

2016

## Public Perceptions of Birthmothers of Adopted Children

Bethany I. Wedlund  
*University of Central Florida*

 Part of the [Family, Life Course, and Society Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/honorsthesis>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the UCF Theses and Dissertations at STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Undergraduate Theses by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact [STARS@ucf.edu](mailto:STARS@ucf.edu).

---

### Recommended Citation

Wedlund, Bethany I., "Public Perceptions of Birthmothers of Adopted Children" (2016). *Honors Undergraduate Theses*. 60.

<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/honorsthesis/60>

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF BIRTHMOTHERS OF ADOPTED CHILDREN

by

BETHANY ILENE WEDLUND

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Sociology  
in the College of Sciences  
and in the Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term, 2016

Thesis Chair: Shannon Carter, PhD

## ABSTRACT

A woman who has experienced an unintended pregnancy and chooses to place the child for adoption is known as a birthmother. When faced with an unintended pregnancy, women typically have three courses of action. They may choose to parent the child, terminate the pregnancy, or place the child for adoption. There is limited research on birthmothers themselves or societal perceptions of them.

When it comes to societal perceptions of abortion, religiosity is a significant factor. Contrary to popular belief, many of the women who choose to abort do so in order to preserve the lives of their families. Single mothers are judged as poor workers due to their devotion to their children, a viewpoint that is compounded if the mother is black. This indicates that race may also play a role in perceptions of birthmothers.

This research aimed to discover public perceptions of birthmothers and test factors that might contribute to those perceptions namely, abortion opinions. This study utilized data collected from a previous study with an online survey of 501 students from a university population conducted in the spring of 2015. Survey questions were open ended, multiple choice, and Likert scale. This study discovered that opinions of birthmothers are largely positive and that opinions on abortion may have a link with opinions of birthmothers. The findings of this study are important because there is minimal research on birthmothers and it helps shed light on public perceptions of this marginalized group. Research has shown that many birthmothers experience a lack of social support that could be remedied from programming that helps these women cope within society and efforts to educate the public about them.

## DEDICATION

For my beautiful son.  
You are my inspiration to conquer it all.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Steve and Carol Wedlund for opening their hearts to myself and my son, our son, at what I believe to be the outset of my journey with this work. To my parents, Bruce and Teri Wedlund who have always been incredibly supportive throughout my life and encouraged me to persevere no matter how difficult things got.

I am incredibly grateful to the entirety of the Department of Sociology at the University of Central Florida for their care and understanding and their clear support of all their students to achieve to the best of their abilities. Most of all, I am indebted to those professors who allowed and encouraged me to continue my own research, Mrs. Diane Prather and Dr. Shannon Carter.

Without you, Dr. Carter, I might never have chosen sociology in the first place. Your passion for this field ignited within me as I experienced my own pregnancy and birth and has kept me striving to give my best throughout these past three years. I owe so much of who I've become thanks to your belief in my ability.

Thank you.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	1
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	2
HYPOTHESES .....	9
Variables.....	9
Dependent .....	9
Independent .....	9
Controls .....	9
Hypotheses .....	9
H <sub>0</sub> .....	9
H <sub>1</sub> .....	9
METHODOLOGY .....	10
Research Question.....	10
Data .....	10
Strengths and Limitations of the Data.....	10
Strengths .....	10
Limitations.....	11
Method of Research and Variables .....	11
Perceptions of Birthmothers .....	12
Attitudes Toward Abortion.....	12
Religiosity.....	12
Socio/Political Beliefs .....	13
Reproductive History.....	13
Demographics .....	13
Sample.....	14
RESULTS .....	15
Demographics.....	15
Opinions of Birthmothers.....	15
Qualitative .....	15
Quantitative .....	18

Attitudes Toward Abortion .....	23
Hypothesis Testing.....	24
DISCUSSION .....	27
CONCLUSION.....	30
REFERENCES .....	31

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: <i>Correlation Analysis of Qualitative Birthmother Scores and Abortion Scores</i> .....	25
Table 2: <i>Correlation Analysis of Quantitative Birthmother Scores and Abortion Scores</i> .....	25
Table 3: <i>Linear Regression Analysis</i> .....	26



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: <i>Birthmother Opinions</i> .....	17
Figure 2: <i>Strength Rating Frequencies</i> .....	19
Figure 3: <i>Intelligence Rating Frequencies</i> .....	19
Figure 4: <i>Bravery Rating Frequencies</i> .....	19
Figure 5: <i>Morality Rating Frequencies</i> .....	19
Figure 6: <i>Selfishness Rating Frequencies</i> .....	20
Figure 7: <i>Laziness Rating Frequencies</i> .....	20
Figure 8: <i>Ability to Parent Rating Frequencies</i> .....	20

## INTRODUCTION

The 2016 presidential election has produced a tumultuous political environment within The United States this year. The topic of abortion is consistently addressed by politicians on either end of the conservative/liberal spectrum. This has been exacerbated by the Planned Parenthood footage that came out in 2015 and subsequent attempts of government officials to defund Planned Parenthood on the grounds that they perform abortive services. While termination of pregnancy is one of the three possible outcomes of an unintended pregnancy, adoption and parenting are the other two options. This study focuses on public perceptions of women who place their children for adoption as the result of an unintended pregnancy. Women who place their children for adoption are known as birthmothers. The term birthmother is preferred, within the adoption community, to biological mother, natural mother, or real mother, per Marietta Spencer's "Positive Adoption Language," also known as PAL (Stroud, 1997).

