

16 and Pregnant: The themes and portrayals of teen pregnancy

by

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Abstract

Numerous studies show that television is a teaching tool and gives us insight into the human experience. This study identifies the narrative themes about and portrayals of teen pregnancy on the MTV reality television show *16 and Pregnant*. These themes and portrayals may influence the viewers' worldview and concept of teen pregnancy. Through a qualitative approach, each episode was analyzed for this content. It was found that teen pregnancy is displayed as taboo, negative and unfortunate in *16 and Pregnant*. The themes present in the show were blame, conflict, and loss.

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Introduction

In 2001, U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher issued a “Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior.” In this address, he stated:

It is important to recognize the responsibilities that individuals and communities have in protecting sexual health. The responsibility of well-informed adults as educators and role models for their children cannot be overstated. Issues around sexuality can be difficult to discuss – because they are personal and because there is great diversity in how they are perceived and approached (2001).

From this address, the importance of educating young adults on issues surrounding sexual behavior is clear, including the risks of having unprotected sex. Having unprotected sex puts individuals at risk for sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy.

America has the highest level of teen pregnancy among industrialized countries, with 34.3 out of 1,000 teen girls ages 15 to 19 becoming pregnant every year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2012). Because of this, information outlets, namely television, are strongly encouraged by health leaders to provide the youth with sexual health education. The teen birth rate is declining, and the numbers are the lowest they have been in 70 years (Ventura & Hamilton, 2011), but have not dropped to the levels of other industrialized nations. This indicates a need to further information about contraception and prevention of teen pregnancy. It also indicates a lack of action on the part of teens to prevent pregnancy. The following study will explore how the third season (2011) of the television show *16 and Pregnant* portrayed teen pregnancy.

Literature Review

In 2009, 46 percent of male and female high school students had sexual intercourse (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2012). Of these students, 61 percent reported using a condom the last time they had intercourse, and 20 percent of the students reported using birth control pills the last time they had sex (2012). As the students age, the reported use of condoms decreases, according to a Youth Risk Behavior Survey administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2012). This survey also showed there is an increase in the use of the birth control pill as students age. The number of young people using contraception has not changed in the last few decades. More efforts need to be made to relay information about sex prevention to teens because there has been little to no change in their use of contraception (Weiss, 2012).

Teen pregnancy and the effects on males and females

Teen pregnancy can have detrimental effects on the lives of the young parents and their children. Teen pregnancy has a disproportionate effect on females. Becoming a teen parent is the number one reason teenage girls do not finish high school. Less than half of all teen mothers graduate from high school, and fewer than 2 percent graduate from college by the age of 30 (Hoffman & Maynard, 2008; The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2012). Approximately 25 percent of all teen mothers will have a second child within 24 months of their first, which further reduces their chances of finishing high school (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2012).

Financially, teen mothers are among the poorest people in the country. More than half of all mothers who are on welfare had their child as a teenager. The majority of absent teen fathers pay less than \$800 per year for child support because of a personal lack of funds. Eight of 10

teen parents will not get married, leaving many children without a strong father figure. Children who live apart from their fathers are five times more likely to be poor than children who have both parents at home (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2012). Children without a father figure are also more likely to go to jail, have emotional and behavioral problems, to abuse alcohol or drugs, and to drop out of school (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2004).

In 2008, teen pregnancy cost American taxpayers approximately \$10.9 billion, according to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (2012). This is the price of addressing the negative life outcomes that the children of teen mothers often experience. The costs of such outcomes may include "health care, foster care, incarceration, and lost tax revenue" (National Campaign, 2012).

The children of teen parents are also more likely to have a difficult time integrating successfully into society and staying out of trouble. The sons of teen mothers are twice as likely to end up in prison, and the daughters of teen mothers are three times as likely to become teen mothers themselves (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2012). However, it has also been argued that the negative outcomes for the children come from the parents' background and not the age in which they had the child (Gregson, 2009).

Teen health education in media

Mass media, including television, movies, newspapers, the Internet, magazines and music, are key sources of sexual information for teens (Johnson & Holmes, 2009). A study conducted in 2010 found that teens spend approximately seven hours and 38 minutes with media every day. However, because teens use multiple media at the same time, it is estimated that teens spend approximately 10 hours and 45 minutes a day with media (Rideout, Foehr & Roberts,

2010).

Because of the media-centric focus of young people's lives, many in the health community feel there needs to be an increase in education and information regarding sexual health in the media (Kaiser, 2004). Increasing this information can be difficult because many media outlets are reluctant to publish or broadcast materials that frankly discuss sex (Major & Walker, 2010).

Many parents find it difficult to have sex-health conversations with their teens, and there are ever increasing limitations put on public schools what they can teach about sexual health (Glazer, 2004). "By 2005, 35 percent of public school districts had accepted federal funds that required teaching that abstinence until marriage is the only safe option and that contraception can be discussed only in terms of failure rates," (Hust, Brown & L'Engle, 2008, p. 5). The lack of education about sex in the home or at school leads teens to seek sexual health information in the media, according to Hust and colleagues.

Social learning theory

How sexual health is portrayed on television is a major concern for parents. More than 60 percent of parents are concerned about the sexual content their children see (Kim, Sorsoli, Collins, Zylbergold, Schooler, & Tolman 2007). Social learning theory suggests "individuals commit to memory behaviors they have observed to be later used as models on which to base their own behavior" (Johnson & Holmes, 2009, p. 353). The National Institute of Mental Health concluded after reviewing more than 2,500 studies on the influence television has on human behavior that television had a major influence on the socialization on how people think and feel about the world around them, or their social reality (National Institute of Mental Health, 1982). It is also suggested in social learning theory that individuals' social reality and actions "involve

not only what they view as acceptable and unacceptable behavior, what they value and what they believe others value, how they stereotype others, and what kind of a world, in general, they think they live in, but are also a kind of lens through which they view others, events in the world, and ultimately themselves” (DeMaio, 1998, p. 2).

According to this theory, adolescents may act in a certain way if they see individuals on television benefitting from a specific behavior (Bandura, 1986, 1994; Johnson & Holmes, 2009). For example, if a teenage boy sees a character on television obtain a higher social status for having sex with a girl, the teenage boy may seek out relations with a girl he knows in order to obtain a similar social status as the character on television.

Media often play a role in how teens view health and sexual health. Teens make efforts to understand themselves and their peers, which make them impressionable and lead them to “often look to the media for issues increasing in importance such as those of romantic and sexual relationships” (Johnson & Holmes, 2009, p. 352). When teens are going through this time of change, they rely heavily on the information provided to them in the media on sexual health.

There have been many studies conducted on how sexual health information is portrayed in media. Hust, Brown and L’Engle (2008) found that characters on television may provide teens with an avenue on which to base their own sexual behavior and ideas. Characters in television dramas popular among teen dramas, “convey how individuals ‘should’ act in sexual situations” (Hust, Brown & L’Engle, 2008, p. 5). If the characters do not show sexually responsible and healthy behavior, “it is less likely that young people will adopt sexually healthy behavior themselves” (Hust, Brown & L’Engle, 2008, p. 5).

Conversely, it is presented that when sexually healthy behavior is modeled in the media, it has a positive impact on young peoples’ sexual behavior (Hust, Brown & L’Engle, 2008).

However, some studies (e.g. Chu, 2007; Pinkleton, Austin, Cohen, Chen & Fitzgerald, 2008) show that sexual relationships on television, specifically in the entertainment sector, do not show negative consequences of having a sexual relationship.

A study of Hollywood-produced romantic comedies found that films and television programs alike use:

Exaggerated and unrealistic portrayals of romantic and sexual relationships to appeal to their audiences. ... Younger viewers with few of their own experiences to compare against may come to view these representation as cultural norms and form unrealistic relationship beliefs and expectations accordingly (Johnson & Holmes, 2009, p. 352-353).

In an analysis of sexually explicit content in movies since 1970, Chu (2007) discovered that out of the 20 movies selected, 10 did not show any consequences of sexual behavior, four showed negative consequences, such as unwanted pregnancy, and six showed positive consequences. Of the films that exhibited a negative consequence, half were from the 1970s, and three of the five movies analyzed in 2000 exhibited no consequences for sexual behavior (Chu, 2007). Similarly, Pinkleton and colleagues (2008) found media rarely provide adequate information about sexual health. In this study, 75 percent of characters from 15 popular television shows experienced positive outcomes from sexual relationships. Efforts to teach sexual health in the media are typically, “gender-oriented, targeting girls, perhaps because pregnancy is often portrayed as the ultimate health risk for this group” (Stapleton, 2010, p. 17).

While the influence of sexual information on television is often construed as negative, media can have a positive impact on teen pregnancy rates. A study suggested declining American teen pregnancy rates “reflected the impact of strong teenage pregnancy prevention

messages that accompanied a variety of public and private efforts to focus teenagers' attention on the importance of avoiding pregnancy" (Ventura & Hamilton, 2011, p. 6).

Social learning theory suggests that observational learning could be directly linked to television (Bandura, 1977). It has been repeatedly demonstrated that human response patterns that formerly were attributed to self-motivation can be created by, eliminated, or reinforced by "varying external influences," such as television (Bandura, 1977, p. 5). For teens, this means they could be modeling many of the sexual behaviors they see on television (Kim et al., 2007).

