Bourdieu (1990), symbolic violence takes place once an individual operates under the assumption that social hierarchies are natural, and then imposes this view upon others. Stereotyping is a key element of symbolic violence, as it exercises symbolic power through representational practices (Hall, 2001).

Stapleton (2010) contends that empirical studies have confirmed that preconceived notions about individuals may significantly influence outcomes in educational, judicial and healthcare settings. According to the author, being ranked as inferior in societal terms actually makes one inferior by way of expectations: “The pervasiveness of stereotyping practices, coupled with the role of more powerful others in shaping events, ensures that outcomes for particular stigmatized groups are almost always negative” (Stapleton, 2010, p. ). Jenkins (2004) argues the values of power holders may “transform social inputs (class) into educational outputs (marks, scholarships, university places) through the mediation of those stereotypical categories of judgment” (p. 168). As such, negative outcomes are not inevitable consequences of teenage parenthood, but rather are mediated by the way society responds to the needs (and the potential) of young parents and their children: “Educational and economic outcomes are especially affected by the degree of state support in terms of income, childcare and educational provision” (Bonnell, 2004, p. 268).

Young (1990) addresses stereotyping in her faces of marginalization and cultural dominance, where, similar to Bourdieu she notes stereotypes are defined from the “outside, positioned and placed by a network of dominant meanings coming from elsewhere” (p. 59). However, Young does contend that the face of systemic violence includes physical acts as well as forms of “harassment, intimidation or ridicule simply for the purpose of degrading, humiliating or stigmatizing group members” (1990, p. 61). While several women reported incidences of harassment and stereotyping, this is not to say that the women who participated in this study would identify themselves in the targeted group. Young recognizes that some people are named as members of a certain group by outside forces: “Our identities are defined in relation to how others identify us and they do so in terms of groups which are already associated

with specific, attributes, stereotypes and norms” (1990, p. 46). Some of the Nuxalk participants might identify with the same group culturally; however there does not seem to be any ‘group affinity’ between young mothers in the community.

## **7.8 Recommendations**

Participants offered a wide range of suggestions when asked about what type of programming could be useful for meeting the needs of young mothers in Bella Coola. Much of what they suggested was based on their own experiences, or those of family members and/or peers who became young parents. These recommendations serve as useful guidelines for future programming planning for young mothers in Bella Coola.

All participants found that more daycare services through the schools would be useful for the community, especially for young mothers.

Grace: And have daycares in schools, that’s a big thing. Because there is a lot of teenage mothers that still are trying to go to school and can’t afford to hire a babysitter, or put their kids in daycare. And I think it would be good to have a daycare right in the school for the students.

Emily: I just think the high schools need to be more involved. They know it’s an issue. There’s teen pregnancy everywhere. Why not get involved in it. Why not somehow accommodate these mothers so that they can graduate. I mean, the support is the biggest thing.

Some of the women believed support around building communication skills between adult parents and their teenagers, and particularly for teens who become pregnant, would be valuable. While neither woman had the experience of being “kicked out” of their home for becoming pregnant, both Emily and Faye mentioned that it had happened to members of their peer group, which they found to be troubling: “It’s just going to make it worse. Where are they

going to go? They really need support (PAUSE) and nurture them. Talk about their options, you know?” (Faye).

A few of the women also believed that young women were becoming pregnant as a result of not being properly informed about safer sex practices and contraception.

Nadine: And then the other one could be even (PAUSE) sex ed. I found is a good one. Due to the teen pregnancies. The only thing with that one is a lot of teens find it funny, when it’s really not. I think I’ve had a few of my cousins say they didn’t know about STD’s, and here they were my age, and they didn’t attend the sex ed. because they thought it was funny.

Emily: It’s embarrassing in high school, you know, you all laugh and goof it off and stuff, but people have sex in high school and they need to be prepared for it. Especially with STD’s and stuff like that. If they don’t protect themselves they can get pregnant or you have to worry about STD’s. Big time, sexual education would have been beneficial. Not just having it that one time where I happened to miss it or skip out.

Quinn felt that adolescents would benefit from a class that demonstrated the realities of parenting, and the responsibilities involved with raising children:

I think a lot of the kids don’t really know how hard it is to be a young mother...A course to actually show them how hard it is to be a mother and to make the right choices. To, I don’t know, even get them to babysit and grade them on it. Like, you know, there’s a lot of hard times, and waking up in the middle of the night and not having any sleep, and trying to finish off your education. It’s kind of hard.

Several participants suggested parenting courses for women who might not have a strong support system in place. Grace suggested making courses such as “parenting classes and birthing classes” available through schools, since Healthy Beginnings holds them, but “a lot of people don’t sign up.” I asked the Healthy Beginnings program coordinator about instances of people not attending programming that was originally asked for, and she believes that these women decide not to

show up due to the fact that they feel they don't have the power to make most of the choices they want to in their lives, so they push away from programs that might be of use to them as an exercise of choice (Notes, December 13, 2010).

Based on her personal experiences, Jennifer felt young mothers “need to know really basic stuff. Like how to bath a kid, and how to dress a kid and how to entertain a kid... How to change a diaper, nutrition, protection against the elements.” Charlotte recommended having courses such as these available for young fathers as well. Hannah mentioned she would like to see mentorship programs designed for young Nuxalk mothers, and for young Nuxalk men who might not have role models in their lives to impart certain skills.

There's so many single moms and young families, and a lot of them don't even know how to hunt any more, or plant a garden... and taking young boys out and teaching them how to shoot a gun. How to go hunting for ducks. How to chop wood, and row a boat, and mend a net. So if the Band can provide programs like that, that would be great.

Many participants recommended making life skills classes available to young mothers outside of school hours.

Diane: Having classes that show you like, I don't know how you'd put it, like a budgeting class. And actual experience. Like to go out and experience what you're going to do makes a big difference. Like co-op programs and stuff out of town. Yeah, it'd be nice to know what you're gonna get yourself into, if it's going to be a career or a job.

In her position as a community worker, Charlotte mentioned that she felt “hands on” training to be a useful engagement strategy with those in the community who might not access other training opportunities. Faye said she would like to see “a place where you can go and learn how to cook, sew, do laundry properly” coupled with a place that offers “respite” for young



mothers when they are experiencing stress.” She felt that this type of support is crucial for a young mother’s well-being: “You do need that... Mum needs a day just to come and rest and unwind.”

And so I’d like a group home for young mothers who can go and stay with their child. Not a transition house, but like a home where they can learn – like I said – the cooking. Teach them how to cook and just general life skills. And that way they know, ok I need this support and I can be (PAUSE) a better mom... And then instead of breaking, be themselves.

Participant 16 expressed concern that “A lot of young mothers don’t have the support of their family” which she felt played a large role in setting educational and career goals: “parents that will just give that extra push or you know... Encourage them to do more with their life.” While all participants mentioned family support as being crucial to the health, well-being and success of adolescent parents, none were sure what type of support could fill the role of parenting or mentorship. The director of the Healthy Beginnings program discussed the mentorship role elder women were taking up in order to support younger women who have children, especially since the elders tended to have had children at a young age. The director also noted that the older women in the community were encouraging younger women to finish their schooling and job training before having children, since ‘that’s the way to do things these days’ (Notes, December 13, 2010).

Although not directly related to adolescent parenthood, Charlotte found that better grief counseling was needed in the community to help those, particularly young people, with situations like suicide, family strife or passing of a family member. She felt that a holistic

approach to healing was needed, where people could define their own appropriate way to express their grief. This subject is reintroduced and discussed further in Chapter 8.

## **7.9 Summary**

Overall, participants reported that parenthood was a positive experience, even though many faced challenges as young mothers. Almost all participants reported that they had good support networks within their families or other aspects of the community. However, several respondents expressed concern many young parents in the community did not have similar resources. Given this, participants offered suggestions for improving services for youth and young parents in the community, including increased life skills education, more accessible daycare services, and better access to sexual health information and services.

## Chapter 8: 'Legend of Cautions' and Sensitive Topics

*When we write about the experiences of a group to which we do not belong, we should think about the ethics of our action, considering whether or not our work will be used to reinforce and perpetuate domination (hooks, 1999, p. 43).*

My decision to develop this chapter was guided by concerns about the sensitive nature of certain themes being discussed in this study. Even if it is not the intent of the author, stories about a sometimes marginalized population can serve to further negatively portray the participants, or phenomenon under study (Tracy, 2008). I had a clear understanding from UBC ethical guidelines of responsibility to collect and interpret the data from this study in a respectful and non-judgmental manner; however I was unsure as to which analytical tools would be most appropriate for discussions.

As hooks (1999) comments above, a discussion of these issues must take the historical and social contexts into consideration, or else risk portraying the research participants in a stereotypical or pathological language. Such action can be difficult to undertake when dominant discourses have attached labels to these troubling issues. It is also important to consider that discussing these issues might further add to the problem if the conversation is taken up in a way that perpetuates the victimization of people who have already experienced trauma in their lives. Despite such hesitations, Alcoff (1991) contends that leaving these issues untouched raises the troubling fact that if we continue to ignore the voices of those being affected by harmful actions, we become part of the problem.

In an effort to mitigate a misreading, distortion or misuse of sensitive data, Fine, Weiss, Weseen and Wong (2003) suggest publishing a 'legend of cautions' that informs readers of how *not* to read work that focuses on groups who are often perceived as vulnerable. For example:

how to not read evidence of violence and dysfunction as the sole reference points for the community being discussed. This chapter is not meant to be taken up as reporting more “bad news” about Bella Coola, nor is it meant to essentialize the Valley as an inherently negative or static community. Instead, it must be noted that the range and diversity of groups, along with information sources that are present in urban communities are often absent in rural areas (Jiwani et al., 1998). This chapter is written in recognition that young mothers in the community face complex obstacles in their lives, and some of these women have experienced violence and trauma.

Most importantly, the discussion of traumatic events that have been experienced by certain participants or community members who were young mothers is not meant to be the only representation of these women’s lives. This chapter is not designed to construct life narratives of certain participants as being spiked only with “hot spots” (Fine et al., 2000, p. 187). The women who spoke about experiencing trauma acknowledged that these events were a part of their personal histories, but they dedicated the majority of their interviews to topics like their educational and career goals, and relationships with their children. This chapter is also not a story of “individual heroes who thrive despite their difficulties” (Fine et al., 2000, p. 197). The challenges the participants in my study faced were difficult, and had very real consequences, sometimes with lasting impacts. In the interviews, social issues were raised briefly as important considerations in a wider conversation about events that influenced participants’ life paths.

With regards to discussions (see below) of family violence in the community, I am not advocating that children be removed from their homes through social services. While intervention is important in cases where it is needed, previous studies (Ordolis, 2007; Fournier &

Crey, 1998; Haig-Brown, 1988) have documented the devastating effects on families and communities that have routinely seen children removed into care, particularly for Aboriginal peoples, and have also highlighted a host of structural and systemic concerns that underpin the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the child welfare system.

I must also acknowledge that I had very little contact with any Ministry related family service programs during my time in Bella Coola. I cannot report on how they see their role in the community, nor the progress they might be making in the lives of families in the Valley. A few participants and community members did tell me however, that they would do everything they could to ensure their children or grandchildren do not become part of “the system.” Amanda was ‘taking care’ of her grandson because her daughter is still a teenager, and she became concerned about the possibility of Ministry involvement: “I took him so the Ministry wouldn’t get a hold of him. I’ve seen kids lost in the system, and I don’t like the system.”