This study is preceded by my own research regarding student perceptions of birthmothers and their relationship with religiosity. Utilizing the open ended responses to a question regarding opinions of birthmothers, I noticed a recurring theme that many of the respondents referenced their opinion to their thoughts on abortion. This happened before the abortion question included in my online survey appeared (Wedlund, 2015). I decided an analysis of the relationship between abortion opinions and perceptions of birthmothers would be the next logical course for my research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

For the purposes of this study birthmothers are women who, when faced with an unintended pregnancy, choose to place their child for adoption as opposed to abortion or parenting. Though there is much research regarding societal perceptions of single mothers and women who have chosen to abort their pregnancies, there is little research on societal impressions of birthmothers. This literature review aims to define the importance of research on birthmothers, to discover some factors that may be involved in determining public perceptions of birthmothers, and to assist in the formulation of methodology for my study.

According to their article, Finer and Zolna (2014) report that of the 6.6 million pregnancies recorded in 2008, 51% were unintended. This number is up from 48% in 2001. They determined the intent behind the pregnancy based on whether or not the woman intended to have a child before conception. At the same time abortion rates have dropped from 47% to 40% indicating a rise in the number of unintended pregnancies ending in birth. Then, in 2016, the authors conducted another study that measured unintended births from 2008 to 2011 (Finer, 2016). While this study found a decrease in the number of unintended births (from 51% to 45%), the percentage of abortions remained somewhat constant (at 42% in 2011). Despite this change in unintended pregnancy rates, the relative stability of abortions suggests that the percentage of adoption and parenting rates has also remained stable. When faced with an unintended pregnancy the three possible outcomes is that the mother chooses to parent, to abort, or to place her child for adoption. In the third option, she will become known as a birthmother.

In a survey conducted by Elizabeth L. Rompf (1993), results showed that slightly more than half of respondents were at least somewhat approving of open adoption. Open adoption is when the adoptive parents and biological mother establish some form of connection before and after placement (Lee, 1997). According to Brodzinsky and Smith the openness of the adoption can also have an effect on the birthmother's emotional well-being. Rompf conducted her survey through random digit dialing and was able to get into contact with 640 adults. She found that 71% of African Americans approved of open adoption while only 51% of Whites approved. She also found that whether or not someone had been adopted themselves or had a family member who was adopted affected if they approved open adoption (44%) and, also, 53% of those who knew a friend who was adopted or had friends who had adopted approve of open adoption (Rompf, 1993). This gives us a glimpse into the general approval of adoption as a whole, but does not provide a clear picture of the views on birthmothers.

Lee and Twaite (1997) conducted a survey of 238 adoptive mothers of children who had been adopted before 3 months post-partum and who were still under 18 at the time of survey. This survey was specifically for adoptions that were semi-open, which is to say that contact was made with the biological mother before and after birth but there was no promise of contact throughout the child's life. The survey used semantic differential technique to evaluate the perceptions of the birthmothers on three factors: evaluative, potency, and "boorishness" (p. 580). Lee used the words, "soft, quiet, accepting, clean, good, attractive, and honest," (p. 579) to determine the evaluative factor. The words, "unsuccessful, weak, inferior, present-oriented, poor, passive, cowardly, and untalented," were used for potency (p.580), and, "tactless, ungrateful, impolite, immoral, and ignorant" (p. 580) for boorishness. The survey found that exposure to the

birthmother created more positive perceptions of her by the adoptive parents. This indicates a need for education and higher visibility of birthmothers. Adoptive mothers who held negative perceptions of their birthmothers tended to project those perceptions onto their adopted child and became stricter parents as a result.

The life of a birthmother is discussed in a study by Lynn B. Clutter in 2014. Clutter conducted her research by interviewing 15 birthmothers in order to allow the women to describe their own experiences. In general, the mothers in this study expressed feelings of accomplishment towards completing the adoption process. They viewed life after placement as a chance to start over, to forge new career and education opportunities. Though all the mothers terminated their relationships with the biological father, many had begun new relationships. All of the mothers experienced sadness at the time of placement though none felt regret about their decision. Interesting to note, those that had a strong support system expressed strong emotional health, but those with a weak support system experienced what Clutter refers to as, “backslide” (p. 197) which is when birthmothers fall back into old habits such as drug use. This illustrates the importance of such research because positive public perceptions can lead toward development of stronger support systems for birthmothers. While all of the birthmothers in this study expressed some degree of healing over the course of time, the level of reported healing varied depending on level of perceived support within the participant’s life (Clutter, 2014).

Research suggests that when birthmothers initially place their child for adoption, there is an acute level of emotional distress that is centered about the event. A survey of 235 birthmothers found that greater than 70% were at least satisfied with their adoption openness level. Despite the fact that most of the mothers felt less emotionally distressed over time, 37% of

birthmothers still reported having low emotional health years after the adoption placement (Brodzinsky, 2014).