Studies have shown that messages sent to children can impact their worldview, which validates social learning theory. Some studies took social learning theory as a valid argument and sought to further discover what messages are sent to audiences. An analysis of Saturday morning cartoons with social learning theory as its basis found there were a number of messages sent to children, such as children should "belong and be loyal to a group" (Swan, 1998, p. 108).

Again, looking for the messages to the audience, a study on the messages to teens about sex found that "positive messages received from experiencing sexual behavior vicariously through the sexual prowess of television characters may encourage viewer's sexual activity," which added to social learning theory (Truglio, 1998, p.20).

In a more recent study using social learning theory as its basis, an analysis of 250 popular films discovered the messages sent to parents about teens (Stern, 2005). Teens were found to be depicted as, "lazy, spoiled and irresponsible" (Stern, 2005, p. 34).

Stereotypes of parenthood and gender roles in media

A study of sexual health found that when sex is portrayed in the media, the portrayal usually follows stereotypical gender roles. The stereotypes of parenthood and the male and roles in parenthood have been studied for many years. A study of prime-time television shows

featuring teen characters “found that negative emotional, social and punitive sexual consequences were more frequent when female characters initiated sexual activities” (Hust, Brown & L’Engle, 2008, p.6).

A study established the basis for the male role in parenthood stating that almost all men consider themselves a good father if they are providing financially for the family (Cohen, 1987). Fathers have had an increasing absence in the family home with more than one-third of children living apart from their biological father (Booth & Crouter, 1998). In the book *The Culture of Teenage Mothers*, it is implied that the absence of fathers in teen pregnancies is a major concern for those wanting to reduce the cost teen pregnancy places on the government (Gregson, 2009).

This reality has been reflected in the media with fathers taking on the economic responsibilities without the emotional responsibilities of childrearing (Booth & Crouter, 1998). Even men who are in a marital relationship and are fathers are:

Profoundly alienated from their children, that even “daddy trackers” are mere helpers and secondary caretakers who leave ultimate responsibility for housework and childcare to their wives; and that men’s primary connection with other family members is essentially economic, not emotional (p. 22).

In mainstream dramatic representations, fatherhood is both rewarding and problematic. Fatherhood can have its benefits such as a loving relationships with their children, but it can also interfere with men’s work life if they hold certain time intensive occupations such as doctors and lawyers (Lupton & Barclay, 1997).

It has also been documented that by the 1980s there were many television commercials and shows that depicted fathers as benefitting from father-child relationships, which has been identified as the “new” or “modern” father (Coltrane, 1995; Lupton & Barclay, 1997). However,

when the “modern” father is shown, it is typically in a situation of divorce, such as in the movie *Mrs. Doubtfire*, or fathers are shown in instances where the mother is no longer alive, such as the television comedies *Full House* and *Who’s the Boss* (Coltrane, 1995; Lupton & Barclay, 1997).

Conversely, a woman’s femininity and gender identity is strongly associated with motherhood (Arendell, 2000). It has been presumed throughout history that motherhood is “a primary identity for most adult women. That is, womanhood and motherhood are treated as synonymous identities and categories of experience” (Arendell, 2000, p. 1192). Mothers are seen as the primary caregivers to their children (Booth & Crouter, 1998).

With teenage motherhood, it is often considered that teen mothers do not meet the standards of “good” mothers (Gregson, 2009). Women are marginalized if they are “living on welfare, divorced or unmarried, aged under 20, lesbian, drug-users, or who have committed criminal offenses” (Rolfe, 2008, p. 300). The conversation surrounding teen pregnancy is that it is a social problem (Gregson, 2009). However, if a teen becomes a mother she is considered morally unstable and troubled (Stapleton, 2010).

Media stereotypes and glamorization of pregnancy

Very little academic research has been conducted on pregnancy and how it is portrayed in the media. Pregnancy is discussed so seldom in “literature on mass communication that one might think it had been newly invented” (Kelly, 2006, p. 8).

The negative response to a female’s reproductive system has been applied in experiments and studies. Females are to conceal their biological functions including their menstrual cycle (Goldenberg, Goplen, Cox & Arndt, 2007). This was shown in an experiment when a male or female administering a survey excused him or herself from the room to either use the bathroom or fetch some paperwork. The results were conclusive that when the female administrator left for

the bathroom the participants rated her lower than when she left to retrieve paper work. However, there was no difference in the participants rating of the male administrator (2007). Goldenberg and colleagues stated that while childbearing is seen as a beautiful life experience it is also seen as a means of discrimination. In history and in the present day, “women’s reproductive responsibility is used to devalue them; and in many cases the argument is directly made that child bearing capabilities interfere with a woman’s ability to successfully perform various jobs” (Goldenberg et al., p. 226).

Women were often legally obliged to leave work once becoming pregnant in the early twentieth century, but only when they started to show; it was “inappropriate” to be pregnant in public (Lupton, 1994). This is reflected in the media. The media have:

Illustrated ambivalence in its treatment of pregnancy. In television’s early years, pregnant women were not visible and discussion of pregnancy on air was restricted; for example, on the show *I Love Lucy*, Lucille Ball was expected to shield her pregnant belly behind chairs (Goldenberg et al., 2007, p. 215).

In a study on the pregnant form, individuals were shown a photograph of actress Demi Moore as she appeared on the cover of *Vanity Fair* magazine in 1991, naked and exposing her pregnant belly. The same individuals were also shown an image of Demi Moore appearing naked, but not pregnant. The pregnant image of Demi Moore was perceived much less favorably than the non-pregnant image (Goldenberg et al., 2007). In part II of the same study, Gwyneth Paltrow, actress, was seen as “less competent” as a pregnant woman than when she was shown not pregnant (Goldenberg et al., 2007).

The way pregnant celebrities are portrayed in the media often suggests that the average mom-to-be should be thin everywhere except for their baby bump (Kelly, 2006). There is an

increasing focus on celebrities and their pregnant bellies. The most tweeted about event of all time was the award-winning singer and songwriter Beyonce Knowles' pregnancy announcement at the 2011 *MTV Video Music Awards* (Hernandez, 2011). However much of the focus is put on celebrities' weight gain and not on the cycle of life; in other words, it's okay to be pregnant, but only if you look "good" while pregnant (Goldberg et al., 2007).

The obsession with pregnant celebrities and the ever-increasing media coverage of pregnant celebrities sends harmful messages to audiences. In the book "The Mommy Myth," Douglas and Michaels explore the almost comical representation of pregnancy and motherhood in celebrity magazines. In an interview for *Good Housekeeping*, Debby Boone, a Grammy award winning singer, told the magazine that she "weight a pound less" than she did prior to her pregnancy just three days after giving birth (Douglas & Michaels, 2004, p. 110). This and other examples of the glamorization of pregnancy can make regular mothers "feel like failures" and sending the message that mothers can do it all if they have the right attitude (p. 119).

Teen pregnancy has been portrayed in television dramas and in movies in recent years. Movies, such as *Juno* and *Saved*, and television shows, such as *Secret Life of the American Teenager*, depict teen girls who become pregnant after their first sexual experience. Multiple studies have researched the messages in the movie *Juno*, a movie based on a teen girl's decision to place her child up for adoption. *Juno* provided the audience with scenes that offered some challenges to the teen pregnancy stereotype, including showing the sex scene between Juno and her boyfriend Paulie (Shaw, 2010). In the sex scene, Juno was shown to be in charge of her sexuality and was a strong woman, which is a contrast to the image of teen males instigating sex. However, the scene also reinforced the stereotype that "teen pregnancy is the result of two teenagers fumbling around in the dark" (Shaw, 2010, p. 61).

While there were positive non-stereotypical scenes in *Juno* it has also been contended that *Juno* glossed over the difficulties surrounding teen pregnancy (Shaw, 2010). *Juno* considered having an abortion, but after sitting in the clinic waiting room for a few minutes she decided against it. Both *Juno* and the receptionist at the clinic were shown as “immature and inarticulate” (Hoerl & Kelly, 2010, p. 369). When *Juno*’s stepmother, Bren asked *Juno* whether she had considered having an abortion, *Juno* said no and Bren stated that *Juno* was a “little Viking,” meaning she was “tough” for keeping the child (Hoerl & Kelly, 2010, p. 369). In their study on the movies *Knocked Up*, *Juno*, and *Waitress*, Hoerl and Kelly found that when the movies depicted the girl’s decision to carry the child to term as the only reasonable option, the films “stigmatize women who have had abortions as unnatural and unfeminine” (p. 376).

The sorrow experienced from putting a baby up for adoption is glossed over in *Juno*, and at the end of the movie *Juno* is shown riding her bike and hanging out with Paulie (Shaw, 2010). *Juno* also displayed the relationship between *Juno* and Paulie growing stronger after the birth when at the end of the film *Juno* said, “I know people are supposed to fall in love before they reproduce, but I guess normalcy isn’t really our style” (Hoerl & Kelly, 2010, p. 369).