While this project was not designed to directly explore and analyze issues of violence and abuse in the research setting, it was intended to gain a better understanding of the experiences and needs of young mothers in Bella Coola. As such, the information that participants shared regarding social issues must be addressed. In doing so, I humbly acknowledge that I am not an expert in this field; I am a graduate student studying educational processes in the interest of program and policy development. But I am accountable first and foremost to the women who gave their time for this study. These participants wanted these stories to be told, to ‘get them out there,’ and it is my responsibility to include this information in the discussion of this thesis. This chapter cannot offer solutions to these issues, but might be regarded instead as an exercise in looking for ways to move forward. I hope that the information shared in this chapter will be a

useful starting point for a discussion among community members, practitioners and other researchers alike.

## **8.1 Social Issues**

Similar to previous research on young motherhood discussed in the literature review chapter of this thesis, participants in this study talked about the complications they have faced as young parents. Many respondents discussed how difficult it was for them to stay in school, find employment and secure reliable childcare. Several women also disclosed information about lifelong poverty, drug and alcohol problems, domestic violence and sexual assault or abuse. While voicing these challenges, these women also spoke about the happiness they found in the experiences of teenage pregnancy, as well as their efforts to ensure their children and/or grandchildren would not have to experience similar traumatic events.

In the formal interviews, several participants identified key social issues of concern when asked about potential barriers they may have experienced, or issues young mothers may face in the research setting. These findings are consistent with Thomassen and colleagues' (2006) study on alcohol use in the Bella Coola Valley, which reports that residents would like to see a variety of health issues addressed, and ranked unemployment, alcohol and drug misuse, family violence, sexual abuse and racial discrimination as the most immediate concerns.

Ten participants talked about substance misuse as an issue of concern. Of these ten women, six discussed their own experiences with heavy alcohol use, and four discussed heavy drinking patterns among various family members, partners or peer groups. Four participants discussed drug use in the community, two respondents shared their respective experiences with a

partner's and parent's heavy drug use, and one participant openly discussed her former struggle with drug addiction.

Two participants shared their own experiences with domestic violence with previous partners (the fathers of their children), and one participant mentioned that her partner had experienced physical abuse in his childhood home. Three respondents disclosed their personal experiences of sexual abuse or assault, and two participants discussed how sexual violence has affected certain family and peer group members, as well as youth in the community. Two participants discussed their struggles with depression, one of whom experienced significant difficulty after losing a family member to suicide.

It is my understanding that these women shared their stories and opinions about complex issues in their community in order to shed light on sensitive topics that are rarely – if ever – discussed with others. I have taken great care to perceive and portray these multifaceted issues as accurately as possible.

## **8.2 Poverty**

Social issues, coupled with limited educational options and few employment opportunities have negatively impacted many residents in the Bella Coola Valley. A public health nurse informed me that the economic situation has had the largest impact on the mental health of community members: “there’s a heaviness; a sense of depression about what can be done to improve the community.” During an informal interview, the Program Manager of the parenting support program also discussed the high rates of dissatisfaction and depression in the community. She expressed concern over the well-being of some of her clients, as well as the wider community: “A healthy appreciation for life is lacking here.” Beverly was one of the few respondents with

secured full time work, yet she still experienced difficulty in covering her family's living expenses with a lower income rate: "we're called what they call the working poor. You can't get ahead living here. Getting the small amount that you get."

In their discussion of rural poverty, Burns and colleagues (2007) report that children, women (including single parent families), and Aboriginal people are among the most vulnerable to rural poverty due to many causative factors: "significantly lower incomes, fewer job opportunities, lower educational attainment and inferior access to social and health services, compounded by social and economic marginalization, make it much harder to address poverty on an individual and a communal level" (p. 30). The authors contend that Aboriginal people, single parents, the working poor and single persons may all have trouble affording suitable and adequate housing in rural, remote and Northern communities.

Rural women face particular challenges related to poverty due to the lack of services and economic opportunities available in isolated areas (Jiwani et al., 1998; Jategaonkar et al., 2005).

Ordolis (2007) has noted that Aboriginal women rarely live alone, and often many family members are living together in substandard housing conditions. According to Charlotte, the lack of housing is one of the most challenging barriers facing young mothers and their families in the Bella Coola community:

The whole issue is not enough homes. There's too many homes of families. Like, from mine was I have three families living in the house, with three mothers and that doesn't work. So I think to better strengthen our health and our education is to have our own homes, to live healthy... I think the barrier is they all feel a drowning living in a tight home, not feeling proud of what they can provide for their own family. And we do step in boundaries sometimes, of does and don'ts of their own children, so having their own living place will develop them stronger for being their own parents, for their own



children. To be stronger for their own education and health. So I think that was the only barrier I see is there's not enough homes for people to grow and better themselves.

Previous studies have demonstrated the lack of adequate, affordable housing contributes to the health and social problems in many Canadian communities, including issues associated with domestic violence, breakdown of families, and to homelessness (Jategaonkar, 2005; Jiواني et al., 1998). On a province-by-province basis, British Columbia and the Yukon have the highest percentage of families requiring core housing needs among rural households (Burns et al., 2007).

### **8.3 Substance Use**

Previous studies (Jategaonkar et al., 2005; Thommasen et al., 2006) have documented a link between alcohol and drug use and poverty in rural areas. According to the Centre for Addictions Research of BC at the University of Victoria, alcohol consumption has risen significantly in British Columbia in the past decade, including a noticeable increase after the recent economic downturn (2009). The highest per capita rate of adult (15 years and older) alcohol consumption in 2009 was found in the northern geographic region of the Vancouver Coastal North Health Service Delivery Area (which includes the Bella Coola Valley)<sup>3</sup>. According to the Centre's report *Alcohol and Other Drug Use in BC*, patterns of drinking habits vary between men and women – there are more heavy drinkers among men than women – and heavy drinking episodes (defined as consuming five or more drinks within a two hour time frame) remains fairly common among school-aged youth (2009).

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<sup>3</sup> Sales data (1998-2009) are used to calculate alcohol consumption in litres of absolute alcohol per capita age 15+ for BC and Canada. The 2009 consumption rate in the Vancouver Coastal North HSDA was 15.14 litres (58 standard drinks) per adult.

Most of the participants who discussed heavy drinking patterns had begun to experiment with alcohol during their teenage years. Several participants reported they had begun drinking heavily or ‘partying’ as adolescents, mostly with other members of their peer groups on weekends, but they refrained from these activities once they became pregnant.

Participant 11: I think it [pregnancy] had a good impact on me because I was the age where I was being influenced by others. You know, ‘oh let’s go drinking this weekend.’ But as soon as I found out [I was pregnant] I wasn’t into that anymore. After my daughter was born I didn’t want to do that anymore, especially when she was a baby. I think it helped me stay away from that. I don’t know what would have happened, maybe I would have made the right decisions, but maybe I wouldn’t have. I can’t really say now (LAUGHS) but I know definitely I was getting MORE into it. That teen drinking and stuff.

Monica said becoming pregnant at a young age was “good” for her outlook on life: “Because I was able to focus more and not get into my partying. Being pregnant, I never drank and did nothing, so it was good for me to have my head clear.” Paula did not discuss her own alcohol use, but she mentioned that her pregnancy had a positive effect on her mother, who was “kind of a partier” at the time but “stopped everything after she found out I was pregnant” in order to support her and her child.

Some participants reported that while they stopped drinking during their pregnancy, they continued to experience long-term struggles with alcohol use. Monica talked about her on-again off-again alcohol consumption pattern, and how it became a significant barrier to continuing with her education until she accessed addiction treatment:

I was really into my drinking, and that was a huge barrier for going to school. Trying to be there for my kids, too. And it wasn’t just ‘til recently that I went and got help... So I feel really good, and I feel a lot healthier and more sure of myself now. And I know what I want, and you know, I have goals and I want to follow through with them. I’ve had these goals since I graduated, and I never ever did (PAUSE) follow through. And I know

being sober, it's gonna help me a lot to focus on my career path. My goals that I want to do.

Hannah described her adolescent alcohol use as a result of growing up “in an alcoholic home” in which heavy drinking was a normalized behavior: “So the way I grew up, I never really looked after myself, and I drank a lot when I was younger.” Hannah also stopped consuming alcohol during her pregnancy, but started drinking again as a coping mechanism for the depression and anxiety she experienced as a single mother without a support system:

I mean sure, I was nineteen, twenty years old when I had my son. I wasn't even finished high school, and I found it the hardest thing. The hardest part of my life. Being alone, and it was scary. I stopped drinking for the longest time, and then three years later I just went out and I drank, and I've been drinking since... Because everybody nowadays, everybody drinks, and that's not the life I want, but sometimes when I want to get away that's what I go and do. And I don't want that anymore.

Emily felt that many young mothers in the community were drinking heavily in order to “get by” in difficult circumstances:

I see a lot of mothers, teen moms right now, who are still going out partying and drinking. What else are you going to do, though? How else are you going to survive? Like, without being on welfare and with all those emotional issues that you have to deal with, I think they are just going to go out and drink and party and not care.

I was informed by the Healthy Beginnings program manager that community and health support workers were concerned about occurrences of FASD in town, and the possibility that young mothers may not be properly informed about the impacts alcohol use can have on a pregnancy. Efforts were being made through the programs to encourage “healthy behavior” patterns, and to inform young mothers about the health risks involved with heavy drinking or ‘partying.’ Hannah disclosed that she is living with an alcohol related learning disorder, wherein she found school work to be extremely challenging despite her enjoyment of certain subjects such as English:

Everything was always hard to me. I believe I'm FAS because I know that my mom, she drank a lot with me. And then growing up in an alcoholic home it was hard to concentrate all the time. So I was always getting in trouble, and my grades were horrible. Like, I always had D's and F's, and maybe, MAYBE I would get a C. So it was a struggle to get through. It was very hard.

In their study on rural violence and substance abuse, Jategaonkar and colleagues (2005) report that participants identified their heavy drinking patterns as a coping mechanism for stress or trauma (p. 138). In this study, two participants discussed incidences of physical and sexual assault in relation to substance use. Olivia mentioned she “fell into a drinking situation” during the time she was being physically abused by her partner. Emily discussed her mother's alcohol and drug addiction as a coping mechanism for childhood sexual abuse: “She never will go to counseling. She doesn't talk about it unless she's drunk.” Previous studies (LaRoque, 1994; Jiwani et al., 1998; Varcoe & Dick, 2008) have demonstrated that women living in rural areas face disproportionate socio-economic burdens – such as poverty and isolation – which compound the difficulties they face. These inequities can create barriers to their accessing meaningful health services, and may result in women engaging in behaviour such as substance misuse as a survival strategy (Varcoe & Dick, 2008).

Amanda disclosed that she had grown up with parents who were “alcoholics” who had “almost lost us a lot of times to the system,” due to the heavy drinking. Amanda began consuming alcohol heavily during her early 20s after her children were born: “alcohol just kinda took over my life for a number of years.” She continued to drink heavily until several years ago, when she “went on a healing journey,” during which she found a connection between her alcohol consumption and the similar patterns her parents had developed after their attendance of residential school:

You know I'm a second generation residential schools survivor. And I never understood that word until they brought it all up a few years ago. And then I started to understand why my life went the way it did. And I always tell my kids, "YOU don't have to fall into that rut of being stuck and branded third generation residential school survivor." Like I was branded. I didn't know I was a second generation residential school survivor. I didn't know that! Until then. And then I was branded that. But (PAUSE) I'm a survivor but I don't have to be a residential school survivor.