Although there are no studies on societal perceptions of birthmothers, literature on abortion and single parenthood may provide more insight. This conclusion is indicated by my previous research which found that many respondents brought up abortion during qualitative analysis when asked their opinions on birthmothers. This occurred prior to the question regarding abortion opinions (Wedlund, 2015). Starting with teen parenting, Turner conducted a study in Scotland in 2004 that shed some light on the role socioeconomic status might have on the perceptions of teen parenting from the point of view of teens themselves. Turner found that the higher socioeconomic status teens tended to think that single motherhood only occurred in lower income schools. Those with higher status tended to be more likely to predict abortion as their preferred outcome should they be faced with an unintended pregnancy as a teen. Those with a higher socioeconomic status also tended to think that teenage mothers would have problems coping with their new lives and associated negative feelings towards teen parenting. The study admits that this trend may be more indicative of their views towards abortion rather than their views towards single parenting. Turner's study showed that those who perceived single motherhood as more negative than others were more likely to predict using an abortion for themselves should they experience an unintended pregnancy (2004). Herrman and Waterhouse found through surveys conducted in the high school classroom setting that while socioeconomic status plays a more significant role on perceptions of teen parenting, Blacks and Latinos are more likely to view teen parenting in a positive light (Herrman, 2010). In Ivy Kennelly's study about how black women are viewed in the work environment, specifically those with white employers,

she found that white employers stereotype black women as single mothers. In some cases they even take it a step further and use their perceived single motherhood as justifying why they are poor or even good workers (Kennelly, 1999). Herrman and Waterhouse also found that gender has an effect as well. Males tended to have a higher view of teen parenting than females (Herrman, 2010).

In Gizem Arat's study of doulas' perceptions of single mothers, Arat found that even when working with single mothers throughout their pregnancy, doulas had the impression that the single mother's aspirations for a better future wouldn't work out for them (2013). According to Arat, Doula's are individuals who provide non-medical care, such as emotional and physical support, to women during pregnancy, childbirth and post-partum. This is in contrast with Parsons' research which describes the experiences of single mothers who were attending college despite being on welfare. Many of the mothers in Parsons' study were skeptical about their own abilities to overcome adversity and achieve their goals to go back to school. An important takeaway from this study is that through support and encouragement from their advisors and instructors these women felt empowered to succeed (Parsons, 2008). Changes in the stereotypes involved with single parenting may yield a more positive and encouraging environment where these individuals can fully realize their goals and aspirations.

Since the study conducted by Turner showed views on abortion as a strong predictor of attitudes towards teen parenting, it is important to determine the underlying predictors of feelings towards abortion (Turner, 2004). When we look at the reasons women choose to have abortions many of them choose to abort not because of a lack of maternal instinct or want of family, but because they wish to keep their current families intact or because they want to wait until a later

time. According to Jones, Frohwirth, and Moore, of the women who have abortions, 61% already have children. In this study, the majority of women with children said they had an abortion because they didn't want a new baby to take time and resources away from their current family. They wanted to provide for their child in a way that isn't possible with their present circumstances (Jones, 2008).

Religiosity is a significant factor in determining the perceptions society may have towards abortion. Amy Adamczyk (2007) measures religiosity by the frequency of prayer, frequency of church attendance, and attendance to youth group activities. She also determined the level of importance the respondents associated their religion to themselves.

Based on the literature directly related to birthmothers, it is evident that there is a need for more research on this subject in order to help expand the development of a stronger support structure for women who choose to place their child for adoption. The research that analyzed adoptive mothers' perceptions of birthmothers provided a helpful template with which to measure college students' impressions of women who place their child for adoption as a result of an unintended pregnancy. The research on perceptions of single mothers helps to identify control variables for my research, and the studies conducted on women who chose abortion lends perspective on the power religiosity might have on determining attitudes towards birthmothers. My ongoing research aims to determine the perceptions college students have of women who choose to place their child for adoption when faced with an unintended pregnancy. I have examined the effects of religion on public perceptions of birthmothers, this thesis determines the effect attitudes towards abortion might have on perceptions of birthmothers.





## HYPOTHESES

### **Variables**

#### *Dependent*

The dependent variable for my study is perceptions of women who place their children for adoption.

#### *Independent*

The main independent variable for my study is attitudes toward abortion.

#### *Controls*

The control variables I will use in my study are political background, current academic major, race, ethnicity, religion, age, sex, and whether or not the respondent has experienced or caused an unintended pregnancy.

### **Hypotheses**

#### *H<sub>0</sub>*

There is no relationship between attitudes toward abortion and college student's perceptions of birthmothers.

#### *H<sub>1</sub>*

Students who are pro-life are more likely to approve birthmothers than those who are pro-choice.

## METHODOLOGY

### **Research Question**

How does attitudes toward abortion affect public perceptions of birthmothers?

### **Data**

The dependent variable in this study is college students' perceptions of birthmothers. In this study, birthmother is defined as a woman who, when faced with an unintended pregnancy, chooses to place her child for adoption. The independent variable is attitudes toward abortion as determined by an open response question that allowed respondents to fully express their feeling towards abortion. In a previous study using the same data, I measured religiosity. A high level of religiosity is defined, for the purposes of this study, as high amounts of time spent outside of religious services practicing their faith or religion, high amount of importance placed on their faith or religion, and whether or not the respondent affiliates with a religion, faith, or considers themselves spiritual. Control variables include gender, age, academic major, socio/political beliefs, reproductive history of the respondent, and race. The data in this study is a combination of quantitative and qualitative information. Data were previously collected through the use of online surveying system, Qualtrics.

### **Strengths and Limitations of the Data**

#### *Strengths*

Some strengths of this study include the online survey format. This helps to ensure respondent anonymity which will encourage them to answer questions more truthfully. Since the survey was conducted at a university with a large population, it will normalize the results of the

study. The briefness of the survey will help to ensure respondents don't get bored resulting in more accurate responses. The online survey will also yield high response rates from the sample.