MTV use by teens

The number one cable network among 12- to 24-year-olds is MTV (Rideout, 2003). Since 1997 the Kaiser Family Foundation has partnered with MTV to provide youth with information outside of the average public service announcement in order to target sexually active 16- to 24-year-olds (Rideout, 2003). According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, “three out of four 16- to 24-year olds watch MTV, including nearly six in ten (58 percent) who watch at least once a week or more, and two in 10 (20 percent) who watch for an hour or more every day” (Rideout, 2003).

In addition to teens watching the programming actually on television, the statistics on who visits MTV.com also speak volumes to MTV's reach. Over one in four 16 to 24 year-olds have visited MTV's website mtv.com (Rideout, 2003).

Reality television

Reality television started in the 1990s with shows such as *MTV's The Real World*, *Big Brother*, and *Survivor*. This trend is a direct result of the budget cuts many broadcasting companies experienced, and the inexpensive nature of reality television programming. While reality shows are popular among all age demographics, it is "disproportionately popular among pre-teens, adolescents, and young adults" (Christenson & Ivancin, 2006, p. 3).

Some reality shows provide educational information and "life lessons" to young people. In MTV's reality show *My Sweet Sixteen*, wealthy teens:

Were sent to impoverished global locations to improve their character and ethics in a program called *Exiled*. The contestants on the third season of sister channel VH1's *Charm School* are currently being instructed on the importance and procedures of volunteering and performing community service (Ouelette, 2010, p. 69).

Still, much of reality television is criticized for its stereotypes. In a study completed on racial depictions on MTV's *The Real World* and *Survivor*, stereotypes made up much of the content in the shows. These shows focus much of the drama and story structure around racial stereotypes and stereotypical myths about racial cultures (Bell-Jordan, 2008).

Very little research has been conducted on reality shows' portrayals of teen pregnancy. However, reality television has sent health messages before. MTV's *The Real World* brought attention to HIV and Aids when in its third season a participant came out that he had the virus (Christenson & Ivancin, 2006).

Research Questions

While many popular television shows provide insight into the benefits of sexual relationships, little research has been conducted on the television shows portraying teen pregnancy, and how the consequences of sexual relationships are portrayed in the media. It opens the door to many questions including what messages are being given to teens about the consequences of sexual relationships, how teen pregnancy is portrayed and how it affects both the male and female characters.

Because of the importance of understanding and researching the messages given to young people about sexual health and the considerable lack of research completed on the portrayal of teen pregnancy in the media, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1: During the spring television season of 2011, how did the reality television show *16 and Pregnant* portray pregnancy?

RQ2: In the television show *16 and Pregnant*, what narrative themes were present?

While this study cannot provide evidence for a direct influence *16 and Pregnant* has on its audience, it can provide a fundamental first step toward future studies on the audience effect (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Stern, 2005).

Method

16 and Pregnant

The television show analyzed in the narrative analysis is *16 and Pregnant*. This show was chosen because of the focus on teen pregnancy. I chose this show because it is a reality show, not fiction. Aside from a few MTV documentary specials, the topic of teen pregnancy on a reality show is unprecedented on television (Rideout, 2004).

16 and Pregnant has aired for three seasons on MTV after its debut in 2009. The following is a table of each season's airdates and the number of episodes.

Table 1

Season	Air Dates	Number of Episodes
Season One	June 11, 2009 – July 30, 2009	8 episodes
Season Two	February 16, 2010 – April 20, 2010	11 episodes
Season Three	April 19, 2011 – June 21, 2011	10 episodes

16 and Pregnant is a show that follows a different teenage girl in every episode. It details her pregnancy experience, including how her family and friends reacted to the pregnancy as well as the birth of the baby. Each episode includes several months following the birth. The program was chosen because of its popularity among young TV viewers.

The third season of *16 and Pregnant* was ranked number 12 in cable ratings amongst all cable shows by Nielson ratings (Seidman, 2011). The first episode of the third season of *16 and*

Pregnant was rated number one in cable ratings for the week and brought in 2.4 million viewers (Seidman, 2011). In the following weeks, the ratings slightly declined, moving from a 1.2 percent of adults aged 18 to 49 watching the first, second and third episodes to 0.8 percent of adults aged 18 to 49 watching the fourth episode (Gorman, 2011). For a non-network television show, these rating numbers are considered extremely high (Neilson, 2010). *16 and Pregnant* has consistently been in the top 15 original cable series since its debut in 2009 and has directly contributed to MTV's six consecutive quarters of growth (Seidman, 2011).

The third season will be the only season studied in this analysis because it is the most recent season of the television show at the time of analysis.

I analyzed one full season of *16 and Pregnant*. I chose a reality program rather than a scripted program because reality television's story arcs are self-contained within one season and scripted television has story arcs over multiple seasons. Also, because health information changes so rapidly, the most recent season of *16 and Pregnant* will provide me with the most current portrayal of teen pregnancy.

Each episode is 60 minutes in length including commercials. Without commercials each episode is approximately 42 minutes long. Each of the seasons contains a special finale episode with Dr. Drew, a celebrity psychologist; two of the seasons have unseen footage episodes. The "unseen footage" episodes and the Dr. Drew specials will not be included in the analysis and were not included in calculating the total number of episodes. These episodes are excluded because while they pertain to teen pregnancy on television, they do not directly correlate with the narratives given in each episode. The chronological aspect of each teen's pregnancy informs this particular narrative analysis heavily; each of these "unseen footage" episodes includes clips from the season as a whole and can show events out of order. The Dr. Drew specials are mainly a

check-up on how the characters are doing months following the pregnancy and answering questions from both the other teen mothers featured on the show and the audience members.

Obtaining the shows

All of the shows are archived on the MTV.com website. The episodes are shown with limited commercials and can easily be paused, stopped, rewound and fast-forwarded.

Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is typically used for the written word, but it can also be applied to television (Horsley, 2007; Newbold, 1998). I hope to gain a full picture of how the narrative within the show *16 and Pregnant* portrays teen pregnancy. According to Newbold (1998), gaining a full understanding of a topic or theme is not only possible through narrative analysis, but it is a preferred method when analyzing moving images, “Using the procedures provided by narrative and genre study, the moving image researcher is able to break down signifying components and structures without breaking up the object of study as a meaningful whole” (Newbold, 1998, p. 131). Narrative analysis is used for television because of the implied influence it has on its audience (Gunter, 2000).

Audiences view most films and television shows because they are presented in the form of a narrative or a story (Bordwell & Thompson, 1997). A story can be broken up into two segments – the series of events and the context in which the events take place (Bordwell & Thompson, 1997; Jensen, 2002). In order to study and analyze a narrative, the researcher must break up the narrative into components and examine the events and context in which the elements take place. When the narrative is broken down in this way, it helps in finding themes, finding significant patterns. This type of analysis is useful because it allows us to see how *16 and Pregnant* portrays the experience of teen pregnancy. The events can be defined as conversations

between characters, conflicts between characters, and key moments to the story, such as the birth of the baby.

Within the context of the narrative, there are a number of functions that break down further into categories, including exposition, characters, and time and space (Barthes & Duisit, 1975; Bordwell & Thompson, 1997). These functions have a direct relation and necessity for the story; however, these functions are not considered the story or action itself (Barthes & Duisit, 1975). The action consists of structural categories including the plot rise, climax, and conclusion or resolution (Bordwell & Thompson, 1997).

The following three functions are a key part of the analysis because they give support and background information to the story.

Exposition is what we can tell or are told in the first part of the television show (Bordwell & Thompson, 1997). According to Chatman (1980), exposition is the back story or the set-up for the story. Exposition introduces characters and provides the audience with the background information necessary for the story to move forward (Chatman, 1980). In film and in television, the exposition is the start of the plot and character development (Bordwell & Thompson, 1997). Exposition is extremely important for the opening situation because “the opening raises our expectations by setting up a specific range of possible causes for and effects of what we see” (Bordwell & Thompson, 1997, p. 99). Each episode of *16 and Pregnant* provides some exposition in which the teen explains where she lives, who she lives with, information regarding her personal and social life, and her pregnancy.

In this analysis, character is not just defined as humans on screen but rather as someone playing an active role with traits and qualities affecting their actions. There are aspects of characters and his or her development that directly correlate with the action and plot of the

narrative. Every character has a set of traits and qualities that contribute and form the narrative through playing their role (Bordwell & Thompson, 1997; Jensen, 2002). According to Bordwell and Thompson (1997), “Character traits can involve attitudes, skills, preferences, psychological drives, details of dress and appearance and any other specific quality the film creates for a character” (p. 94). Their role will either be to hold a round character role, or drive the plot, or they will have a flat character role in which they will contribute less to the plot or will be non-essential (Layne & Lewis, 2009). According to Jensen (2002), characters provide us with both narration and action. Even when characters are not speaking, they are providing us with part of the story (Jensen, 2002). We learn about the characters through their actions with other characters, their words, how they are presented from the outside and how they are presented from their own internal thoughts and point-of-view (Jensen, 2002). Within *16 and Pregnant* the characters’ traits, actions and narration of the story are developed and filtered through the eyes of producers, directors, and editors of the television show. This study aims to analyze how pregnancy is portrayed and what messages are sent to teens from the television show *16 and Pregnant*.