Beverly told me that she "was never one to drink" much because she wanted to avoid an intergenerational cycle of alcohol abuse: "I didn't really see the draw of alcohol. Because I watched my mother and she was a heavy alcoholic. And I always swore I would never do to my children what my mother did to me." Beverly concluded that her mother was unable to cope emotionally after her residential schooling experience, and "got into" alcohol as a means of dealing with past traumatic experiences.

The consequences of the residential school system are profound for survivors, their families and communities. As such, it is vitally important that Canadians learn about and acknowledge "what Indigenous people have suffered as a result of assimilation policy and actions" (Regan, 2010, p. 8). In communities that have experienced waves of trauma, multigenerational pain can lead individuals, families and whole communities to look for coping mechanisms that are easily and quickly accessible (Michele Sam, personal communication). Turning to alcohol and drugs, for example, often becomes a tool of survival (Baskin, 2006; Varcoe & Dick, 2008). Additionally, Bopp and Lane (2000) contend that while removing the pattern of alcohol consumption from a person's life will certainly bring some improvement, it is critical to the person's healing that the underlying issues also be identified and addressed. The authors note that internalized patterns of alcohol and drug misuse can easily become "recycled generation after generation" if issues remain unaddressed (p. 2).

It should not be lost in this discussion that substance misuse affects both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population in Bella Coola. Thommasen and colleagues (2006) report that Aboriginal peoples in the Bella Coola Valley were more likely to abstain from drinking alcohol (53%) than non-Aboriginal people (22%) – which is contrary to stereotypical thinking about drinking habits, but consistent with other survey results. In the Nuxalk Health and Wellness Development plan, Bopp and Lane (2000) report that the Nuxalk Nation has implemented an effective model of community based alcohol and drug treatment program, which has seen successful results. More recent data regarding the program and results is not available at this time.

#### **8.4 Violence**

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, several participants disclosed issues related to violence in the community and in their own lives. According to the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (1991), violence against women is a multifaceted problem which encompasses “physical, sexual, psychological and economic violations of women” (p. 5). In addition, Yee (2009) points out that sexual violence can take the form of verbal and physical forms of sexual harassment, as well as physical attacks and violations. The various forms of violence listed here will be discussed in this section.

In rural areas, violent offences against family members are among the crimes for which arrest rates are greater when compared to those in cities (Pruitt, 2008). Jiwani and colleagues (1998) report that previous studies have indicated that the levels of violence against women increase at times of economic recession. As such, key factors associated with family violence, such as parenting stress, poverty and unemployment, are more prevalent in rural areas primarily

due to the instability of a resource-based economy (Chabot et al., 2010). LaRoque (1994) observes that poverty and marginalization can play havoc in a community, wherein certain individuals turn to violence as a means of maintaining some sort of power or control.

Additionally, Varcoe and Dick, (2008) contend that Aboriginal women living in rural areas face multiple and intersecting forms of oppression within a historical context of colonial abuses and cultural disruptions. Baskin (2006) reports that incidents of family violence in Aboriginal communities are eight times higher than the average for Canadian society as a whole. LaRoque (1994) argues there is growing documentation that Aboriginal female adults, adolescents and children are experiencing abuse, battering and/or sexual assault to a staggering degree. According to Smith's American study (2005), Indigenous women are victims of rape or sexual assault at more than double the rate of other racial groups—and are more likely to be victimized by non-Native American perpetrators.

### **8.5 Teenage Pregnancy and Violence**

Mylant and Mann (2008) report that other forms of childhood victimization or assault can be predictive of future sexual assault among women. According to Saar (2008), previous research has identified that sexually abused girls initiated intercourse a year earlier than their peers and engaged in a wide variety of high-risk behaviors, including substance abuse and engaging in unprotected sex. Sexual violence during adolescence has been identified as a significant predictor of other serious adolescent health risk behaviors, including substance abuse, unhealthy weight control, sexual risk behaviors, pregnancy, and suicide (Mylant & Mann, 2008). Additionally, girls who are victims of violence from dating partners are four to six times more likely than non-abused girls to become pregnant (Saar, 2008, para 6).

Olivia indicated that her risk taking-behavior during adolescence was related to sexual assault at a young age: “I was abused myself as a child. And you can see my results. You can see my results; tattoos at a young age, sleeping around at a young age, you know, promiscuous.” She stated that she “wasn’t shocked” that she became pregnant as a teenager “because of my lifestyle.” While only three participants reported experiencing some form of sexual abuse as a child, other respondents identified past histories of sexual abuse or assault as the reason for many young women becoming sexually active. Emily described the situation as such:

If people were sexually abused when they’re younger, having sex when you’re older isn’t a big deal. It’s not something you’re scared to do. You’ve already experienced it. It doesn’t matter. It doesn’t bother you... A lot of my girlfriends were sexually abused when they were younger, by their uncles, friends of their parents, and they tell me about it. They just felt as though sex was whatever. You know, ‘I’ve already had sex. Had sex when I was five. Doesn’t matter.’ So I think they have that kind of mentality towards it. I think if they were sexually abused when they were younger you just don’t think about it. You don’t try to hold off, it’s already happened so it’s no big deal. I think that’s huge and really sad that happens.

While previous research (Saar, 2008; Smith, 2005; LaRoque,1994) indicates that young women with a history of physical and sexual violence are significantly more likely to engage in ‘risk taking’ behaviour, some participants indicated this was not always the case. Jennifer discussed her avoidance to ‘dating’ or forming friendships with heterosexual men for several years after she had ended an abusive relationship at the age of 19 (after a 5 year relationship). Beverly told me she refused to engage in a sexual relationship unless she felt ‘safe:’ “I made a decision that I wasn’t going to have sex with the boy until after so long. Even then I made sure when I was having sex that I would do everything in my power to keep myself safe and healthy.”



LaRoque (1994) believes sexual violence is best explained by sexism and misogyny, which are nurtured in patriarchal society, and further argues that discussions of sexual violence against Aboriginal women must also address the effects of racism and sexism: “Sexual violence is related to racism in that racism sets up or strengthens a situation where Aboriginal women are viewed and treated as sex objects. The objectification of women perpetuates sexual violence” (p. 79). The author observes that there are indications of violence against women in Aboriginal societies prior to European contact, but the process of colonization has “exacerbated whatever the extent, nature or potential of violence there was in original cultures” (pp. 75-76). An unfortunate historical narrative over-sexualizes Indigenous (and other non-white) women, and this narrative currently renders these bodies more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and devaluation (Saar, 2008; Yee, 2009; Olsen, 2005).

Saar (2008) argues that discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy need to be expanded beyond issues of promiscuity, or lacking access to sex education or contraception, in order to include the loss of agency over one’s body because of “the unbearable injuries of being sexually violated” (para 3). LaRoque (1994) contends that education may be the most important process as a means of enlightenment for the issue. Previous research indicates that incorporating a number of approaches to sexual health education and prevention programs is more effective than relying on one particular course of action. Education, mentoring, life skills training and community involvement are all elements of effective programming (Best Start, 2007). In this context, schools and community programs should provide high quality sexuality education to children and teenagers, and such education must include information about consent, healthy relationships and self-esteem in conversations about safer sex, birth control, reproductive choice and responsibility (LaRoque, 1994). Furthermore, all community members are entitled to

comprehensive sex education and information that is fully inclusive of violence prevention, including the many definitions of violence and how it can play out in different scenarios and relationships (Yee, 2009).

## **8.6 Violence Against Youth and Children**

In most discussions about violence, the focus has been on male violence against women, and in particular, male sexual abuse of children. While this work is valuable and important, hooks (1999) argues that it is also crucial to call attention to physical abuse in all its forms:

“Discussions of violence against women should be expanded to include a recognition of the ways in which women use abusive force towards children” (p. 85). As referenced above, the term violence encompasses a number of behaviours, actions and terms. Participants who disclosed information about maltreatment they experienced as children mentioned incidents of neglect and emotional abuse, including exposure to substance misuse and domestic violence, as well as inadequate supervision.

Hannah described the challenges with navigating life in an alcoholic home during her childhood: “My mom and everybody, they were always drunk... she drank so much that she never cared. And you know, the life I grew up in with me and my brothers, and my sister, I always looked after them since I was seven years old. But we seen a lot of drinking and beatings and everything. So once we got older the beatings came in our life, and that was hard.”

Charlotte told me about her husband’s experience with childhood abuse when explaining his relationship with formal education: “Mom was keeping things good for the stepfather, more than the children and the children all had to leave home early to be out of the abusive relationship...at that time school wasn’t important. It was a place to be fed and hide out and be safe.” During my

volunteer work in the research setting, I was informed that one of the high school students was homeless, and that he came to school primarily for meals and a safe space to be during the day. Faye mentioned that homelessness was not uncommon in her peer group during her teenage years: “Like, some friends didn’t have enough food to eat, or some friends didn’t have enough clothes, or they were staying where they could. You know, every night it was a different place. Just somewhere to lay their head.”

## **8.7 Self-Esteem**

Several participants discussed the devastating effects that abuse and violence have on a person’s self-esteem, and the lasting influence they have on future behaviors: “that kind of ruins the way you hold yourself, the way you feel about yourself. It ruins all of that. I think that’s a really huge thing” (Emily). Research into the experience of repeated and traumatic experiences among children and youth has uncovered symptoms of underlying depression, low self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness, which can manifest in self-harming behaviors like substance abuse, depression, anxiety and suicide attempts. (Baskin, 2006). In their study on the impacts of rural violence on Aboriginal women, Varcoe and Dick (2008) report that abuse had dramatically shaped their participants’ sense of trust and self-esteem: “This mistrust and low self-esteem, in turn increased their vulnerability to exploitation, further abuse and substance use” (p. 46).

Several participants referred to self-esteem issues stemming from past traumatic experiences as the most prominent barriers to achieving their goals. Hannah mentioned her struggle with substance use: “I had my falling down and getting into drugs and drinking more and more – I’m scared that I’ll just start falling into the same thing again. I don’t feel strong enough yet. And I don’t know how long it will ever take for me to feel like, safe, and to get my

life back on the right road.” She also acknowledged that she was aware other people in town also used alcohol as a coping mechanism, even though heavy drinking was generally understood to have a lasting negative effect for the Nuxalk community: “If alcohol didn’t have the biggest effect on our people, I think our people would be farther... Because alcohol has a big impact on people’s lives here. You’re drinking so much that you don’t care.” Amanda discussed the positive effect that completing a substance treatment program had on her life, but she mentioned still trying to overcome bouts of anxiety and self-doubt: “I guess it’s just I never really had (PAUSE) what would you call it (PAUSE) very high expectations of myself because of how I grew up and how I was raised. But now sometimes (PAUSE) I tend to still kinda keep myself at a really low, maybe medium level where I sometimes tend to put myself down. And that’s the one thing I still have to get out of. And I’m almost there now. I’m not as bad as I used to be.”

Beverly talked about intergenerational self-esteem issue associated with alcohol use that was wide reaching throughout the community: There’s a lot of hereditary alcoholics out there. ...It’s a cycle. So there’s a lot of alcohol because they feel like they can’t get ahead they fall back on that old bottle.” She then commented on how many people, particularly from the Nuxalk community, experienced trouble “getting ahead” due to esteem issues related to formal schooling and educational attainment: “We’ve got this mentality that - Native people do have the mentality that they don’t have any rights. It’s to do with residential school. And it’s to do with the system. The way these people look at the system like it’s made to push them down. And that’s a lot of mentality. It’s a lot to work through. A lot of years to work through.” She reported that the legacy of assimilation policies were still playing out in her teenage daughter’s generation:

But there are barriers. There are mental barriers, there are physical, there are historical. That’s what the residential school is. There’s a cycle. An ugly cycle that goes through.