### *Limitations*

When using the online survey format, there is a limit to the quality of the data collected. Respondents may be unlikely to share the same wealth of details that they might in an interview setting, despite the presence of open-ended questions. Despite the various control variables built into the survey, there are undoubtedly other variables that may contribute to the reasoning behind respondent perceptions. While this survey takes a step in identifying how college students may feel about birthmothers, this would not necessarily be applicable to the general public. This survey cannot measure if level of education has an effect on societal attitudes towards birthmothers. Another limitation of this data is the age of the material being used. This data was collected before major political events such as the presidential elections and the undercover Planned Parenthood abortion tapes and trials. Events such as these may affect public opinion on the variables being studied.

### **Method of Research and Variables**

This research study utilizes prior data collected to analyze college students' perceptions of birthmothers and examine data collected on attitudes toward abortion. There was an introductory paragraph at the beginning of the survey that assured respondents of their anonymity, let them know that they may exit the survey at any time or choose not to answer questions, discusses the requirements of the survey—that they must be at least 18 years or older and be currently enrolled as a student at the University of Central Florida—and defines the term birthmother while letting them know the purpose of the survey.

### *Perceptions of Birthmothers*

To analyze students' perceptions of birthmothers, respondents were asked to rate birthmothers on seven characteristics, strength, intelligence, bravery, morality, selfishness, ability to parent, and laziness on a scale of very low, somewhat low, in the middle/not sure, somewhat high, and very high. Respondents were then given an open ended response question asking their feelings about birthmothers.

### *Attitudes Toward Abortion*

Respondents were asked to describe their feelings about abortion in an open ended question. This question is incredibly important because if a respondent is not supportive of abortion, this may have an impact on their feelings towards birthmothers.

### *Religiosity*

Religiosity was measured by asking if respondents have a religious affiliation with "Yes" answers asking for a specific religion, a response that states they have no religious affiliation but they do consider themselves spiritual, and a "No" response. If the respondent answered "Yes" or "I have no affiliation with any religion, but I do consider myself spiritual" they will be asked how often they practice their religion or faith at home. Possible responses for this are daily, 2-3 times a week, once a week, 2-3 times a month, once a month, less than once a month, and never. The final question to measure religiosity is "How important is your religion/faith to you?" with responses including extremely important, very important, neither important nor unimportant, very unimportant, or not at all important.

### *Socio/Political Beliefs*

This control variable was measured by asking respondents if they are registered to vote, their political affiliation, whether they consider their beliefs conservative or liberal, and how they feel about abortion. Possible responses for “What is your political affiliation?” are republican, democrat, independent, other (please specify), and not affiliated. Respondents were then asked to rate whether they are conservative or liberal with the following possible options: very conservative, somewhat conservative, moderate, somewhat liberal, and very liberal.

### *Reproductive History*

Reproductive History is important because if a respondent has been through the adoption process with their own child, they may have stronger feelings about birthmothers that may counter data collected about their religiosity and other demographics. Reproductive history was measured by first asking, “Have you ever been pregnant yourself or gotten someone else pregnant unintentionally?” Possible responses are Yes, No, and I’m not sure. If the respondent answers “No,” they will skip the next question which is, “What was the outcome of that pregnancy?” Options are either one of or both biological parents chose to raise the child, abortion, placed child for adoption, other (please specify), and I’m not sure. The final question measuring reproductive history asks if they have children. Unfortunately, the responses for this section were too skewed to be able to determine any significant difference between those who had experienced any sort of pregnancy and those who had not.

### *Demographics*

The survey ended with demographic questions including sex, race, ethnicity, major in school, and family structure. The sex, race, ethnicity and major questions were to control for

possible differences in responses that may occur as a result of those categories. Family structure is important because if a respondent was adopted themselves, then they are more likely to have stronger feelings about birthmothers. Respondents were asked to choose the family structure that most closely resembles the family they were raised in. Options were living with both biological parents married, living with both biological parents (shared parenting/joint custody) divorced/separated, living with single biological parent, living with grandparents (not adopted), living in foster care, adopted and other (please specify).

### **Sample**

The population being studied is the University of Central Florida student body which consists of about 60,000 graduates and undergraduates. The survey was distributed to 501 college students. This sample is a non-probability sample because subjects will be surveyed at the same institution that the research is being conducted within. It is because of this that this study is also a convenience sample.

## RESULTS

The goal of my research was to describe the overall opinion of birthmothers and then to compare these results to participant attitudes toward abortion. While the survey collected both quantitative and qualitative data on opinions of birthmothers, I only obtained qualitative written responses for the abortion data.

### **Demographics**

The sample respondents were 27% male, 70.1% female, and 2.1% other. Participants' age ranged from 17 to 60 with the median age at 21 years old. 19.9% of respondents identified themselves as Hispanic. The majority of respondents (75.4%) identified as White with 9.6% identifying as Black or African American, 8.2% as Bi- or Multi-Racial, 2.9% as Asian, and 4% as something else. Of the 501 people surveyed, only 220 answered all of these demographic questions.