Every narrative occurs within a specific time and space. The space is the physical location in which the events take place, such as the home, school and doctor’s office; in television and in moving visuals as a whole, time and space are vital factors of the story (Bordwell & Thompson, (1997). The concept of space is important; often the audience will be asked to visualize a space that is never shown (Bordwell & Thompson, 1997). For example, the pregnant teen may talk about how terrible school is and the events that take place there, but that space may never be seen on screen. The time is constructed by the events and plot points that take place throughout the narrative (Bordwell & Thompson, 1997). While many narratives will

use time as a means of only revealing plot points at certain times (Bordwell & Thompson, 1997), the episodes of *16 and Pregnant* follow a chronological timeline from pregnancy to several months after the birth. The time, especially within the narrative of *16 and Pregnant*, allows us to not only understand when the events are taking place, but it allows the audience to understand the rapid physical and emotional changes throughout the teen's pregnancy.

The elements of action are key to building engaging narrative (Layne & Lewis, 2009). The elements of action are rising plot, climax, and resolution. This structure is present within each episode of *16 and Pregnant* and presents the viewer with the theme of the narrative (Layne & Lewis, 2009). According to Layne and Lewis, "the theme or message is the main point or points that the viewer draws from the way the characters respond to the obstacles or resolve the conflict in the film." Plot is not just the story and what is visibly and audibly in front of the viewer, but it is the cause and effect elements within the story (Bordwell & Thompson, 1997; Layne & Lewis, 2009). Most often, the agents of cause and effect are the characters present within the narrative (Bordwell & Thompson, 1997). The actions of cause and effect will create conflict. Rising through the plot, the narrative will most often, "resolve the causal issues by bringing the development to a high point or climax" (Bordwell & Thompson, 1997, p. 101).

The climax, the point at which the story has only a few possible outcomes, typically serves to settle the causal conflicts within the narrative and emotionally gives the viewer the feeling of tension and suspense (Bordwell & Thompson, 1997). The resolution is provided after the climax, which often gives the viewer a satisfactory feeling (Layne & Lewis, 2009). There are four types of resolution, according to Layne & Lewis (2009): (1) comic resolution is when the protagonist is better off than when the narrative started; (2) tragic resolution is when the protagonist is worse off than when the narrative started; (3) linear resolution is when the

protagonist is largely unchanged by the conflicts that arose throughout the narrative; and (4) denouement is when the narrative ties up all loose ends. Within each episode of *16 and Pregnant*, the resolution will play a large role in discovering how teen pregnancy is portrayed on the show. The resolution holds the largest takeaway of the film and, thus, will hold great significance when analyzing the portrayal of teen pregnancy. The resolution is the take away message from the film.

Process and Unit of Analysis

For this study, I first created a matrix (Appendix A) based on the matrix developed for Horsley's (2007) study on portrayals of weight loss on television for each episode. The matrix contained the functions and plot/action elements indicated above.

Based on both Horsley and Foss's (2004) recommended process for narrative analysis, I first analyzed the show to gain an overall, comprehensive understanding of the narrative of the episode including key plot points and character overviews. When watching each episode a second time, I examined relationships, the climax of the story arc and portrayal of the pregnancy, the birth, and the first months of motherhood. After the second viewing I re-watched the episode a third time to take further notes and gather more theme-based information. The process of coding and viewing the episodes of *16 and Pregnant* three times provided an in-depth look at the program's collective narrative.

For example, when watching episode 1 "Jordan," I watched the episode once without taking notes to gain a general understanding of the story. I then took detailed notes about Jordan's conversation with her grandmother about how Jordan became pregnant and how her pregnancy affected more than just Jordan and Brian, Jordan's boyfriend. I also took detailed accounts of how each argument and conversation took place. When I watched the episode a third

time, I took note of Jordan's concept of the pregnancy prior to the birth and after becoming a mother.

The results were compiled after careful consideration of each episode and the larger narrative within the series was analyzed. The matrix was used to determine the larger narrative for the series of this year's episodes. I analyzed each episode systematically, but acknowledge that someone else looking at the programs may come to a different conclusion.

Findings

While each episode followed a different girl with a different pregnancy experience, there was an overall narrative that came to light after analyzing each episode three times. The larger narrative of teen pregnancy was a story of blame, loss, and acceptance.

Demographics

The girls on the show ranged in age from 15 to 18 years old. Their age was stated at the start of every episode. The reasons for the pregnancy included an accident because of a lack of a birth control method, failure of the birth control method, or not properly using the birth control method. The pregnancies were neither planned nor were from an unwanted sexual experience, such as rape. On *16 and Pregnant*, the girls who became pregnant were portrayed as not limited by geographical location or race. The teen girls were from all over the United States. Of the pregnant teen girls, four were Caucasian, one was African-American, three were Latino, and two were bi-racial. By showing a diverse group of young pregnant girls, *16 and Pregnant* emphasized that becoming pregnant can occur to any woman having unprotected sex or not properly using birth control.

In every episode the girls wanted to have sexual intercourse, but they did not want the pregnancy. The girls had all been sexually active prior to becoming pregnant, and either did not use a birth control method, the method was misused, or the method failed.

Who is at fault?

Teen pregnancy is portrayed as taboo, negative and unfortunate in *16 and Pregnant*. The theme seen in the first third of each episode was blame. In an effort to unravel why the pregnancy occurred, the characters attempted to answer the question: “Who is at fault for this pregnancy?” The pregnant girls are most often blamed by their parents, peers, and significant

others. In addition, several of the parents blamed themselves, one another, and even grandparents. Overall, a major focus of each episode is placed on discovering who is to blame for the pregnancy despite the inability to change the past.

An example of blame was shown in Episode 4 “Danielle.” In this episode, the audience was introduced to Danielle, her boyfriend, Jamie, and her mother, Casey. Danielle became pregnant while living at her grandmother’s house. Casey struggled with accepting Danielle’s pregnancy because she had been a pregnant teen herself. After the baby was born, Danielle wrestled with the decision to move in with Jamie and his father or to stay and live with her mother.

In Episode 4, Casey expressed her profound disappointment in Danielle’s actions and in her pregnancy. Casey went so far as to blame Danielle for how others perceived Casey as a mother. Casey said:

Now, when people look at me they think I’m this horrible person that let her 16-year-old daughter get pregnant. When I worked so hard to embed it into your head this isn’t something you wanted.

Casey also placed the blame on herself for allowing Danielle to move into her grandmother’s home. Casey said to Danielle:

It breaks my heart that I let you go with Grandma and all of this happened. What were my words when she called and told me you should go and live with her? “What, so she can go and end up pregnant like I did?” I knew what that situation was like – there was no parental supervision, and I let my baby girl out of my hands.

Danielle’s friends also asked her why she wasn’t on birth control. Danielle explained that when she went to the doctor to get birth control, they discovered she was pregnant.

In Episode 5, “Cleondra,” Cleondra’s pregnancy was both a surprise and a great disappointment to her family. Cleondra’s sister had been also a teen mother, and Cleondra saw firsthand the trials of teen pregnancy. Throughout the episode, Cleondra dealt with her boyfriend Mario’s lack of enthusiasm for taking care of the child.

Cleondra’s mother, Dixie, expressed her anger and sadness over her daughter’s pregnancy. Dixie blamed Cleondra for the pregnancy and said, “I was so angry because of the fact that I made it a point to get you a big box of condoms and to go through safe sex. You said your heart dropped. So did mine.” In a later conversation, Cleondra’s brother, Javon, told her, “I thought you would be smarter than that. Being pregnant is going to hold you back from everything.”

Episode 7 “Izabella,” also provided an example of finding blame for the pregnancy. In this episode, Izabella hid her pregnancy for eight months while she avoided her friends and her relatives. Izabella made up excuses to not see her friends, and she would only leave her house if she were going to the other side of town where she would not encounter people she recognized. When she finally told her extended family of her pregnancy, the response was one of shock and disappointment.

While Izabella’s parents were supportive of Izabella’s decision to keep the baby a secret, her uncle, Luigi, expressed his disappointment after finding out Izabella had been keeping her pregnancy a secret for eight months. Luigi said:

It just shows that it doesn’t matter how close you are to your daughter and stuff because you guys are really close (indicating Izabella and her parents). Look what’s happened. I mean I just feel for you because your lives are going to change. It’s hard ya know – especially for you as a girl (pointing to Izabella). For him it’s like high fives and stuff, ya

know? And that's the truth. But for you, you're the one that's going to have to stay home and watch the baby and stuff. I don't know, I'm disappointed.

After this statement Izabella and her mother were both crying.

In another scene, Vi, Izabella's mother, asked Erik, Izabella's father, if he still "blames her" (Vi). Erik responded:

If you want a straight answer, yes; I do blame you. I kept on telling you, "You need to talk to her," because you're the one who's really closest to her. I mean I've told you many times – be the mom, not the buddy, not the friend.

Prior to blaming Vi, Erik expressed that he felt he failed and expressed his difficulty in accepting Izabella's pregnancy.