And the mentality that you're not good enough. You've done something wrong and you don't know what it is, and you're not good enough to get an education. You're not good enough, you're not smart enough. You get this because you're being constantly held back and constantly (PAUSE) I don't know if you would call it abuse in a way where you're basically made to believe that you're worthless. You can't get ahead because your brain doesn't work properly for it. And other stuff like that.

According to LaRoque (1994; 2010), the internalization of racial stereotypes and societal rejection is one of the most problematic legacies of long-term colonization. The author takes notes that this concept is not perfectly understood, for much of it appears to be an unconscious process (2010). She emphasizes this manifestation in the lives of Aboriginal peoples as: "feelings about themselves as peoples subjected to social and ideational hatred based on their racial, cultural, and ethnic groupings as 'Indians'" (LaRoque, 2010, p. 120). This process involves a dramatic and profound transformation in people who have been subjected to 'othering' for a sustained amount of time, during which Aboriginal peoples have subconsciously judged themselves against the standards of white society, and believing "the standards, judgments, expectations and portrayals of the dominant white world" (LaRoque, 1994, p. 74). LaRoque is quick to note that most Aboriginal people are now aware of the "whys and wherefores" of their position in Canadian society and are less prone to such self-judgment, however the damage of internalization has been extensive and the problem still exists. She also points out that Aboriginal internalization of racist/sexist stereotypes may be at work in the area of violence (1994, p. 74).

Both Jennifer and Olivia reflected on the domestic violence and sexual abuse they had experienced in their youth, and the subsequent self-esteem issues they struggled with throughout their lives. While both women have led remarkably different lives, they both spoke about regaining their self-esteem through accessing school and employment programs. According to Participant 10, "It built up my self-esteem knowing that I had a skill." The women are now in

their 50s and 40s respectively, and they expressed concern for the younger generations of women who might now be struggling with the same issues. Olivia acknowledged she was now in a position where she could offer support or mentorship to younger women in the community through talking circles: “I think if people like myself and people like [community member], people that have been there and done that, I think we really need to step up to the plate, ‘cause I’m going to be an elder. In ten years I’m going to be an elder in this community. And I’m still sitting back listening to the same bullshit that’s been going on in the last thirty years.”

The issues presented in the previous pages are multi-faceted and complex, and I was privileged to hear the disclosures from the participants who felt safe sharing them with me. The information outlined here helped contextualize their lives and my findings.

## **8.8 Community Level Distrust**

Several respondents described how instances of abuse and violence in the Valley led to issues with trusting other community members, and feeling their children were unsafe. Emily mentioned that the bounded nature of the community, where “everyone knows each other,” makes the instances of abuse all the more distressing: “It’s actually scary that it happens so much here ‘cause it’s with people you know. You know everybody. And think that could happen to your children, or that person you know could do that to your child.” When disclosing her own experience of sexual abuse, Beverly linked the experience to issues around trusting other community members: “My biggest fear was that something was going to happen to my kids. That I put my trust in someone and that trust is abused. Or my child is. I did not want that to happen.” Jennifer contended that sexual violence in Bella Coola operated as a barrier to having trust, security and a safe environment for the community’s residents, and particularly children:

“Never, ever trust anybody. I’m sorry, you can’t trust Uncle Jack or Aunt Suzy. You have to know that that kid is ALWAYS protected. Because you know abuse is HUGE. It’s almost a rite of passage in certain communities. And it is so damaging.”

### **8.9 Codes of Silence and the ‘Undiscussable’**

Jenson (2008) notes that a vital part of what is considered to be ‘safe and good’ about small communities is the notion that everybody knows each other. The author discusses how areas with smaller populations and a fair degree of homogeneity can foster the sense of identification, belonging, and trust. However, Bopp and Lane (2000) note that rural communities that have experienced a great deal of trauma often face a deep-seated distrust of institutions and others, and community social patterns that foster quiet or secretive discussions about sensitive issues, rather than communicative strategies that challenge the status quo. It should also be noted that the status quo’s maintenance and exercise of power is more intense as a result of the size of the community, making sanctions more possible and effective (Jiwani, et al., 1998). In this context, the bounded and socially cohesive nature of a rural community can amplify feelings of shame and self-blame associated with abuse, and can cause survivors to be viewed as different, thereby exposing them to stigmatization, social ostracism or exclusion, and community gossip (Leipert & George, 2008).

Pruitt (2008) contends that many incidents of sexual assault and domestic violence often go unreported in rural areas likely due to interpersonal familiarity, wherein domestic or family violence is commonly thought of as a private issue in which outsiders should not get involved. The author has found that women have been encouraged to keep an assault quiet because of the embarrassment and stigma attached to being a victim of domestic violence, and members of rural

communities will often not assist victims of violence for fear of retaliation (2008, p. 363). Jiwani and colleagues (1998) observe that such beliefs and attitudes are just as prevalent in urban settings, however the articulation and impact of the ‘private business’ ideology is more forceful in rural areas:

The patriarchal values embodied in the larger society assume a more concentrated form in rural areas by virtue of the lack of any socio-cultural space or legitimacy for alternatives. These include alternatives to heterosexuality, ethnocentrism, racism, and classism. This is not to suggest that the latter are not present or widely accepted in the larger society. Rather, there are more alternatives and subcultural formations in the larger society which allow for some degree of respite from the experience of marginalization (para 10).

Jennifer mentioned she had found the long-standing patriarchal values of “the old-timers” to be a barrier in the community. She also noted that such attitudes were slowly shifting as more people move into the Valley from other areas. In light of recent demographic shifts and technological developments that better connect many rural residents to wider society, rural residents may not be as socially, culturally, and politically settled as they once were, however societal change happens at a much slower pace than in urban areas (Pruitt, 2008).

Advances have been made in transforming the subject of intimate violence from a private issue to a public one since the 1970’s as evidenced by the continuing pervasiveness of public education on the subject (Pruitt, 2008). Baskin (2006) also notes that the silence around sexual abuse and family violence has finally been broken in the public discourse, allowing for an overall increased understanding and awareness of the impact of physical and sexual abuse. However, Openness of these issues in the public discourse does not always translate to ending the silence surrounding these issues at a personal level.



Empirical evidence (Jiwani et al., 1998; Bopp & Lane, 2000; Alaggia & Vine, 2006; Baskin, 2006) has revealed many victims of violence feel ashamed, and find it difficult to talk about their experiences out of fear of judgment. Bopp and Lane (2000) discuss how the culture of silence that surrounds abuse and violence is a factor that makes these challenging issues even more difficult to contend with. The authors have observed that people are often reluctant to even speak about abuse: “It is too painful for victims and their families. It immediately calls forth the fear of disclosure and public humiliation” (2008, p. 48). Compounding this problem is the reluctance of the general public to address what they consider to be “an ugly and personal issue” (McCain, 2006, p. vii). As such, living with violence becomes an accepted part of life that many people simply tolerate and attempt to survive (Baskin, 2006; LaRoque, 1994).

According to Baskin (2006), a major similarity between current Aboriginal societies and non-Aboriginal ones is the atmosphere of secrecy that accompanies violence. LaRoque (1994) contends that a form of censorship exists in small communities against those who would report sexual assault or other forms of violence, due to the lack of privacy in small communities where fear of further humiliation through community gossip, ostracism, and intimidation from supporters of the perpetrator may all be at work: “Often a victim is confronted with disbelief, anger, and family denial or betrayal. Secrecy is expected and enforced” (p. 77). Baskin (2006) contends that Aboriginal communities are well aware of the high rates of family violence within their communities, but like many others: “they too are often caught in the dynamics of shame, self-blame, fear and helplessness” (p. 27). As such, many people may be aware of issues of violence and abuse, but the topics remain undiscussed.

Norman Dale (2005) uses the term “the undiscussable” to describe when community members cannot or will not discuss sensitive matters. Dale was an outsider who came to Bella Coola as a community economic development project Council Member, and he describes the characteristics of “undiscussability” in the community as being a “far more widespread and potent factor than in most other contexts” (2005, p. 187). Dale’s analysis of the “undiscussable” is framed by the community economic development experience, yet I believe the concept is applicable to discussions regarding social issues. The ‘undiscussable’ is not a construct that is meant to be “lifted” from one context and “dropped” into another (Dale, 2005, p. 191), but is a concept that can be rethought as it is applied to making sense of another ‘silenced’ issue. In the framework of the undiscussable, a community will continue to relive the past and its mistakes if it cannot surface and freely discuss issues of concern (Dale, 2005).

Although not named as such outright, the ‘undiscussable’ was a topic that was touched upon in both formal and informal interviews with a variety of community members, all of whom acknowledged the problematic nature of the phenomenon. Some participants expressed particular concern about how community members are acutely aware of these social issues, but these topics are considered to be taboo and remain unaddressed. Emily raised the issue of sexual violence as being “a huge deal” for many community members due to the perpetuating nature of abuse coupled with a hesitancy to openly discuss the issue: “A lot of people have been sexually abused, men and women, here. By people they know. And it still happens here...It’s kind of quieted; it’s kind of a hush – hush thing. You don’t talk about that kind of thing, right?” Olivia mentioned sexual abuse and the silence surrounding it as one of the most prominent issue young women face in the community: “There’s a lot of sexual abuse in our community and nobody talks about

it. They all keep hush-hush, and it's sad... It's been going on for the last forty years [referring to attacks and particular individual], and same old-same old. People just push it under the rug.”

Bopp and Lane (2000) contend that certain thought and behavior patterns can become institutionalized in a particular family or community culture, and if such patterns are unbalanced or unhealthy they are perpetuated from one generation to the next, ensuring that a “particular way of responding to an initial trauma becomes accepted as a ‘normal’ way of life” (p. 29). Previous research conducted in Bella Coola refers to the many challenges the community faces, including poverty, unemployment, substance misuse and intergenerational abuse, all of which are contributing factors to a level of acceptance of sexualized violence, particularly among youth (CMF, 2006; Thommasen et al, 2006; BC Stats, 2008). Olivia expressed concern that attitudes towards assault have not improved for younger women in the community: “It really hurts my soul to know that those kinds of things are still happening, and nobody’s getting charged for it. ‘Cause rapes are still happening at parties. To some people it’s just a normal thing that happens at parties, and it’s not normal.”

In rural communities, the culture of silence around social issues may stem from the community’s image of itself as a ‘haven’ free from the ills associated with urban life (Jiwani et al, 1998). Jensen (2008) describes such actions as the suppression of the “parts we do not want to deal with;” the prejudice, mistreatment, scorn and indifference that exists in small rural communities just as it does in cities (p. 174). Both urban and rural-based research on abuse has identified community denial and lack of ownership of the issue, however this denial in rural areas may be intensified by the close-knit nature of the community as well as its small size (Jiwani, et al., 1998). Beverly discussed the difficulty of disclosing abuse in a small community,

and the reluctance of survivors to speak out due to the possibility of swift reprisals through backlash and denial: “You’re told ‘don’t lie to me you little bitch! Don’t tell tales, you’re going to get them in trouble.’ It’s not happy. It’s something that’s kept me back.”