### **Opinions of Birthmothers**

#### *Qualitative*

Participants were asked, "What are your feelings about birthmothers?" In order to prepare the qualitative responses of opinions on birthmothers for a quantitative analysis, I read through each response and assigned them to one of three categories. The categories are "positive," "neutral," and "negative." These categories proved to be broad enough that they incorporated almost all of the opinions expressed while narrow enough that responses could be placed on a sliding scale for quantitative analysis later. In this study, the majority of respondents, 63%, had a



positive opinion of birthmothers. An example of a response that was coded as positive toward birthmothers is:

*“I feel like they have the child's best interests in mind and I generally respect their decision.”*

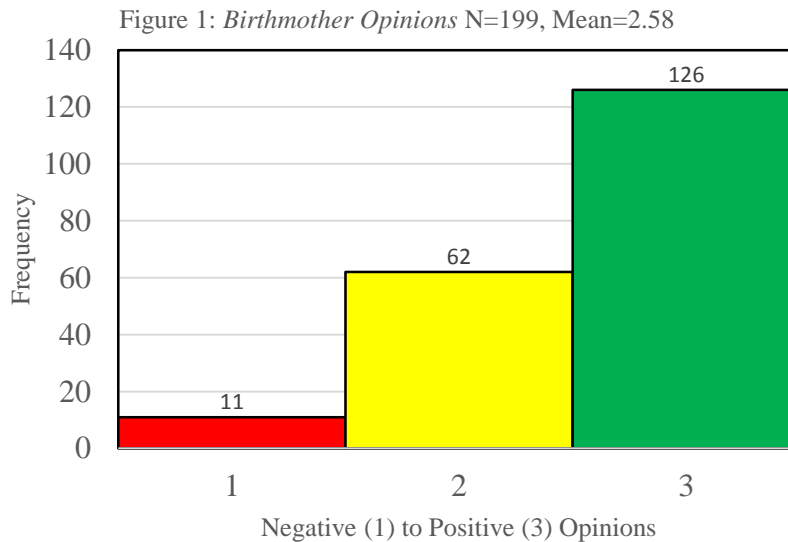
The next most common response was coded as neutral. Neutral responses accounted for 31% of the data collected. An example of a neutral response is:

*“You never know someone’s circumstance, therefore I don't have much to say making that broad of a generalization.”*

Despite the fact that the negative opinions accounted for 6% of the responses, they still make up a significant portion of the data. The responses that made up the negative category represented a broad range of opinions. An example of a response that was coded as negative is:

*“I find it incredibly sad that a mother should have to put their child up for adoption. I believe it causes a lot of identity and self-esteem issues later in life for both mother and child.”*

In order to convert this qualitative data into a quantitative variable, I assigned values to each category (positive = 3, neutral = 2, and negative = 1). See Figure 1 below to view the frequencies of each birthmother opinion.



This histogram displays a negative skew dataset indicating most responses lying within the positive opinion range.

Each category of responses displayed a variety of themes. Positive opinions characterized birthmothers as doing what's best for their child. Many of the respondents used the quantitative adjectives from earlier in the survey to describe these women as brave and strong. A significant portion of the positive responses described birthmothers as altruistic and making the ultimate sacrifice. The choice of placing a child for adoption was depicted by participants as a responsible and intelligent decision. Respondents also pointed out the relationship to abortion suggesting that it's better for the birthmother to place for adoption than have an abortion.

Neutral responses largely consisted of participants who felt that every situation is different and that it would be wrong to judge a person without knowing their specific circumstances. Others characterized the decision of whether to adopt as difficult and not to be taken lightly.

While the negative opinions of birthmothers made up the fewest amount of responses, there were still a significant amount of responses that were coded this way. The bulk of the negative responses towards birthmothers felt that these women were irresponsible to get pregnant in the first place. Birthmothers were also characterized largely as coming from some sort of negative life circumstances or hardship rather than capable women who choose not to have children. A few respondents cited their concerns about putting a child into the adoption system and some even suggested that abortion would be a better option than to place a child into a potentially bad future. This was the second set of responses that brought up abortion before the question appeared on the survey.

### *Quantitative*

Survey participants were asked to rate birthmothers on a set of 7 adjectival characteristics: strength, intelligence, bravery, morality, laziness, selfishness, and ability to parent. The ratings were based on a Likert scale design with discrete values from “Very Low” coded as a 1, “Somewhat Low” coded as 2, “In the Middle/Not Sure” coded as 3, “Somewhat High” coded as 4, and “Very High” coded as 5. Frequency distributions for each of the adjectives can be seen in the graphs below.