Throughout the episodes, the teen's peers also tried to determine who was to blame for the pregnancy. Most often, the teen's peers asked the teen mother, "Were you using birth control?" "Did you use a condom?" "Why weren't you using birth control?" These conversations appeared in every episode with the exception of Episode 9 "Taylor." In trying to determine the blame for the pregnancy, the peers also blamed the teen mothers more than the teen fathers. This showed that both adults and young people blamed the teen mother for becoming pregnant. Pregnancy was the girl's fault and the girl's problem.

In Episode 3 "Jamie," Jamie was a straight-A student and lived with her single mother. In the episode Jamie was confronted with the reality of having to raise her baby on her own after Ryan, her boyfriend, struggled to take responsibility for the baby. Jamie had a strained relationship with her father but relied on her mother and her friends to support her through the pregnancy.

Jamie's friends, Brandon and Hannah, asked her if she was on birth control. Jamie told them she was not using birth control pills or condoms. Jamie's friend Hannah responded and said, "You were always the brains of all of us. You would always say to wait!"

The teen fathers were occasionally present for the who-is-at-fault conversation but were not blamed for the pregnancy in the way the teen mothers were blamed. One teen mother had a conversation with the teen father about what kinds of birth control were being used and why they didn't use more protection. In Episode 2, "Jennifer," Jennifer told Josh, the teen father, that he should have worn a condom, but that he said he didn't have money. Josh told Jennifer, "I just used that as an excuse; I just didn't want to buy them. It's awkward going in there and buying condoms." This is the only conversation with a teen father about what he should have done to prevent the pregnancy. This showed the audience that the girls were the ones to blame for the pregnancy. This also showed that girls are to be responsible for the birth control method in a sexual relationship, which is an unfair burden.

In Episodes 8, "Kianna," and 10, "Allie," the teen mothers discussed with the teen fathers how they misused their birth control pills. Both Kianna and Allie neglected to take the pill at least one day when they became pregnant. In both of these conversations, neither Zak (Kianna's boyfriend) nor Joey (Allie's boyfriend) countered with what they could have done to prevent the pregnancy.

In every example and in each of the episodes of *16 and Pregnant*, we see the blame placed on the teen mother more than any other character. The teen fathers are not held responsible for the pregnancy, which could be the result of a disassociation between teen fathers and pregnancy. Because the teen fathers do not physically carry the child, more of the blame is

placed on the female because the pregnancy is physically evident. This is a gender norm that could make women more responsible for the birth control.

The blame put on the teen mothers often left the pregnant teen girls with feelings of guilt, regret, and disappointment. For example, in Episode 5, Cleondra said that she felt incredibly disappointed in herself after her mother expressed her frustration in Cleondra becoming pregnant. In Episode 6, Kayla's mother ignored her after the pregnancy. Kayla often attempted to start conversations with her mother about how she felt overweight while pregnancy, but her mom did not help. However, it was Kayla's friend Kelci who comforted her. Kelci said to her, "You're not fat; you're pregnant." The negative self-image, caused by the blame, showed the detrimental effects of placing blame on the teen mother. It displayed that if a teen girl is to become pregnant, she will feel guilt and shame for the pregnancy.

Conflict

Conflict with the result of loss was another theme of the narrative. The conflict arose from the disruptive event of the pregnancy. The pregnancy caused conflicts about money, responsibility, and family. The episodes displayed conflict prior to the birth, which mainly revolved around the blame of the pregnancy. The conflict prior to the birth is often about whether the pregnancy is a good thing. In Episode 2 "Jennifer," Jennifer's parents strongly disapproved of having a baby shower because the pregnancy was not something to celebrate. Josh, the teen father, and his parents decided to throw a baby shower. When Rico, Jennifer's father received the invitation he refused to go and said, "This is supposed to be a joyous time, and I don't feel that way."

There was a brief reprieve from conflict when the baby was born, and then the conflict rose again. The conflict in each episode escalated after the baby was born. The conflict post-birth included arguments between the teen parents, the parents of the teens, and other family members.

In episode 1 “Jordan,” we saw how the pregnancy caused conflict within the family. Jordan dealt with the repercussions of her pregnancy most with her twin sister Jessica. Jordan and her boyfriend Brian moved into the downstairs of Jordan’s grandmother’s home. After the baby was born, the living situation and the baby’s presence caused disputes.

Jordan and Jessica had a dispute prior to the birth about Jessica’s presence in the delivery room with Jordan and Brian, the teen father. Jessica and Jordan were inseparable before Jordan became pregnant. Jessica felt left out and abandoned by Jordan.

After Noah was born, Jordan experienced the trials of motherhood on the first night home; Noah woke up at 12:30 a.m., 1:45 a.m., 2:30 a.m., and 3:15 a.m. Noah’s crying seemed endless. Jessica walked downstairs where Brian and Jordan lived and offered her help. Jordan and Brian refused, and Jessica became extremely upset. Jessica said to Aleta, her grandmother, “I’m not part of her picture anymore. She always wants to be my number one person, but I’m not supposed to be hers anymore.” Jessica felt replaced by Brian and Noah in Jordan’s life.

Jordan’s experience with teen pregnancy showed that her pregnancy affected her life and the lives of those around her. The conflict and changes that Jordan and Jessica experienced showed the loss experienced by pregnant teens. Jordan used to be extremely close to her sister, but after the pregnancy their relationship was strained.

In Episode 3, “Jamie,” the tension over who was to be responsible for the baby’s care and emotional support caused conflict between Jamie and Ryan and between Ryan and Jamie’s mother Aprille.

Jamie and her mother, Aprille, were concerned about Ryan's parenting skills before Miah was born because he liked to party. Ryan convinced Jamie he was willing to step up and accept the responsibility of being a father. The fear of Ryan's absence turned into a reality when Jamie gave birth. Ryan arrived just in time to see Miah's birth. Jamie narrated that he looked "like hell," and he had a pathetic excuse for not picking up the phone when she called him countless times. After Miah was born, Jamie kicked Ryan out of the hospital room and told him to go home.

Jamie brought Miah home when she was two days old. Jamie said she always thought Ryan would be going home with her, but that she had to figure out how to do things on her own. On Miah's third day home, Ryan arrived at Aprille's house to see Miah. Jamie said he looked like he had been partying. Ryan wanted to take Miah with him, but Jamie made it clear that Miah needed to stay with her because she was too young. Ryan started crying and Aprille arrived home. Aprille joined into the argument and said:

Right now it's not about you; it's about your daughter. What's best for her is staying with her mother. (Ryan started to interrupt) You shut up a minute. You hurt my daughter. You blew it. You're lucky you even made it to the birth. You're not even old enough to drink and you show up hung over. Right now I'm really pissed off at you because you're not responsible.

This scene showed that Ryan was not blamed for the pregnancy, but he was blamed for not taking responsibility for Miah. Ryan left Aprille's house after the confrontation. Ryan and Jamie saw each other one more time at Ryan's home when they argued over when Ryan would be allowed to keep Miah at his house. Jamie said she felt uncomfortable with the argument and left Ryan's house.

Jamie tried to keep her focus on her schoolwork, but when she started back in her high school, she said everything felt awkward and that she felt like people were hiding something from her. Jamie remembered what her friend Sybil told her:

Ryan already has a new girlfriend and that he has been seeing her for months. And, I'm pretty sure that's who he was with the night I went into labor. And, to make matters worse, everyone at school knew except me.

Jamie discussed how hurt she was with her friend Sybil. Jamie then decided that she needed to confront Ryan and tell him that she would handle the custody of Miah through the courts.

Jamie's experience with conflict showed that her pregnancy did not bring her closer to Ryan, but rather it drove them further apart. The conflict that Jamie experienced caused the loss of her childhood and her dreams. She also lost the romanticized notions of romantic relationships.

In episode 9 "Taylor," Taylor's mother Debi wanted Taylor to give her baby up for adoption. Debi was also a teen mother, but chose adoption at that time. Prior to the birth, Debi explained the financial struggles Taylor would have because of the child. Neither Taylor nor Nathan, Taylor's boyfriend, had a job despite Taylor's urgings for Nathan to find work. Taylor was resolute to keep the baby regardless of the troubles she might experience.

Conflict about money and responsibility arose after the baby was born. When Aubri was born, Taylor found herself taking care of Aubri on her own without the help of Nathan or Debi. Debi also became frustrated with the amount of money Debi spent on Aubri. While Debi, Nathan and Taylor were buying baby supplies for Aubri, Debi expressed her frustration to Nathan and Taylor.

Debi said: Somebody needs to get a job besides me around here.

Nathan said: I'm trying. I've been filling out applications.

Debi said: Well, let's try harder so it doesn't always fall on me.

Taylor said she felt bad for relying on Debi for everything.