Previous research (Baskin, 2006; LaRoque, 1994) has also indicated that many women in rural areas feel that the reporting, charging and incarceration of many offenders is a useless process, because offenders often return home after serving their sentences without receiving treatment, and the causes of abuse are not dealt with. Olivia: “Nothing’s happening to this man. He’s raped my daughter, and nothing happened to him then. He still sits in our community like he’s (PAUSE) you know, it just kills me... well there’s laws, but he goes away and he comes back, and it’s the same freakin’ person.” Baskin (2006) notes that another layer of silence can be related to power dynamics within communities: “If, for example an abuser is in a position of power, the victim or other community members may not want to disclose the abuse for fear of repercussions or that they will not be believed. In such situations, even sometimes unknowingly, community members protect abusers rather than victims” (2006, p. 27). No one in the formal or informal interviews talked about a situation such as this happening in the research setting. I am only mentioning this information here to note the possibility of such an occurrence. LaRoque (1994) lists this practice as being particularly harmful for communities, considering knowledge about who offenders are is often kept away from others, particularly young people who might be vulnerable.

Additionally, the lack of anonymity in rural communities had been described as a significant difficulty for those who would disclose their experiences of violence or abuse. Rural communities, by virtue of their small size and population, cannot offer the kind of anonymity

that women can find in urban areas (Jiwani, et al., 1998). Pruitt (2008) sees this lack of anonymity, or lack of information privacy, as what constitutes rural space while also being constituted by it: “It enables and disables, inhibits and disinhibits rural residents in a variety of ways by constructing the social spaces in which they live in ways that effectively limit their agency and subjectivity (p. 363). As such, Pruitt contends that lack of anonymity may deter women in rural areas from reporting matters they might consider private, such as domestic violence, assault or abuse.

When asked about the availability of counseling services in Bella Coola, Emily responded: “You could offer it, but it doesn’t mean they’re going to take it.”

Emily: I don’t think it [counseling] is really offered more around here. Everybody is just too close to each other; it’s just such a small community. Everybody’s too close, related somehow, everybody’s too close.

A: To talk about it? With someone else?

Emily: Yeah! I mean, say the counselors who work at the Band office right now are people you can go to, but if that’s your auntie you don’t want to talk to them about it. Or what if it’s your best friend’s auntie. And just having to see that person all the time. In the city, you would only see that person if you made an appointment. You wouldn’t see them around town every day. You’ll see them at the time something horrific just happened to you. You’re not going to see them the next day, whereas here it’s a different situation. You’ll see them at the store grocery shopping, you’ll see them at basketball games, you’ll see them at potlatches, you’ll see them walking down the street. And they know that kind of stuff about you. You don’t want to talk them about that.

Emily mentioned that the anonymity she had in the research project - granted by my outsider status along with the confidentiality requirements outlined in the ethical guidelines of the study - influenced her decision to take part in the study: “You’re somebody who’s not going to be here all the time. I’m not going to see you that often, so I’m ok talking to you about that kind of stuff.

I think that's probably what everybody else thinks too. You're not from here. You don't know our entire background." I had received similar feedback from a community public health nurse, who suggested there would be a strong possibility for disclosure of many sensitive topics in my interviews, due to my being "from the outside" and offering a non-judgmental space for these women to "share their stories."

Jiwani and colleagues (1998) contend that for those delivering services, the familiarity with clients and others in the community raises the concern that confidentiality could be breached. Rural health care providers and police officers may be acquainted with or related to abusers and their families. These relationships can create barriers to disclosing abuse confidentially, and compromise the seriousness with which disclosures are treated (Leipert & George, 2008). Hannah contended that she found accessing treatment for alcohol use difficult, because "it's such a small community," which could possibly become a privacy issue since she felt "everybody talks."<sup>4</sup> As in any small group of people, gossip is rampant in small communities. However its impact on abuse is to make survivors feel discredited and publicly humiliated, and it often works to deter victims from seeking support or involving service providers in the issue (Jiwani, et al., 1998; LaRoque, 1994).

## **8.10 Moving Forward**

Dale (2005) has observed that a possible outgrowth of the phenomenon of the undiscussable is the repression of taboo issues that resurface in intricate webs of "gossip and whisper campaigns" (p. 191). While such actions could be seen as ubiquitous to the human experience in any given community, rural areas like Bella Coola are especially affected by the 'viral' nature of

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<sup>4</sup> While the lack of anonymity and confidentiality were discussed as barriers to disclosure or seeking help in the community, several participants also named the public health nurses and Healthy Beginnings as reliable and trustworthy community resources

community gossip (Kramer, 2006). Bopp and Lane (2000) have identified “Toxic communication” – backbiting, gossip, put downs, personal attacks, secrets – as one of the specific issues that requires attention in the healing and wellness process for the Bella Coola community (p. 17).

Alaggia and Vine (2006) note that the action of turning away from violence could be held in tension with the action of speaking out against it, as women are generally credited for ‘breaking the silence’ about sexual abuse and domestic violence. Beverly spoke to the need to openly address these issues in order to “break the cycle” of intergenerational violence in the community, although such action is difficult to accomplish as an individual: “So there’s not just abuse, it’s a cycle. It has to take someone that’s strong enough to say no more to break the cycle. But the only thing I can say is that the only person that can speak up is themselves when they’re ready to... There’s gotta be some sort of support out there for them.” In order for silence to end, support systems must be created with family and institutional support in order for people to learn how to trust, give and receive support, and move forward, which in turn builds capacity to persevere in the work of implementing information and public awareness about social issues, despite potential backlash, resistance or denial (LaRoque, 1994; Baskin, 2006; Bopp & Lane, 2000).

In both formal and non-formal interviews, several participants expressed hope at the possibility of research being an appropriate medium for the community to address the issue of the ‘undiscussable.’ Several participants discussed the trauma their grandparents, parents or other family members had endured, and the effect such experiences had on their own lives. These respondents were also concerned that past traumas would come into play in the lives of their

children and grandchildren. The women who discussed their own experiences with abuse also spoke about the strength and resilience they have developed in order to come out of these traumatic events. These participants articulated their hopes for imparting this strength and knowledge to their children, and other young women in the community. Several women explained that they hoped their participation in this project would be helpful in addressing their concerns, and that it will “make a difference” (Emily), “better the community” (Charlotte) and “help our community learn from it [the study]” (Faye).

Dale (2005) has observed a potentially constructive route in addressing the ‘undiscussable’ is to explore the fine structure of ‘defensive routines’ and well hidden information that make significant problems undiscussable – the same problems that are “universally understood throughout the organization as being the root cause of dysfunction” (p. 191). He notes however that another potential problem arises when the phenomenon is discussed at the surface level, but “intervention and problem solving... may not be of clear application and relevance,” especially in the early stages of the process (p. 193). In their report on community healing and wellness development in Bella Coola, Bopp and Lane (2000) observe that a community wellness plan entails many months of community consultation and hard work, and the process will fail if it is rushed: “The point of the exercise is not to produce a document, but rather an understanding, agreement and commitment in the hearts of the people” (p. 66).

Several participants mentioned the usefulness of talking circles or groups, and how they would like to see long-term plans made available for specific groups in the community. Charlotte discussed community workshops as a means of bringing together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members in order to teach each other about important cultural differences. Faye indicated that



she found family circles to be useful, and she would like to see one implemented specifically for youth:

I want one for teenagers, where they could be safe and just talk about their feelings with each other, and then connect with people who have the same issues. And then connect and build upon it, rather than (PAUSE) crawl in their shell and not kind of express themselves or get out of that mold and just stay (PAUSE) we've lost too many people to depression or unstable homes. So I just kinda want to build it up, even for my children, when they get older as adults. I want them to see they can help in some way. Hopefully we can get there someday.

When talking about how to address the issue of sexual violence towards teenagers, Olivia expressed the need for circles specifically for young women: "At the school they should be having circles with our girls. Circles where it's just for them. In a safe place where nobody else is around."

Support systems for youth are incredibly important, given that teenagers are perhaps among the most susceptible to sexual assault: "Teenage girls with little or no sex education in an environment conducive to alcohol abuse and violence are particularly vulnerable to adult sexual seductions/attacks" (LaRoque, 1994, p. 80). In their provincial wide survey, The McCreary Centre Society (2009) report that this concern is particularly relevant given that young women who have been physically or sexually abused are nine times more likely to report suicidal ideation than their peers with no abuse history, and suicide attempts for the same group are about five times more likely among youth who have been physically abused (15% vs. 3%) or sexually abused (22% vs. 4%). Also of concern is that Aboriginal youth are at greater risk of suicide; the rates of suicide among Aboriginal youth, are estimated to be five or six times higher than among non-Aboriginal youth, particularly in small, remote communities (Health Canada, 2007).

Jennifer insisted that creating support systems for young women who are experiencing abuse is vital in dealing with the emotions associated with traumatic experiences, as the “bottling up” of such emotions is detrimental to emotional and physical health: “‘cause you will bottle them up and they will come out in inappropriate ways. Inappropriate rage. You’ll either get into an addiction, which is super easy to do, or – because unless you get healed, it’s never going to go away. Never, ever, ever going to go away.” Hayes and colleagues (2006) provide evidence for the effectiveness of a ‘talking strategy’ as part of violence treatment programs, because it allows members to verbalize the trauma they have been experiencing. The authors do not suggest that merely talking about the event is enough to ‘solve’ the problem, but the theory related to ‘breaking the secret’ is that the moment becomes “the starting point from which all other change can flow” (p. 220).

Previous research (LaRoque, 1994; Jiwani et al., 1998; Bopp & Lane, 2000; Jategaonkar et al., 2005; Alaggia & Vine, 2006; Baskin, 2006; Ordolis, 2007; Murdock, 2009) has indicated that leadership at all levels should be involved in taking a stand against violence, and in doing so, offer long term counseling services where community members can discuss issues of mutual concern, and feel free to address “unwieldy and unpopular issues such as violence, equality, patriarchy, political leadership, etc.” (LaRoque, 1994, p. 82). Pruitt (2008) argues for place specific responses using local “know-how” to diminish the obstacles to justice that confront rural victims of violence. Similar to many individuals in any given part of our society, women experiencing violent or abusive situations want choices or alternatives, rather than being told what to do, whether by mainstream society or by their communities (Baskin, 2006; Salmon, 2007). If intervention and treatment programs are to be effective in dealing with these serious issues, those who are most directly affected by violence and the legislation surrounding it should

be involved in making recommendations for practice and policy (LaRoque, 1994; McCain, 2006).

### **8.11 Summary**

This chapter developed from participants in both formal and informal interviews expressing particular concern about how community members are acutely aware of social issues, but these topics remain unaddressed due to the problematic nature of the keeping silent about ‘private’ matters. Social problems and the silence surrounding them are complicated, and careful attention must be given to the complexity of the factors involved in dealing with these serious issues. LaRoque pointedly states: “Obviously, there are no easy answers. Nor am I suggesting any simplistic solutions” (1994, p. 84). One study will not have the capacity to make an enormous impact, but I hope this work will be useful to various people (community members, service providers, educators, students, administrators, researchers, activists) who have an interest in bringing about awareness to such issues.

## **Chapter 9: Conclusion**

This study investigates the educational experiences of women who became parents during their adolescent years. I conducted this case study in order to learn about the factors that influence the decision making processes of young mothers living in rural BC, specifically in the Bella Coola Valley. My hope is that this research might provide community members, service providers and educators with a better understanding of this particular issue. In this final chapter, I provide a summary of my study, a discussion of highlighted issues from the research, and suggestions for future research in this field.

### **9.1 Summary of Research Findings**

As explained in the introductory chapter to this thesis, this exploratory study was designed to explore the pathways participants had created or used to access educational and career opportunities, and to determine the factors women who became young mothers identify as enhancing educational engagement in their community. I relocated to the Bella Coola Valley to participate in community life, and to introduce myself and my study to a variety of members in the research setting. Sixteen women participated in formal interviews, and they described the role young motherhood has played in their educational careers and occupational pathways.