Figure 2: Strength Rating Frequencies N=268

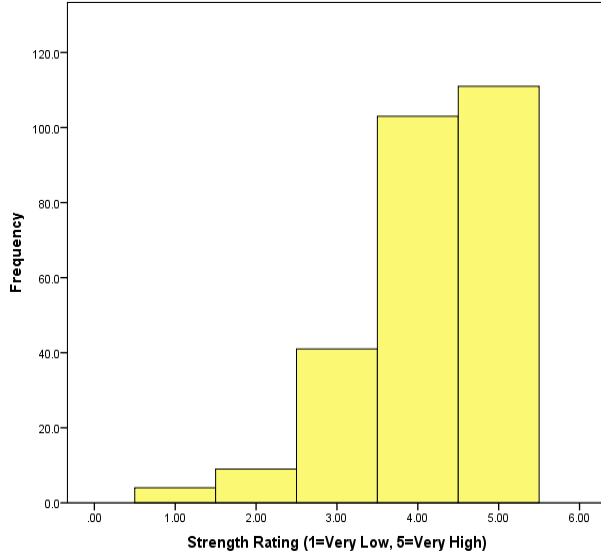


Figure 3: Intelligence Rating Frequencies N=256

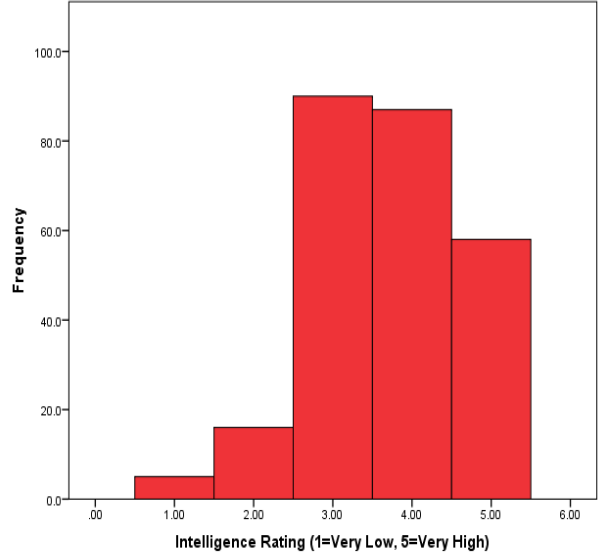


Figure 4: Bravery Rating Frequencies N=271

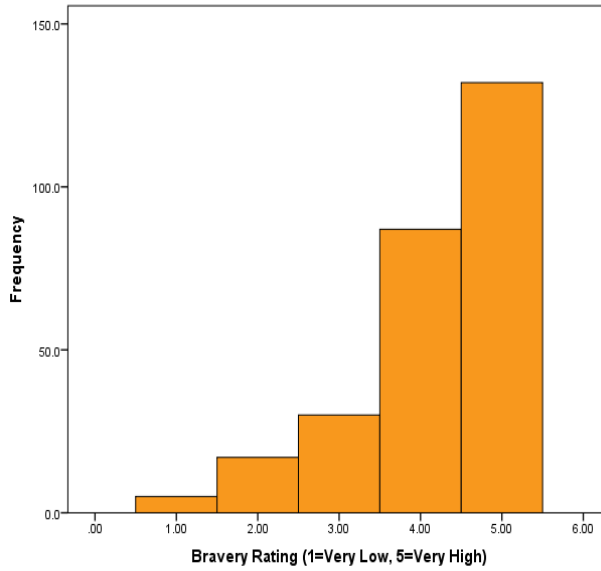


Figure 5: Morality Rating Frequencies N=266

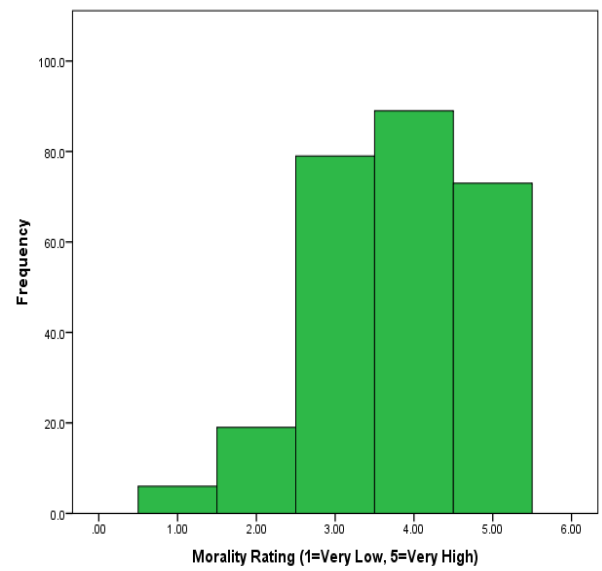