Nathan and Taylor argued when Nathan spent the night to help with Aubri's care. Taylor wanted Nathan to get up in the middle of the night to give Aubri a bottle because it was "his turn." He refused. Taylor was the one who woke up first and prepared the bottle for Aubri in the middle of the night. Taylor talked to Nathan about how he needed to help more, and it turned into a larger argument. Nathan said he helped, but Taylor wanted more from him. He called her an idiot and left the house. Debi approached Taylor and Nathan the next day to discuss the argument. Debi said to Nathan:

All Taylor is asking for is help. You bitch (context of complaining). You don't want to do your share. You're here, but you're not. When you get up to do your share, you're supposed to do it by yourself. She doesn't need to put a bib on the baby. You don't need to go to the bathroom right away. Feed the baby then get up and do what you need to do with your business. You don't need her to get up; that's why she asked you to help. She can stay in bed and sleep. This isn't easy for anyone, Nathan. You are mean to her, Nathan. (Nathan and Taylor start arguing over when Nathan is mean). I cannot have this. I cannot live like this. This situation is out of control and I will not have it period. I'm not living like this. You have an attitude problem. This whole situation is why I said this child needed to be put up for adoption. It wasn't cause I didn't love her, and it wasn't because I didn't love you two. It's the fact that kids should not have kids cause you don't know how to handle situations yet.

After this conversation with Debi, Taylor and Nathan had a conversation alone. They laid out ground rules about calling one another names and figured out what needed to happen in order for Nathan to be more of a support.

Taylor's conflict with money and her struggle with Nathan for help and support showed the loss of her youth and innocence. She lost her self in that she now had to think about others. She was no longer able to have the life she wanted. Instead of spending her money on items for herself or saving for college, Taylor spent most of her money on Aubri. Taylor's conflict with Nathan also portrayed that instead of growing closer, their relationship was fractured because of the pregnancy.

The conflict each pregnant teen girl experienced highlighted the loss that accompanied the conflict. Instead of leading "normal" teen lives filled with high school experiences, friendships and dreaming of the future, their lives were now filled with taking care of a child and molding their future around that child. In addition to losing their social lives, they lost stable relationships.

Every girl experienced a drastic change in at least one relationship because of the conflicts surrounding the pregnancy. These changes happened in parental relationships, sibling relationships, friendships, and romantic relationships. These changes and conflicts also highlighted the loss from the pregnancy. The teen girls were no longer able to have the same kinds of relationships that they had in the past with their peers, significant others, parents, or siblings because of the pregnancy. Again, we saw the most change happen to the teen mother. This could be because the show is seen through the point of view of the teen mother.

Gender Roles

Another conflict was gender roles and gender expectations. After watching the episodes it became evident the characters were fulfilling gender stereotypes, which created more conflict in the familial and romantic relationships. The teen mothers were seen as the primary caregiver to the baby and they were responsible for getting pregnant, too. The teen fathers were shown in two ways: The teen father provided for the baby financially and occasionally offered caretaking, or the teen father was unwilling to help take care of the child physically. The most common example was the latter of the two with the exception of episode 7 “Izabella,” where teen father Jairo’s caregiving role is shown in only one scene.

In Episode 1, “Jordan,” and Episode 6, “Kayla,” the teen fathers Brian and Mike represented the minority of fathers who provided financially and occasionally took care of their children. Brian had a stable job as a cook at a restaurant and was a student at a local community college. Mike worked part-time at the mall, but when Kayla’s mother insisted on him paying rent, he started working full-time. In both of these instances, the teen mothers were left as the sole caregiver to their babies during the day. Both Brian and Mike helped take care of their children even when they came home from work.

In all other episodes, the teen fathers either were not present or were unwilling to help take care of the baby. In Episode 4, “Danielle,” Danielle moved in with her boyfriend Jamie so he could help take care of Jamie Jr. Jamie worked for his dad in construction. Danielle was left to take care of the baby. Danielle started failing her classes because she had no time to work on school. She decided to talk to Jamie about helping with Jamie Jr. Jamie didn’t want to take the baby for four hours a day when he came home from work. Danielle said, “It might be hard, but Jamie has to find a way to help out with the baby, or I’m not going to make it through high

school. And my mom won't let me live here." Instead of helping out with Jamie Jr., Jamie decided to spend more time with his friends. After an argument about childcare, Danielle decided she needed to move back home with her mom so she had help.

In Episode 5, "Cleondra," Cleondra and Mario argued over his role in baby Kylee's life. Cleondra wanted him to be around more, but Mario didn't want to stay over at Cleondra's house because of her family. Cleondra decided to stay the night at his house so Mario could help. When Kylee woke up at 4 a.m. needing a bottle, Mario wouldn't get up. Cleondra said, "It doesn't matter where we sleep, Mario just doesn't want to help with this baby." Cleondra's mother and Mario's mother brought them together to talk about Mario's absence and what needed to change. At the end of the episode it was still unclear if Mario changed his attitude or his actions in regards to taking care of Kylee.

In Episode 10, "Allie," Joey, the teen father, refused to take a larger part in taking care of their son Aydenn. Since Joey was still in high school and on the football team, he had little interest or energy to help with the caretaking. Allie continually woke up during the night to change the baby and give him a bottle. Allie said to her friend, "He (Joey) hasn't been helping a lot. Like if I ask him, he will but he still gives me a hard time and does it, but I shouldn't have to ask. ... He's not ready for the responsibility, and it's a little late to not be ready because he's (Aydenn) already here." After weeks of Joey not helping, Allie decided she needed to end the relationship, finish school and then move back to New Jersey where her mother lives.

The males played the stereotypical role of a detached father, but that may be because physically they can walk away from the pregnancy and the girls cannot. The show cast the boys as immature and irresponsible while the girls were expected to carry the burden and

responsibility of the pregnancy. The burden and responsibility placed on the teen mothers occurred both prior to the pregnancy with the blame and after the pregnancy with the conflict.

Instances of Abuse

Abuse was portrayed in three episodes, which signified a small but significant number of conflicts that reached a dangerous level. These three episodes showed physical and verbal abuse as well as neglect. After each verbally explosive or physically violent scene, MTV provided a public service announcement giving viewers information about where to get help both online and on the phone if they are or were a victim of physical or verbal abuse.

Josh, the teen father, instigated the physical and verbal abuse in Episode 2, "Jennifer." Josh arrived to pick up Jennifer and their twins because he was uncomfortable staying at Jennifer's house. On the ride over to Josh's house, they started to argue over Jennifer's parents. Josh told Jennifer, "They wipe your ass for you." Jennifer became very upset and demanded he take her home. Josh then called Jennifer a "stupid bitch." Jennifer told him she was done and she wanted out of the relationship. Josh started to speed and put his hand in her face while he said to her, "Shut your fucking mouth." Josh then pulled over and shoved Jennifer out of the car; he took off with the twins in the back seat. Jennifer was left on the side of the road, but Josh came back. After arguing, Jennifer attempted to get the children out of the back seat. Josh picked her up and shoved her away from him. Jennifer then called the police.

Episode 10 featured arguably the most explosive example of verbal abuse. Allie was forced to live with Joey, the teen father, and his family after her father kicked her out of her home when she became pregnant. Allie's mother lived in New Jersey. Allie decided it would be best to stay in Texas with Joey and his family so their baby had a mother and father. Joey's

mother, Yolanda, struggled with a drug addiction, and she assaulted both Allie and Joey on camera.

In the first scene, Allie tossed Yolanda's son, Damien, a banana to hand to Yolanda instead of handing it directly to Yolanda. Yolanda told Allie that she got on Yolanda's nerves sometimes. This caused a volatile situation. Allie said she didn't care about getting on Yolanda's nerves, and Yolanda said Allie could go and live with her own parents. Yolanda said:

Why should I take care of you? You ain't my daughter. You are not my daughter girl. That's my son, and my son don't throw shit in my face. Fuck you, bitch. Did you hear that? Get the fuck out. Get out.

Joey stepped in and told his mother to stop. Yolanda lurched forward at Joey, and threw her cell phone at a pregnant Allie. Joey held his mother back from trying to hurt Allie. Yolanda said:

Fuck her. You fucking shit. (To Joey) What's wrong with you, fucking hitting me? Get the fuck out of here. You mother fucker, don't you ever call me. Do you hear that? Ever. (To Allie) Fuck you. That's why your mama didn't want you and your daddy didn't want you. You're here because nobody is around for you. (To Joey) You don't ever hit me in my fucking mouth. I will press charges on your ass. I'm gonna fuck you up and fuck her up, too. I don't give a fuck if she's pregnant. (Yolanda on the phone with her mother) Mom, I had it out with Allison. Your fucking grandson popped me in my fucking mouth because of his little bitch. (To Allie) So what I'm a doping bitch, at least I see my kids. What's your fucking parents' problem? They don't even do drugs and they don't want to see you. ... If I could have seen the future I would have said to abort that child. Abort it. I want her out. You are not to step foot in my fucking house. I mean that Joey. Fuck you. I'm dead to you now.

After this verbal and physical assault, Allie and Joey were both crying. Joey's grandmother allowed both Joey and Allie to live with her after the argument. Allie and Joey avoided Yolanda for two weeks. However, they needed their clothing and personal belongings from her home. When they arrived, Yolanda was upset and started a fight with Allie. Yolanda told Allie that she ruined Yolanda's relationship with Joey in the second verbal assault. Yolanda said:

You can take that goddamn attitude outside cause ya know what? You're in my house. Get your fucking ass out of my fucking house girl... The world knows that I'm a pill poppin' head. The world knows. But who the hell is she to throw it in my face? Not once did I throw it in her face about her parents. Who the hell got you here? When nobody wanted you – nobody wanted you, and I took you in. And you're buddy-buddy over there with my mother who didn't want you? I did a lot for your ass, Allison. A lot. You tore my son away from me, and me and my son had a relationship like this (holding two fingers crossed).