In Chapter 2, I reviewed the relevant literature that contributes to the contextualization of young motherhood in British, American and Canadian research. I examined national differences in perceptions of young parenthood through the lenses of poverty, educational disengagement, welfare dependency and race. I also presented the literature regarding the ‘Good Choices’ discourse as it relates to the deficit-based conceptions of young motherhood. As Kelly (2000) suggests, this discourse fails to acknowledge the complexity of the human decision making

process, when an examination of the complexity of young mothers' lives is needed in order to gain insight to the factors that influence their choices. Finally, the chapter is concluded with a discussion of the structural and situational factors that potentially occur in the decision making process for young women living in BC.

In Chapter 3, I outlined the two theories that provide the framework for this research and data analysis. Bourdieu's Theory of Practice and Young's Five Faces of Oppression are useful to thinking socially and politically about the different levels of structures that influence the decision making process. Bourdieu and Young have produced large bodies of work on how individuals and groups participate (unconsciously or not) in the production and perpetuation of existing social orders. Both theorists analyze the internalization of social norms as a systemic process that incorporates individual, organizational and social relations. Bourdieu's research helps us to see why education tends to reproduce social divisions, and therefore challenges all interested parties to make moves within the field that might bring about change (Webb, et al., 2002, p. 107). Young's theory illuminates how oppression can operate as a structural factor in our everyday lives, and how we might (re)produce the historical and social conditions within which we exist.

As explained in Chapter 4, a case study paired with qualitative data collection methods is appropriate for investigating a particular phenomenon while concurrently contextualizing the case in its wider social, political and historical contexts (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2003). This study was designed to gain a better understanding of the factors that influence young mothers' decision making with regards to their family, school and work based goals and needs. The case of educational experiences of young mothers in Bella Coola could not be considered without the

contexts of young parenthood and school settings, as these are the contexts that influence the decision making process. A detailed account of the social and economic history of the research setting was provided in order to situate the research findings in the contextual conditions relevant to the phenomenon under study.

In Chapter 5, I presented the findings of participants' past and present educational experiences, and their future goals and plans. Half of the sixteen interview participants reported that they had enjoyed school. Diane, Faye, Grace, Irene, Monica, Nadine and Quinn reported that they liked school and had considered pursuing post-secondary before becoming pregnant. Charlotte disclosed that she had liked school, but finding work was more important to her at the time, so she left before completing her secondary education. Amanda, Emily and Kate reported that they 'didn't care' about school, or didn't take school seriously before their pregnancies, and Paula mentioned that she 'just wanted to get it done.' Beverly, Hannah, Jennifer and Olivia disclosed that they disliked school as adolescents due to issues of boredom, learning disabilities and racism from certain teachers. Most participants who disliked or were ambivalent towards education found completing school to be important once they had their children. Only two women reported that they were now appreciative of school and training opportunities as adult learners. A discussion of the supports and barriers participants experienced as young parents is also presented here.

While school completion was a universal goal for all participants, some respondents disclosed that school environments were often difficult places for themselves, family members, or friends. Some of the women were critical of certain aspects of school, but they did not reject education itself, as they stressed that it would play a significant role in assuring their future

career choices. Hannah and Jennifer acknowledged experiencing difficulty in fitting “the system” of K-12 schooling at a personal level, and Kate and Quinn discussed how family members experienced difficulty with the structural aspects of school. Beverly and Jennifer reported resistance to conforming to prescribed norms, while others reported personal learning barriers (Hannah), or (temporary) systemic barriers to achieving educational success (Emily, Grace, and Olivia). Completion of secondary school was an almost universal goal for students I spoke with at the K-12 school (Acwsalcta) and adult learning centre (Lip'ahayc), although some adolescent students were experiencing conflict between their personal academic aspirations and the demands of their peer groups or families.

At the time of this study, 6 participants were perusing post-secondary or upgrading coursework, and the remaining 10 all disclosed plans to continue with their education within one to three years from the point of their interviews. As addressed in Chapter 6, all participants discussed education as being necessary to gaining access to employment opportunities, even if those opportunities might not necessarily be present in the Valley. All participants felt that high school education was beneficial towards accessing work opportunities, and some reported that post-secondary education would also be useful at opening doors, but might not be an accessible option for themselves or their children. Most participants discussed the possibility of their children pursuing post-secondary education, as long as their children enjoyed their studies and found the work they were pursuing to be fulfilling.

Several participants discussed the changing nature of the employment sectors in the Valley, and noted that the most viable job sectors were in the fields of education, nursing and human services. A few of the women mentioned that their partners or spouses were experiencing

difficulty in securing stable employment in the wake of the fallout of the resource extraction industry. These women noted that their partners had not completed their education, and saw this as an impediment to achieving gainful employment. Previous research (Enns, 2008) has indicated that middle-aged men with low levels of formal education are indeed a vulnerable group in rural areas undergoing transition. All participants discussed meaningful careers as being important to themselves, their families and their community. For many, stable work also meant achieving economic independence from social assistance programs, which was seen as a step to bettering the mental and economic health of the Valley.

In Chapter 7, participants reported that young parenthood was a positive experience overall, even though they faced various challenges as young moms. All women discussed the support they had received from either family, social and/or community networks as being crucial to working through difficult situations. All participants expressed gratitude for the support they received from the various sources they have been able to draw upon. What participants valued most were those people who helped to create a supportive environment for them and their families. The social capital these women carried in their networks was a resource they could call upon as a means of maintaining or improving her conditions of living (Enns, 2008). These networks provided support when the women needed help with childcare (Diane, Emily, Kate, Monica and Paula), other parenting responsibilities and emotional support (Amanda, Beverly, Charlotte, Faye, Irene, Nadine, Olivia, Paula and Quinn), and financial support (Emily and Hannah). Participants with the strongest ties had the most access to what they needed, and for most respondents, social capital resided in their family structures.



Beverly and Olivia discussed young motherhood as being traditional to Nuxalk culture, and both women mentioned their grandmothers and great-grandmothers had started large families at a young age. Teenage pregnancy is still common in the community, but the Healthy Beginnings coordinator mentioned views of the phenomenon were changing as older community members are encouraging young women to complete school and job training before having kids, since that's the "way to do things these days" (Notes, December 13, 2010). While several participants mentioned their families 'love babies,' only three participants (Irene, Kate and Monica) reported that their families reacted happily to the news of their pregnancies. Given the high incidences of teenage pregnancy in the Valley, family and community habituses make it likely that young women in Bella Coola are accustomed to the phenomenon of young parenthood, and may see entering the field of young motherhood as a 'coherent' or 'convenient' choice. However, no data or observations gathered in this study found this to be the case.

As discussed in Chapter 8, several participants expressed frustration at 'the way things are' in certain aspects of the community, and they also expressed a desire for a shift in the ability to address certain social issues. In regards to the views of young motherhood in the Valley, Faye articulated a need for community members to be open in discussing a topic may only be gossiped about: "And they don't know! They don't know your experience. They don't know why you're choosing to be a mother. Like, ask! Ask us. Why we chose to be young moms." Participants in both formal and informal interviews expressed particular concern about how community members are acutely aware of social issues, but these topics remain unaddressed due to the problematic nature of the keeping silent about 'private' matters. Young (1990) contends that violence is a social practice: "It is a social given that everyone knows happens and will happen again" (p. 62). Several women communicated a sense of powerlessness about the situation,

noting that the social problems are ‘just the way things are,’ but they also expressed hope at the possibility of transforming the culture of silence around social problems as a means of changing the status quo.

The tight-knit nature of the community was something that was valued by participants in both formal and non-formal interviews. However, at the same time, respondents also expressed disappointment in the separateness that existed between certain groups of community members. Social boundaries set a distance between perceived public and private information that could be discussed openly. Enns (2008) reported similar findings in Old Massett, where specific trust in the form of family loyalties is high, but generalized community trust is low, contributing to a less cohesive and unified community overall. The need to ‘bridge the gap’ between and within community groups was discussed in both formal and informal interviews. Charlotte discussed community workshops as a means of bringing together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members in order to teach each other about important cultural differences. Faye indicated that she found family circles to be useful, and she would like to see one implemented specifically for youth.

Previous studies (Alaggia and Vine, 2006; Baskin, 2006; Bopp and Lane, 2000; Jiwani et al., 1998; LaRoque, 1994) have documented how non-judgmental support systems are incredibly important for those living through situations involving substance misuse, domestic violence, sexual violence and abuse, and community-level violence. A Nuxalk community leader spoke at a public event about the need to improve dialogue around issues in the community, even if the topics were difficult to address, the conversations were necessary in building capacity to ‘move forward’ to a healthier community (Notes, September 17, 2010). Service providers mentioned the need for ‘safe spaces’ for women, youth and men to gather (in separate groups or community

wide) in order to fully explore and hopefully transform the issues that trouble the community (Notes, September 9 and December 13, 2010).

## **9.2 Strategizing for Change**

As illustrated throughout Chapters 5, 6 and 7, the women who participated in this study were making life choices that were greatly influenced by the environments within which they learned, worked and lived. The socio-cultural and economic challenges disclosed by participants are consistent with those highlighted in previous research about teenage motherhood and school environments. Similar to Kelly's (2000), Olsen's (2005) and Murdock's (2009) findings, women in this study reported that they were trying to make the best of their situations with the opportunities available to them. Regardless of their educational or financial status, all participants were motivated to be a good role model in their children's' lives, and wished to give their children access to a wider range of opportunities than the women had in their youth. Participants discussed the impact their schooling and career choices would have on their children, and consistent with Corbett's (2001) study of schooling in a rural community, participants were struggling to retain their ties to their home community when job and school prospects often exist elsewhere. Given this, participants strategized how to best navigate various circumstances to meet their needs.

In *The Logic of Practice* (1990), Bourdieu sees social actors being positioned by circumstances that are beyond their control, such as race, class and gender. Given this, actors strategize their choices as they navigate the world under certain constraints. The women who participated in this study were living in an economically disadvantaged region that is undergoing serious cuts to services such as family aid, poverty aid, legal aid, midwifery programs, maternity

wards and clinics offering birth control services (SCYBC, 2005; CRHR, 2008; BC Stats, 2008). Additionally, the reality for remote and reserve communities is that education, employment and housing can be deficient, and sometimes outright lacking (Guimond & Robitaille, 2008). These aspects of the lived realities of teenage mothers in the research setting must be taken into consideration when examining decision making practices. Also of note is Young's (1990) argument that an individual's sense of history and mode of reasoning are partly constituted by his or her group affiliations. As such, Reay (2004) contends that individual and collective aspects must be taken into account when examining the conditions within which people are making choices in their lives. Webb and colleagues (2002) note that the choices people make are subject to change as their circumstances do, and as such, we need to move beyond labeling choices as being simply either good or bad.