Figure 6: Laziness Rating Frequencies N=264

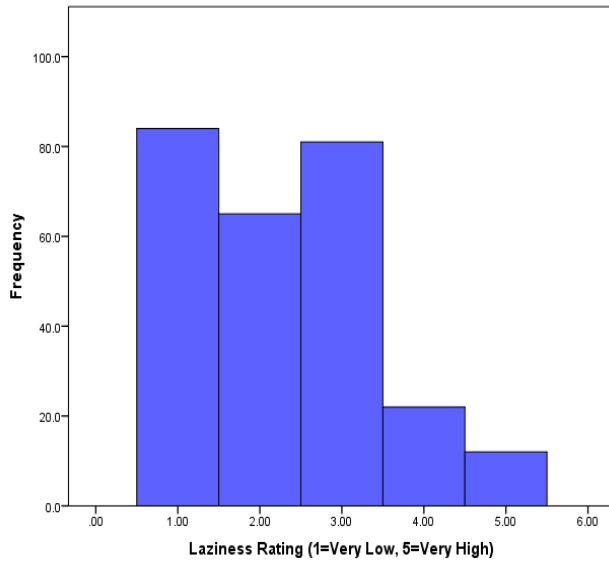


Figure 7: Selfishness Rating Frequencies N=266

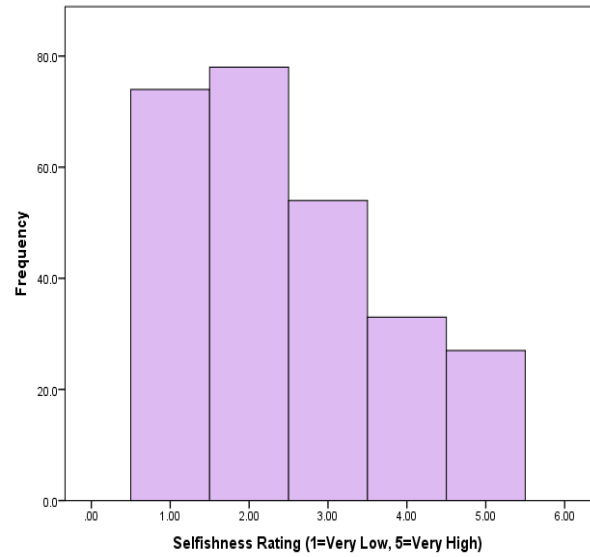
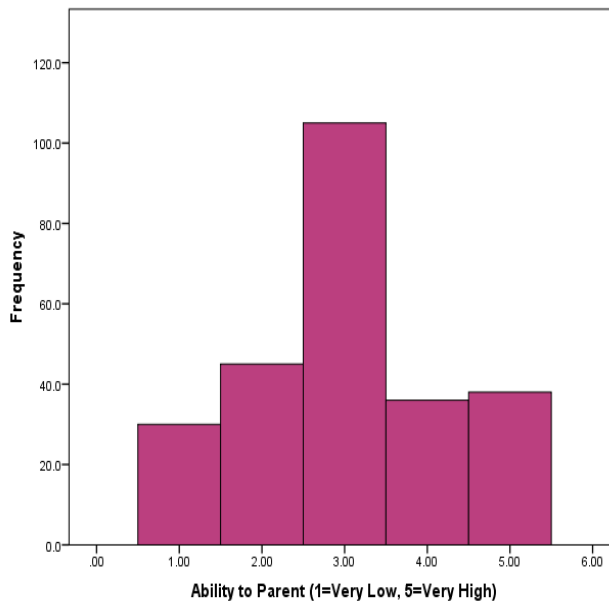


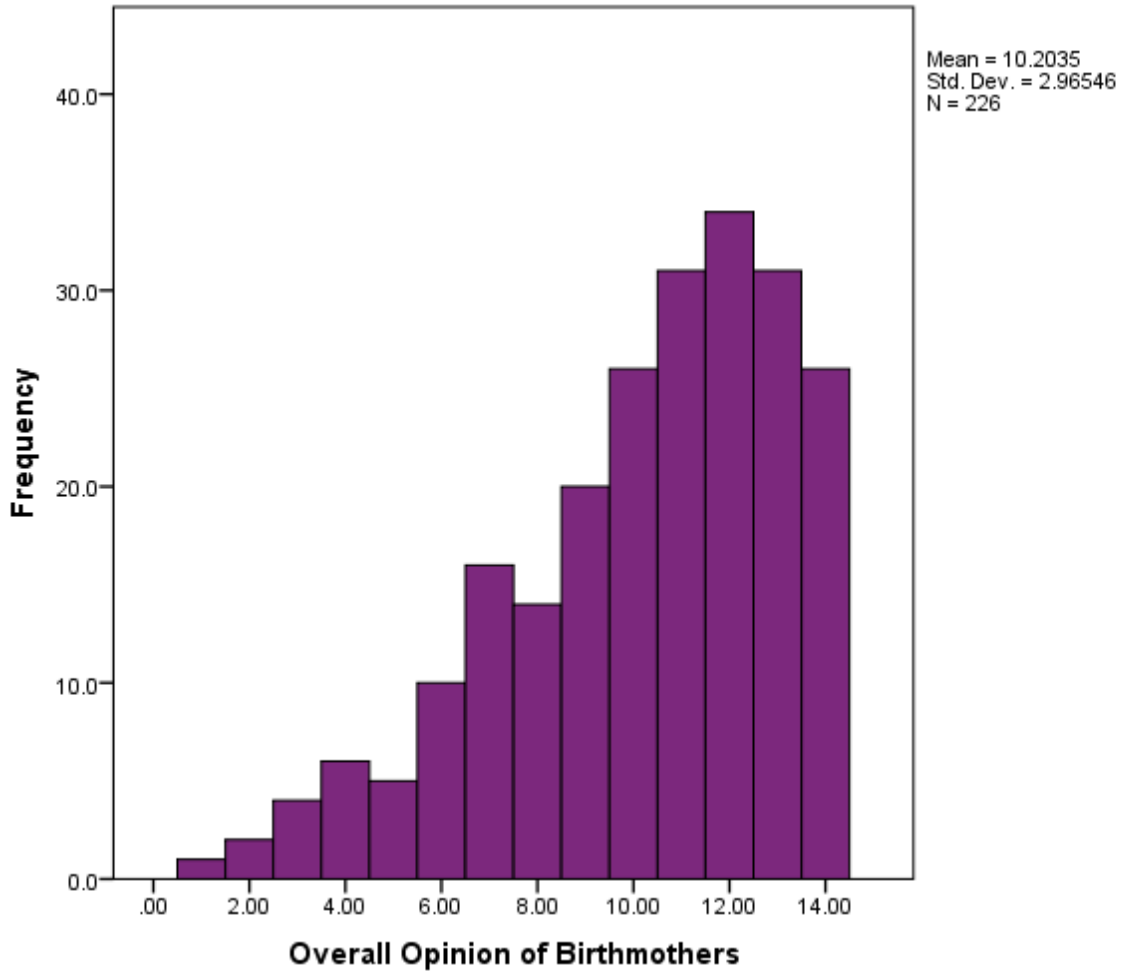
Figure 8: Ability to Parent Rating Frequencies N=254