Allie did not retaliate. She got in the car and left. Later, Yolanda talked to Joey and Allie and told them she was entering a rehab facility for her prescription pill addiction. When Yolanda returned from rehab, her behavior was less erratic.

Allie's experience with abusive conflict showed how drastically her life changed and how much she lost after she became pregnant. After being kicked out of her father's home, she was forced to live in Joey's unstable household. The capricious nature of Yolanda's drug problem combined with the stress of Allie's pregnancy lead to an extremely dangerous situation.

Episode 6, "Kayla," the neglect Kayla experienced was not identified as abuse by MTV with the public service announcement that was provided after both Jennifer and Allie's abusive experience. However, according the United States Department of Health and Human Services

(2008), neglect is considered child abuse. Kayla's mother Deb neglected Kayla in a number of scenes. Deb often left Kayla to take care of herself at only 17 years old. Deb stayed the night at her boyfriend Mike's house more often than not. Kayla, who struggled with an eating disorder, was hospitalized for dehydration after only eating a couple of vanilla wafers for an entire day's food intake. After getting out of the hospital, Kayla went to see a nutritionist who told Kayla and Deb they needed to start eating more meals as a family. Deb agreed to be more present for meals but never followed through on this promise.

After Preston was born, Deb's neglect became harmful when she forgot to fix the heating unit, which forced Mike and Kayla to go to a hotel for the night. Deb also suggested to Kayla that they go on a diet together despite her knowledge of Kayla's struggle with anorexia.

One-third of the teen mothers on *16 and Pregnant* experienced abuse. The instances of abuse indicated volatile relationships that were present among the teens and their family members. These relationships quickly turned violent and harmful when the stresses of pregnancy were placed on them. From this we can learn that teen pregnancy is stressful, and the abuse experienced by these teens added stress. These teens' pregnancy exacerbated an already tenuous family situation. Pregnancy doesn't change family relationships for the better. It only adds another layer of stress to their already stressful lives.

Resolution of the Episode

In every episode, there is an attempt to resolve the conflict. The theme of the resolution was that their lives had changed, but they were accepting responsibility for their child. The teens also accepted the loss they experienced by becoming pregnant. The girls gave an assessment of their lives as a means of ending the conflict. The focus of the resolution is on the changes they experienced and the lessons they learned from the pregnancy.

At the end of each episode, the teen mothers gave a monologue about their experiences. The girls spoke directly to the camera and gave an account of what they learned and the lessons they had for other teens. This segment was used as the moment of resolution and gave an ending to the TV story. While the teen mother was narrating, a montage of video clips was shown to end the episode, and to give us information about where the teen's story finished at the end of filming. To provide the viewer with how the conflicts were resolved, I chose to include three of the monologues from the examples of conflict.

In Episode 1, "Jordan," Jordan said in her monologue she wished she was older before she had Noah. Noah was diagnosed with acid reflux, which caused him to cry constantly. In her monologue she said:

It was one of the hardest nine months of my life – feeling nauseous. It was just very difficult, and watching my body change so much – you get stretch marks and it's not fun. I love being a mom – even the screaming, the reflux, all of the time being in the hospital – I don't regret any of it. Noah is worth it, but I wish I was older and that I already had my education taken care of. I wish I didn't have to worry about all of that. I gave up my freedom. I gave up modeling. I gave up not planning for my future. When he was born it was pretty much planned out for me: Noah.

In Jordan's monologue the message of her loss was shown on multiple levels. She lost her physical appearance, her childhood and her future all because she became pregnant. In between Jordan's final monologue Jordan had a conversation with her twin sister Jessica. Jordan told Jessica to take advantage of all of her opportunities implying Jordan no longer had opportunities after her pregnancy. Here the audience saw the exact life Jordan could have had if

she hadn't become pregnant; Jessica went to school and could be with her friends carefree whenever she chose, Jordan couldn't because of Noah.

In Episode 3, "Jamie," Jamie said she thought everything would turn out differently than it did, especially her relationship with Ryan. Her life was completely changed by the pregnancy. She said in her monologue:

I thought me and Ryan would stay together, but we didn't. He always told me, "Oh, everything's going to be okay. I'm going to take care of you. We're going to be together." And, I believed it. Finding out he had been cheating on me and he had been with other girls – that really did suck. I hope that Ryan and I will be civil with each other at some point. I think it will probably be after court and after everything is settled because right now everything is up in the air. A year ago I would be out with friends and now partying is kind of out for me 'cause I don't like to leave her because she's my responsibility and my daughter. I want to be the best mom I can for Miah. She deserves the best. As far as the future goes, I know where I want to be in life and where I am going to be in life. Whether Ryan is in my life, her life or not, I'm going to do the best I can for me and Miah.

In Jamie's monologue, the message of change and loss was evident. Jamie no longer had her boyfriend, her trust, or her innocence. Jamie discussed having to take on more responsibility, which she would not have experienced if she did not become pregnant. At the start of Jamie's episode, Jamie narrated that she was a straight "A" student and had aspirations of becoming a nurse. While Jamie still had these dreams at the end of the episode, the audience saw her struggle with keeping up with her studies and the uphill battle she was experiencing in order to achieve

her dream. This struggle and the struggle Jamie had with her boyfriend sent the message that teen pregnancy inflicts change and loss of childhood and relationships.

In Episode 9, “Taylor,” Taylor described how hard it was for her to sacrifice her teen and high school experience to raise Aubri. Nathan still attended high school, but Taylor had to take her classes online so she could stay home with Aubri. At the end of the episode, she said in her monologue:

My relationship with Nathan is harder now ‘cause now we’re kinda stuck with each other. We’re like an old married couple or something. It sucks. I bet if we didn’t have Aubri our relationship might be a little bit better and not so hard. We’re both moody. We’re both tired. We both just want our teenage years back; so it just puts a strain on it. I don’t want Aubri growing up without a dad ‘cause me and him (Nathan) both know how it feels. And I don’t want her to have that constant pain that we (Nathan and Taylor) both have. It’s just not fun growing up without two parents. But, if he doesn’t take the right steps to become a better dad then he can’t be around Aubri. It makes me sad that Nathan gets to get up and go to school every day because everybody says high school is the best thing ever, but I’m missing out on that experience. I feel old. Now I know my friends are out having fun and I’m stuck at home with Aubri. But, I don’t ever regret having Aubri. I just regret having her so young and not having the stuff I need to take care of her and missing out on my teen years. That’s the biggest part and the saddest part. I think there’s going to be more hard times, but hopefully more good times than bad. You just never know. It’s life so you just gotta go with it.

In Taylor’s monologue the message is sent that if a girl becomes pregnant she will not only lose her freedom, her youth, or her future, but also her boyfriend will not lose as much as

she will. Nathan had the opportunity to continue attending school while Taylor stayed home to watch Aubri. Nathan's responsibility in raising Aubri was he had to find employment while Aubri's entire life was upended with drama and challenges.

In viewing the monologues in their whole form, we can see the entire reflections of the teen girls. These three monologues contained many lessons for teens. Each teen discussed the changes they experienced because of the pregnancy. They also expressed how their lives would have been drastically different if they did not have a baby as a teen. Overall the most profound theme in every episode was the loss experienced by each teen after becoming pregnant. The theme of loss sent the message that teen pregnancy is not a joyous occasion, but rather a detriment to their lives as a whole.

Discussion

Social learning theory states that individuals, when they watch television, can develop a response to situations in their own lives based on what they are viewing (Bandura, 1977). Based on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), the messages in the television show *16 and Pregnant* could have a significant impact on the teen viewers' worldview and how they perceive teen pregnancy. Teen girls could potentially learn from the messages by seeing the negative repercussions the teen girls experience and model their own behavior to avoid pregnancy, such as learning more about birth control methods (Ventura & Hamilton, 2011). The message for teen boys was not as negative for male viewers because they were not blamed as much for the pregnancy, and their repercussions are minimal. However they may model their behavior to avoid pregnancy if they do not want to lose their girlfriend, or if they do not want to cope with the financial burden of teen pregnancy.

The findings suggest many messages are sent to teens about the negative repercussions of teen pregnancy. The teens shown in *16 and Pregnant* displayed the conflict that arose from pregnancy at a young age. Season 3 of *16 and Pregnant* sent the message that teen pregnancy was a disruption for both familial and romantic relationships. The pregnancy was not shown to be joyful, except for the baby showers, and many times the decision to have a baby shower caused conflict as teens and families debated whether the pregnancy was a reason to celebrate.

This program sent the message to teen girls that despite the teens appearing on television giving them a celebrity status, their lives were riddled with conflict, hardships and blame. This is in direct contrast to what is seen in movies and television dramas depicting teen pregnancy. While the teenager girls in the dramas are shown to have positive relationships with their boyfriends after the pregnancy (Shaw, 2010), most of the teen girls in *16 and Pregnant* are

shown to have a more tumultuous relationship after the pregnancy. The aim of *16 and Pregnant* is to deter teen pregnancy, and the messages sent to teens were all negative.