Some of the women in this study discussed how they have faced the challenge of contending with negative stereotypes associated with teenage pregnancy and parenting. In addition to potentially being viewed as someone who has made "bad choices," several participants disclosed prejudice and alienation in their high school communities, and dealing with stereotypes of promiscuity or reliance on welfare benefits. Previous research (Olsen, 2005, Murdock, 2009; Chabot, et al., 2010; Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study, 2011) indicates that decades-old discriminatory attitudes towards teenage pregnancy are still affecting young mothers, and especially young Aboriginal mothers, who face the most distorted stereotypes of any non-white group in Canada. As this study progressed, I became aware of Val Plumwood's work, wherein she describes a phenomenon that adds to Young's Faces of Oppression theory. Plumwood (1993) describes these concepts as "conceptual weapons," which can be "mined, refined and redeployed for new uses" (p. 41). According to the author, these weapons have been

accumulated by the dominant culture throughout the historical process of the development of the major forms of oppression: “Old oppressions facilitate and break the path for new ones. Since they are formed by power and correspond to stages of accumulation, any account of their development would also be an account of the development of institutionalized power” (Plumwood, 1993, p. 41). Similar to Young’s *Faces of Oppression*, Plumwood’s cultural weapons work together to structure a system of thought that ultimately fosters distorted and oversimplified views of oppressed groups of people.

The challenges participants faced were difficult, and had very real consequences, sometimes with lasting impacts. However, similar to women in Kelly’s (2000) and Stapleton’s (2010) research, several women who participated in this study disclosed how they wished to not be viewed as victims of their cultural, social or economic circumstances. Weis and Fine’s (2000) offer their analysis of the binary representations of marginalized individuals as being victims or heroes, and call for writing that:

...spirals around social injustice and resilience; that recognizes the endurance of structures of injustice and the powerful acts of agency; that appreciates the courage and the limits of individual acts of resistance, but refuses to perpetuate the fantasy that “victims” are simply powerless (Weis and Fine, 2000, p. 61).

It is my hope that the writing in this thesis contributes to a better understanding of the lived experiences of women who tend to be marginalized in wider social discourse. My intention with this work is to respect the struggles these women have faced, and recognize the strength they have gained through their experiences.

As discussed in Chapter 8, several participants disclosed information about traumatic events in their lives as a means of potentially bringing about change to

troubling circumstances in the community. According to LaRoque (1994), people need to believe they have the capacity to make changes in their lives, and they might be able to do so once they are able to articulate the constraints they are living with. Smith (2012) contends that the concept of ‘struggle’ is a tool of both social activism and theory: “People, families, organizations in marginalized communities struggle everyday; it is a way of life that is necessary for survival, and when theorized and mobilized can become a powerful strategy for transformation” (p. 200). As a white, childless woman from outside the Bella Coola community, I recognize that I can never fully understand the experiences or struggle of the women who participated in this study. However, as Regan (2010) suggests, research like this is an opportunity for non-Aboriginal Canadians to undertake a “deeply critical reflective re-examination of history” and my role within its legacy.

According to hooks (1999), critical reflection is required when we are motivated to conform or compromise within structures that reinforce domination: “Only by challenging ourselves to push against oppressive boundaries do we make the radical alternative possible” (pp. 81-82). Young highlights the importance of collective transformation, noting that: “cultural politics has primarily a critical function: to ask what practices, habits, attitudes, comportments, images, symbols, and so on contribute to social domination and group oppression, and to call for collective transformation of such practices” (1990, p. 86 in Allen, 2008, p. 164 ). In a Bourdieuan framework, action aimed at changing current circumstances would allow the movement of habitus(es) across the field of capacity building and community healing, and as such, develop potential to enact strategies for change. Reay (2004) contends that the range of possibilities inscribed in a habitus can be seen as a continuum:

At one end, habitus can be replicated through encountering a field that reproduces its dispositions. At the other end of the continuum, habitus can be transformed through a process that either raises or lowers an individual's expectations. Implicit in the concept is the possibility of a social trajectory that enables conditions of living that are very different from initial ones (p. 435).

By examining the structures that influence their choices, individuals can build capacity to become strategic agents in the numerous fields they encounter.

### **9.3 Recommendations for Programming**

The sixteen women who participated in this study offered a range of suggestions when asked what type of programming could be helpful for meeting the needs of teenage mothers in the Valley. Participants reflected upon programming or support that could have been useful for themselves, or for family members and/or peers who became parents at a young age.

All participants advocated for more childcare services in the schools. Several of the women felt that better access to daycare centers would be useful for young mothers, as well as for other women who would like to pursue academic or work opportunities. The need for better childcare was reported as a need by women living in the Valley, and by women who were attending school in other areas in the province.

Several participants listed reliable counseling services as being a possible valuable service for teenage mothers who do not have the necessary support from other areas of their lives. Many participants also recommended parenting and life skills classes for young parents who found themselves without a strong support system in place. Faye expressed a desire for a counseling or mediation service that could facilitate better communication between adult parents and their adolescents, particularly for teenagers who become pregnant. One participant disclosed

that she would like to see a mentorship program established for young mothers and fathers who might not have role models in their lives to impart certain skills and knowledge.

Two participants suggested the creation of an emergency shelter or space for young women who have been pushed out of their homes due to their being pregnant. Almost all participants discussed better sexual health education, along with better access to contraception, as being crucial for adolescents living in Bella Coola.

#### **9.4 Recommendations for Future Research**

Other pathways for new research stemming from this study include an examination of the experiences of young fathers in the research setting; the establishment of educational and support programs for young parents, and finally, an examination of the needs of teachers and service providers who would be implementing programs for teenage parents.

Previous studies (Scott, et al., 2012; Ball, 2012) have indicated that research and policy regarding teenage parents have focused much more on mothers than fathers. These studies indicate that taking a closer look at teen fathers' unique circumstances will better inform father engagement and child support efforts. According to Ball (2012), Aboriginal fathers are the most overlooked group in Canada in regards to research, legislation and funding, which often leaves them excluded as a stakeholder group and as a resource for Aboriginal children and youth. Ball's study posits that fathers might be the "greatest untapped resource" in the lives of Aboriginal youth (2012, p. 373). As a researcher with the Father Involvement Research Alliance's Indigenous Fathers Cluster, Ball (2012) recommends further research in this field in order to guide the development of policies and practices aimed at father support and education programs.



In British Columbia, educational and service programs for teenage parents function in various capacities around the province. Young Parent Programs are recognized by the Ministry of Child and Family Development, but they are not formal programs that receive funding, except in the form of a surcharge added to basic childcare subsidy for qualifying young parents (Norton, 2005). These programs are established through partnerships with community and public sector services, and the subsidies are accompanied by the expectation that the teenage parent is actively pursuing his or her high school education (Norton, 2005). According to the BC Council for Families, the number of Young Parent Programs offered fluctuates from year to year as they are dependent on funding. In 2011, the MCFD increased the monthly subsidy rate for young parents (from \$850 to \$1000 per child), and gave Young Parent Programs a one-time payment to invest in additional resources to meet program demands (Peters, 2011). However, program operations and services remain inconsistent, and a comprehensive report on existing programs has not been compiled since Norton's in 2005. Future research in this area can help establish a baseline profile of current programs, and can guide the creation of new programs along with the development of a stable framework for Young Parent Programs.

This study has focused on the needs and goals of young mothers in Bella Coola, as little has been documented about the educational experiences of women who become parents during their teenage years, especially those living in rural and remote areas in BC. As such, the majority of participants recommended the implementation of comprehensive school and program services for teenage parents in the Valley. Several Nuxalk participants also suggested cultural awareness or bridging programs for non-Aboriginal teachers working in the area. According to Kanu (2011) little research has been done that focuses on teachers' perceptions of curricular innovations, as most researchers have continued to focus on students' responses. He contends that part of the

past history of failure of educational and curricular reform has been due to the Ministries' neglecting to take into account the potential needs of educators and service providers:

“Integration involves not only theoretical abstractions and principles at the curriculum planning level in ministries of education but also, and most importantly, decisions about actions in the concrete situation of the classroom with real students” (Kanu, 2011, p. 182). Future research that focuses on the needs of educators and service providers would be beneficial to the development and delivery of curriculum and programming.

### **9.5 Concluding Thoughts**

The findings of this research suggest that participants viewed education as a tool that could enable an individual and community-wide shift away from poverty, economic dependence and personal dissatisfaction with current living situations. The women interviewed in this study were motivated to attain economic and social independence for themselves, but also for the benefit of their children. Several of the women in this study were working towards leaving behind negative schooling and work experiences in hopes of achieving a more stable and enjoyable life. In order to accomplish these goals, participants were making decisions about their education in the context of an increasing demand for credentials in many professions. I truly hope this study will add to the growing body of research calling for action from all interested parties to bring about change in the educational field. Again, I would like to recognize that one study does not have the capacity to make an enormous impact, but I hope this work will be useful to the Bella Coola community as they respond to the issues involved in changing current circumstances.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Interview Participants

Interview Code	Pseudonym	Age at birth of 1 <sup>st</sup> child
01	Amanda	17
02	Beverly	20
03	Charlotte	17
04	Diane	14
05	Emily	15
06	Faye	19
07	Grace	16
08	Hannah	19
09	Irene	15
10	Jennifer	14
11	Kate	15
12	Monica	17
13	Nadine	16
14	Olivia	16
15	Paula	14
16	Quinn	18

## Appendix B

### Participant Recruitment Poster



Department of Educational Studies  
UBC Faculty of Education  
2125 Main Mall, Vancouver BC, V6T 1Z4

### Invitation to Participate in Research

My name is Alison Krahn and I am a master's student in education at the University of British Columbia. I am here in Bella Coola for my research project, which is designed to gain a better understanding of the educational experiences and goals of young mothers living in the Bella Coola community. My intention is to explore the factors that young mothers identify as being valuable towards enhancing educational engagement and achievement in their community.

I am seeking to hold interviews with women who have had at least one child during their teenage years. I am hoping to speak with women who have completed their high school education and other training, as well as with women who have not yet completed their secondary schooling. I hope to facilitate a genuine dialogue through these interviews to hear what you have to say about your experiences, interests, goals and needs within the context of education.

***\*\*Every precaution has been taken to maintain confidentiality and to protect your identity \*\****

**If you are interested in participating, or would like more information, please contact**

**Alison Krahn**

## Appendix C

### Adult Consent Form



Department of Educational Studies  
UBC Faculty of Education  
2125 Main Mall, Vancouver BC, V6T 1Z4

---

### Adult Consent Form

#### Young Mothers and Educational Choices in Bella Coola: Issues, Challenges and Successes

**Principal Investigator:**

Dr. Don Fisher, Department Head of Educational Studies

**Faculty Advisor:**

Dr. Don Fisher, Department Head of Educational Studies

**Co-Investigator:**

Alison Krahn, Masters Student (Thesis), Educational Studies

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the educational experiences and goals of young Nuxalk mothers living in the Bella Coola community.

You are being invited to participate in this research study because you are a self identified young Nuxalk mother who is between the ages of 19-30 and who has given birth to at least one child before finishing high school.

**Research Procedures:**

The study will comprise of one 45 to 60 minute face-to-face interview.

The interview will take place at a location of your choice.

Each participant will be asked to share her experiences and perceptions about her educational career and job pathways. The interviews will be audio recorded, and the digital recording will be kept on a secure computer by the co-investigator.

**Confidentiality:**

Every precaution has been taken to maintain confidentiality for all study participants. You will not be identified in any way, nor will your name or other personal information be attached to the survey. All survey documents will be identified only by code number and kept in a locked

filing cabinet. All voice recordings and interview data will remain on a secure computer. Data from all phases of this study will only be analyzed by my Faculty Advisor and I, and you will never be identified by name in reports or publications resulting from this study.

**Risks:**

While some participants may experience some hesitancy in answering questions, previous studies have shown that many participants enjoy, and may also benefit from the opportunity to talk about their experiences.

Before the study begins, you will get a handout that explains the rights of all research participants, as well as the key terms of the research vocabulary that are used in this study. The researcher will also ensure that you are aware that you can stop at any time during the interview, or discontinue the topic if needed.

In the event that you become upset by any part of the interview process, the researcher will provide a list of community services (such as counselors) and their contact information if needed.

**Contact Information for the Study:**

If you have any questions or would like further information about this study, you may contact Dr. Donald Fisher.

**Contact for Concerns About the Rights of Research Subjects:**

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services.

**Consent:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and there are no consequences if you do not wish to participate.

Your signature below indicated that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature below indicated that you are providing consent for your participation in the survey.

---

Signature

Date

Thank you!

Your participation will add valuable input to this study.

## Appendix D

### Parent/Guardian Consent Form



Department of Educational Studies  
UBC Faculty of Education  
2125 Main Mall, Vancouver BC, V6T 1Z4

---

### Parent/Guardian Consent Form

#### Young Mothers and Educational Choices in Bella Coola: Issues, Challenges and Successes

##### Principal Investigator:

Dr. Don Fisher, Department Head of Educational Studies

##### Faculty Advisor:

Dr. Don Fisher, Department Head of Educational Studies

##### Co-Investigator:

Alison Krahn, Masters Student (Thesis), Educational Studies

##### Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the educational experiences and goals of young Nuxalk mothers living in the Bella Coola community.

Your daughter is being invited to participate in this research study because she is a self identified young Nuxalk mother who is between the ages of 14-18 and who has given birth to at least one child before finishing high school.

##### Research Procedures:

The study will comprise of one 45 to 60 minute face-to-face interview.

The interview will take place at a location of your daughter's choice.

Your daughter is welcome to bring a friend or family member with her to the interview if it makes her feel more comfortable.

Each participant will be asked to share her experiences and perceptions about her educational career and job pathways. The interviews will be audio recorded, and the digital recording will be kept on a secure computer by the co-investigator.

##### Confidentiality:

Every precaution has been taken to maintain confidentiality for all study participants. Your daughter will not be identified in any way, nor will her name or other personal information be attached to the survey. All documents will be identified only by code number and kept in a



locked filing cabinet. Data from all phases of this study will only be analyzed by myself and my Faculty Advisor, and your daughter will never be identified by name in reports or publications resulting from this study.

**Risks:**

While some participants may experience some hesitancy in answering questions, previous studies have shown that many participants enjoy, and may also benefit from the opportunity to talk about their experiences.

Before the study begins, a handout will be provided that explains the rights of all research participants, as well as the key terms of the research vocabulary that are used in this study. Before the study begins, your daughter will get a handout that explains the rights of all research participants, as well as the key terms of the research vocabulary that are used in this study. The researcher will also ensure that your daughter is aware that she can stop at any time during the interview, or discontinue the topic if needed.

In the event that your daughter becomes upset by any part of the interview process, the researcher will provide a list of community services (such as counselors) and their contact information if needed.

**Contact Information for the Study:**

If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Dr. Donald Fisher.

**Contact for Concerns About the Rights of Research Subjects:**

If you have any questions or concerns about your daughter's rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services.

**Consent:**

Your daughter's participation in this survey is entirely voluntary and there are no consequences if you do not wish for her to participate in the study.

Your signature below indicated that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature below indicated that you are providing consent for your daughter's participation in the survey.

---

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

---

Parent/Guardian Name

Printed Name of Child

Thank you! Your daughter's participation will add valuable input to this study.

## Appendix E

### Interview Guide

Interview Code \_\_\_\_\_  
Interview date \_\_\_\_\_  
Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_  
Contact Info \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study.

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how young mothers in Bella Coola make decisions about their education. The questions I'm asking are generally about your experiences with school, your future plans and goals, and your opinions about school and education in your community.

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions

You can choose to not answer any of the questions, and you have the right to withdraw from this study at any time without any consequences.

I'll be taking notes during the interview so I don't miss anything important that you say.

Everything we talk about today that has been written down or recorded will be kept secure in my work area.

I will not include any information that will identify you personally or any other community members in my written report.

Is there a pseudonym or fake name that you would like to identify yourself as in this study?

Do you have any questions for me before we start the interview?

---

### General Questions

1. How old are you?
2. How would you BEST describe what you are doing now? (For example, working full time/part time, student full time/part time, full time household duties, etc.)

- If in school, where, what grade level, etc.
  - If working, where/what field, for how long
3. Have you already finished high school? If so, what's the last grade you have completed? (tie to Q9)
  4. I'd like to get a good understanding of what it feels like to be in your shoes right now. How would you describe a typical week in your life right now?

### **Questions about school**

5. How did you feel about school/your education before you had your child/children?
6. How did having kids affect your schooling?
7. How do you feel about school/your education now?
8. Can you tell me about what you like (d) the most about school? How about what you like (d) the least? Why?
9. Have you taken any time off from school? If yes, why?

### **Questions for older participants who have gone back as adults**

10. What made you decide to start taking courses here?
11. When was the last time you were in school before taking courses again?
12. What was happening in your life before you started taking classes again?
13. How has your life changed since taking these classes?

### **Future Plans or Goals**

14. What is the highest level of education that you WANT to achieve in your lifetime?
15. Is there a particular career or type of work that you are planning on getting into (if already in that field, did you plan on being in this line of work?)
16. What do you think formal education will/did do for you in terms of your life goals?
17. What kind of support would most help you meet your (educational or career) goals?
  - Are these support systems already available to you?
  - Are you getting the support you need?
18. Have you experienced any barriers in going to school? If so, please describe them for me. How can these barriers be removed?

### **Experience of Young Motherhood**

19. Who are the most important people in your life who help or influence you with your future plans?
20. How did this person (these people) react when you first told them you were pregnant?
21. How old were you when you first became pregnant?
22. How would you describe your experience of being a mother?
23. What are some of the issues girls face as teenage parents?
  - Do you think those issues are particular to Bella Coola?
  - How does your community view teen pregnancy?
24. How many kids do you have? What are their ages?
25. What is the highest level of education you want your kids to achieve in their lifetime?
  - What type of school programming do you consider to be important for your kids?
  - Is there any type of classes or programming that you would like to be available to your kids that may not have been available to you?

**Education in the community**

26. How would you describe your parents' (or family's) views on schooling?
  - What were their experiences like with school?
  - How do they feel about school and education?
  - What level of education have they completed?
27. How about your friends?
28. How would you describe the community's views or attitudes about school or formal education?
29. In your opinion, does (formal) education help make a community strong, or stronger than it already is?
30. What kind of programming do you think would work well for teen mothers?

**I'd like to finish off by asking some questions about the interview**

31. I'm trying to get a better understanding of how young mothers in Bella Coola make decisions about their education. Is there anything that I should have asked that I didn't? Or anything I left out?
32. Is there anything you would like to add?
33. Is there anything that you would like to ask me?

## Appendix F

### Know Your Rights With Research Handout Research Vocabulary

Here are some common words that are often used by researchers that might help you better understand how a research study is being conducted.

**Academic Research:** Research done for educational purposes that is completed by schools, universities, colleges etc.

**Analyze:** To examine carefully and in detail to identify causes, key factors, possible results, etc.

**Confidentiality:** Researchers do not share the identities of the people they may have met, spoken with or seen with anyone outside of the research project. Researchers also do not share any of the information provided during interviews or participant observation with anyone except those working on the research project that need to know (eg; the project supervisor).

**Ethics:** the principles of conduct governing an individual, a profession or research project. Universities and school districts often have developed set of guidelines that a researcher must follow. Universities also have ethics boards that review a researcher's project and must approve it before the researcher can begin their study.

**Findings:** Information that is discovered because of research

**Informed Consent:** Consent that is given by a research participant after having been provided with, and understood, the relevant risks and benefits of participating in a particular study.

**Interviews:** A meeting at which a researcher asks questions in order to find out study participant's opinions. Sometimes interviews are audio recorded and other times only written notes are taken. Youth should be told by the researcher about how the interview will be conducted before you agree to participate.

**Obvert Participant Observation:** the researcher is open with the group being studied about the reason for her presence in the field and the purpose of her study. The researcher must inform people in the research setting regarding writing about events that are witnessed in the field, and must also respect people's requests to not reveal aspects of their lives.

**Pseudonym:** A false name used by a participant instead of their real name to keep their identity secret.

**Study methods:** The way the study is being conducted. Common methods include surveys, interviews, focus groups, and observation.

**Transcript:** A written word-for-word copy of what was said during an interview.

## **Know your Rights with Research**

As a study participant it is important that you understand the full details of participating in a research study. The better you and the researcher understand each other and the details of the study, the more likely it is that you can have a positive research experience. Here are some of the things you should know before you participate in a research study.

### **You are allowed at any time to:**

**Refuse a Question:** During the interview you have the right to not answer or skip a question if you do not want to answer it.

**Withdraw from the study:** You can withdraw from the study at any time during the study, and all of your information will be withdrawn as well.

**Have interactions with the researcher at any point during the study:** Make sure you are able to communicate with the researcher before and after the study if you wish.

**Ask the researcher questions about anything in the study that is unclear to you or you are unsure of**

### **Has the researcher told you:**

- ☐ **The benefits and risks of the study?** If not, ask.
- ☐ **The purpose of the study?** If you don't understand it, ask questions.
- ☐ **The study procedure and methods?** (eg: how the study will be conducted, the length of time it will take to participate). If you think they left something out, ask them questions.
- ☐ **Where and how the information is going to be used?** Make sure this is clear to you
- ☐ **That your participation is entirely voluntary?** You do not have to participate if you don't feel comfortable
- ☐ **That you have time to decide whether or not you want to participate?** Make sure you have the time to think about participating.
- ☐ **That you have the right to remain anonymous?** The researcher should give you the option of using a fake name or ID number.
- ☐ **Where you can contact them if you have any further questions?** Make sure you have the researcher's contact information.

## Appendix G

### Findings Table

	Education	Employment	Young Motherhood
<b>Supports</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Affordable Childcare</li> <li>- Family</li> <li>- Partner</li> <li>- Teachers/Administrators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Affordable Childcare</li> <li>- Family/community connections</li> <li>- Adult education/job re-training (health and administration)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family caregivers</li> <li>- Partner support</li> <li>- Healthy Beginnings</li> </ul>
<b>Barriers/Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of childcare</li> <li>- Discrimination</li> <li>- Harassment</li> <li>- Geographical isolation</li> <li>- Lack of funding</li> <li>- Unfamiliarity with life outside the Valley</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of childcare</li> <li>- Low skills in education/job training</li> <li>- Lack of transportation</li> <li>- 'Bust' economic cycle</li> <li>- Welfare</li> <li>- Geographical isolation</li> <li>- Discrimination (unequal pay)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of family support</li> <li>- Lack of partner/child's father support</li> <li>- Inadequate housing</li> <li>- Discrimination/Stereotypes</li> <li>- Judgment</li> <li>- Gossip/rumors</li> <li>- Lack of access to birth control</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Better access to daycare</li> <li>- Flexible class scheduling</li> <li>- Variety in programming</li> <li>- Appropriate teacher (re)training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Job share programs</li> <li>- Job creation programs</li> <li>- Applicable job training</li> <li>- Computer classes (basic, graphic design)</li> <li>- Talking circles for Nuxalk and non-Aboriginal community members (learning opportunity)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Better (access to) housing</li> <li>- Better sex ed. programming</li> <li>- Parenting classes</li> <li>- Family counseling</li> <li>- Support circles for women</li> <li>- Programs for young fathers</li> <li>- Community/cultural mentorship programs</li> </ul>