16 and Pregnant attempted to find a resolution within each episode's story arc, but the resolution was that the teen mothers' lives were forever changed. Pregnancy and motherhood at a young age were portrayed as negative situations that were necessary to overcome. This was highlighted in the monologues at the end of each episode. *16 and Pregnant* did not glamorize teen pregnancy; it displayed the disturbing reality of blame, shame and hardship the teen mothers experienced after becoming pregnant.

A theme of *16 and Pregnant* was assigning blame for the pregnancy. I was surprised while viewing the show how much focus was placed on solving who was to blame for the pregnancy, and that most often the blame was placed on the teen mother. This sent the message that if teen females become pregnant it will be their fault regardless of the actions they take to prevent a pregnancy. The placement of blame showed the negative repercussions girls experience when they become pregnant. However, these negative messages pertain mainly to a female audience. The placement of blame and responsibility disproportionately fell on the teen girl, as the blame was not placed on the teen father. The blame and disappointment expressed to the teen girls from their parents and peers for becoming pregnant reinforced the stereotype that pregnant teen girls are troubled and responsible for the consequences of sexual intercourse (Stapleton, 2010).

The negative portrayal of teen pregnancy may be an accurate depiction of what teen mothers experience; however, I found it did not show a balanced view of males and females dealing with the repercussions of teen pregnancy. This was because the stories were told through

the point of view of the teen mothers. The point of view reflects our societal norm of not treating fathers and mothers the same way.

The show was meant to be viewed through the lens of what 16 years old's experience when they become pregnant. The females narrated the story from the beginning to the end of the episode, and the males were not given the opportunity to speak to the camera in the resolution segment of the episode. This structure did not lend itself to displaying the male point of view, their emotions or feelings on the pregnancy.

The image of teen fathers given to viewers was that they were unable (most often because of employment) or unwilling to take part in the childcare. According to the statistics on fathers in the United States, this was not a false representation of what teens experience, but adding the father's perspective could tell us more. The father's perspective could potentially provide the answer to why the fathers do not participate in the childcare. As it is, we were shown the emotions, feelings and trials of the teen mother but routinely missed the opportunity to gain insight about the males' perspectives.

I found that *16 and Pregnant* reinforced stereotypical gender and parent roles seen in the media (Booth & Crouter, 1998; Cohen, 1987). It sent the message that teen mothers held the most responsibility for getting pregnant and for the childcare of the baby, reinforcing the stereotype that caregiving is the mother's role (Booth & Crouter, 1998). It sent the message to teen males that if they impregnated a girl, they would not be blamed as much for the pregnancy, their responsibility for childcare would be minimal, and they would be expected to provide financially for the child. It also sent the message to teen males that the repercussions for not providing childcare or not helping with the financial burden of the baby were losing their girlfriend and potential custody rights. The father's willingness to break his relationship with his

girlfriend and have less custody rights showed that the mother and the child do not mean much to the teen father. What the audience saw here is the lack of usefulness or purpose of fathers beyond providing financial support.

The image of these teen fathers as bad people could be because we do not hear the father's voice or feelings in the narrative. The messages of the teen father's minimal role in childcare reinforced the image of stereotypical father roles, including absence or only providing financially for their children (Lupton & Barclay, 1997). This is consistent with Cohen's (1987) contention that fathers are perceived as 'good' when they are providing for their family financially.

Teens could learn through the messages in the show about the imbalance of responsibility in teen pregnancy and that teen pregnancy is "bad," but they also learned about the sometimes violent and abusive relationships that occurred in many families and teen relationships. While *16 and Pregnant* was a television show about pregnancy, the show had a deeper purpose to educate teens on more than just what it was like to be a pregnant teen. Viewers were educated on where to find help if they were in an abusive relationship or were being neglected or abused by their parent or guardian.

16 and Pregnant provided viewers with the website and hotline for the organization Love Is Respect immediately following scenes of abusive situations. It also provided viewers with website information for the organization It's Your Sex Life, where teens could go to learn more about the prevention of teen pregnancy and sexual relationships. Providing this information throughout the show showed the producers and creators of *16 and Pregnant* understood the opportunity for entertainment as education.

Lessons for media

This program is unique and groundbreaking through its discussion of motherhood and teen pregnancy in a reality show format. *16 and Pregnant* works with advocacy organizations to try to provide a more realistic view of teen pregnancy. However, media have many opportunities to grow from the starting point of *16 and Pregnant*. Two people were needed for the teen mother to become pregnant, yet the majority of the blame was placed on the teen mother. This suggests that media should provide males with the same level of blame and attention that pregnant teen females receive. Through portraying more balanced blame of the pregnancy, adolescent males would receive the message that pregnancy can negatively affect them as well as their female counterpart.

There were numerous opportunities within the show to display the feelings and emotions of the teen father regarding the pregnancy. The creators of *16 and Pregnant* also missed the chance to provide messages to viewers on what the male could have done to prevent the pregnancy and their level of responsibility after the birth. I would suggest allowing both the male and the female point of view to be shown to the viewer. Including the boy's point of view would provide male viewers with the same educational material and messages that teen girls received from watching the show.

In addition to providing more information from the male perspective, media should educate both males and females on the choices available to teens when they become pregnant. Many of the girls discussed how they came to the decision to keep the child and their thoughts of having an abortion or adoption. Episode 9, "Kianna," struggled with her decision to choose adoption or raise the child, but ultimately decided to keep the baby. The show discussed pregnancy prevention, the decision-making process and how to deal with the pregnancy, but it did not show teen girls who chose adoption or abortion in season 3. In previous seasons of *16*

and Pregnant the show explored the options of both abortion and adoption, but it neglected these story lines in the most recent season. Because of what teens can learn from media, it is important for media to provide information to teens on their options after they become pregnant.

The findings suggest that while *16 and Pregnant* has acknowledged its potential influence on the audience and has attempted to provide educational messages to viewers, there are areas for improvement. More television programs should focus on the important role fathers play in children's lives and the repercussions of the lack of a father figure. Media should also educate teens further on options after pregnancy such as adoption and abortion.

Personal Conclusions

Throughout this process, I found myself asking the question, "Teens have access to sexual health information, so why is the United States pregnancy rate still higher than any other industrialized country?" The solution I found is to provide teens with a more balanced level of responsibility. I was disappointed that we rarely hear how the teen father is feeling or an explanation for his actions. I was also disappointed the show provided only teen females with significant deterrents to becoming pregnant. Without messages targeted to both teen girls and males, the show can only be used as an intervention to address teen pregnancy for teen girls.

I think, too, in the discussions of birth control the teens had with their peers, it was evident that many teens do not know how to properly use birth control. Many of the teen mothers took the steps to get the birth control pill but did not take it properly. This suggested to me that teens have access to birth control, but are not educated enough on how to use it. Here, *16 and Pregnant* missed an opportunity to send an educational message for how to properly use birth control. The show only states that the girls misused their birth control method, but they didn't state how they should have used it.

I found many of the findings pointed toward a tragic narrative. When the teen mothers reflect on their experience they often seemed regretful of their decisions and resigned to a difficult and trying future. Also in the reflections, the teen girls seem sad and dejected, and none of the girls seemed exceptionally happy. Their lives that were once filled with promise and hope for the future seem to be consumed by taking care of their child and trying to make it through the next day. The tragic narrative was also a direct result of an absent male perspective. Without the representation of the male point of view, the burden of the pregnancy appeared to fall on the shoulders of the teen mothers.

Further Research

This study could be expanded to include how viewers respond to the messages and themes portrayed in *16 and Pregnant*. Knowing how the viewers respond to the themes found in this study would allow media to better formulate the messages to teens. Another potential viewer perspective could be achieved by analyzing the episode comments on MTV.com. This study also suggests that further studies conducted independently of The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy are necessary to gain an understanding of sexual health messages to teens on television. With further research, the media can better communicate messages that are beneficial to both male and female teens' sexual health.

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Appendix A

MATRIX FOR NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF 16 AND PREGNANT

Episode Information

Episode Title and Number	
Original Airdate	
Length	
Episode description provided by MTV.com	

Main Characters

Expecting teen mother	
Expecting teen father	
Parents of teen mother	
Parents of teen father	
Siblings and other family of teen mother	
Siblings and other family of teen father	
Friends of teen mother	
Friends of teen father	
Teachers	
Employers	
Doctors	
Nurses	
Social Workers	
Church/Religious Officials	
Other	

Characteristics

Age, sex, and race of teen mother and father	
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Setting

Public Setting description (school)	
Private Setting description (home)	
Time Frame of events	

Action/Plot Elements

Exposition	
Key events	
Conflicts	
Relationship between teen mother and father	
Teen mother's reaction/interaction with	

parents/guardians	
Teen father's reaction/interaction with parents/guardians	
Teen mother's reaction/interaction with friends	
Teen father's reaction/interaction with friends	
Resolution of conflicts	

Pregnancy

Discussion of the potential child	
Description of pregnancy prior to birth (viewpoint of mother)	
Description of pregnancy post birth (viewpoint of mother)	
Supporting character's reaction to pregnancy	
Reflections on the pregnancy by main characters	