The above histograms suggest largely positive ratings from the respondents in most of the categories. Bravery and Strength had the highest mean scores at 4.20 and 4.15 respectively. Ability to Parent had the lowest scoring mean (3.03) which is more indicative of its normal distribution (see Figure 8) than of an overall negative opinion of birthmother's ability to parent. The Laziness (mean=2.29) and Selfishness (mean=2.48) adjectives have negative connotations where the other adjectives, including Morality (mean=3.77) and Intelligence (mean=3.69), are more positive. This is important to consider when analyzing the means as well as the shape of their frequency distributions. Selfishness had the largest variation of all the characteristics with a standard deviation of 1.29.

Using these ratings, I created a new variable, entitled "Overall Opinion of Birthmothers" that combined all of the ratings into one encompassing score. I had to flip the scales for the two negative adjectives so that they matched the scales of the other before adding everything together. Then, I conducted a reliability assessment on the new variable and it received a Cronbach's Alpha=.749 indicating a reliable scale. Figure 9 displays an overall positive opinion of birthmothers with some left skew towards the more negative opinions. Lower values represent the more negative scores while higher values indicate a more positive opinion of birthmothers.

Figure 9: Overall Opinion of Birthmothers



As with the qualitative responses, the mean for the quantitative measure of overall opinions of birthmothers falls just right of center indicating a left skew. When further analyzing this graph, there is an appearance of a tri-modal dataset in about the same locations as a negative, neutral, and positive opinion areas.

## **Attitudes Toward Abortion**

Participants were asked an open response question, “How do you feel about abortion?” The responses were then analyzed to identify any underlying themes. I found that most responses fell on a continuum that lay between pro-life opinions (coded as 1):

*“I am against abortion and pro-life. I know there are many reasons to support abortion but those mean nothing to the baby.”*

and pro-choice opinions (coded as 3).

*“I am pro-choice. Women own their own bodies, not the government or anyone else.”*

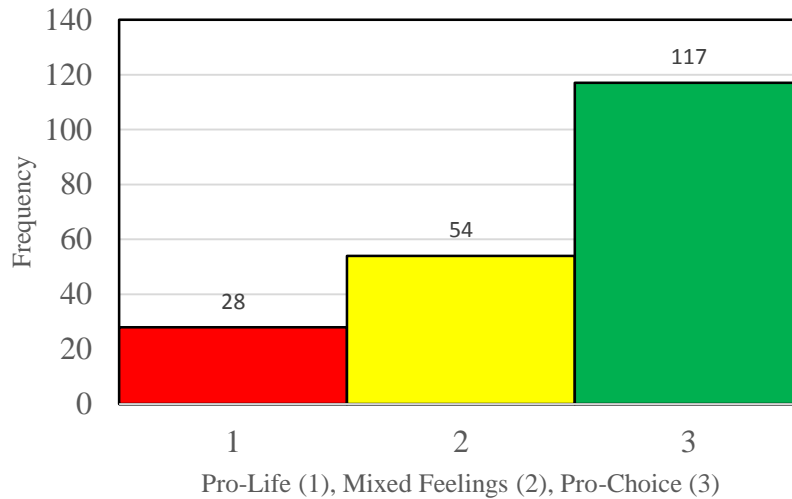
The intermediate responses were coded mixed (2):

*“I believe that women do have a right to their own bodies, but they do not have the right to the body inside them. Abortion should only be used in cases where delivering a baby could be hazardous to the health of the mother.”*

Figure 10 shows the frequency distribution of abortion opinion scores.



Figure 10: *Abortion Opinions* N=199, Mean=2.45



The histogram shows a distribution that is skewed left (pro-life).

## Hypothesis Testing

When comparing Figures 1 and 10 side by side, there appears to be some similarities between the two graphs. There are, however, some key differences. When it comes to opinions of birthmothers, there was a higher amount of responses that fell somewhere in the positive and neutral opinions range, whereas for the abortion data, the distribution was more evenly distributed between the pro-life and pro-choice opinions. A bivariate analysis determined that there was no significant correlation between qualitative opinions of birthmothers and attitudes toward abortion. I also conducted bivariate correlation analysis between attitudes toward abortion and quantitative opinions on birthmothers with no significant correlation found.

Table 1: *Correlation Analysis of Qualitative Birthmother Scores and Abortion Scores*

		BIRTHMOTHER SCORE	ABORTION SCORE
BIRTHMOTHER SCORE	Pearson Correlation	1	-.007
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.911
	N	257	257
ABORTION SCORE	Pearson Correlation	-.007	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.911	
	N	257	257

Table 2: *Correlation Analysis of Quantitative Opinions of Birthmother and Abortion Scores*

		ABORTION SCORE	Overall Opinion of Birthmothers
ABORTION SCORE	Pearson Correlation	1	.103
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.139
	N	257	206
Overall Opinion of Birthmothers	Pearson Correlation	.103	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.139	
	N	206	226

I also ran individual correlation analyses with each of the individual adjectives but found no significant correlations, though selfishness came the closest to alpha=0.05 significance with a p=0.057.

For testing purposes, I modified several of my control variables in order to conduct a linear regression analysis. First, I converted the responses on sex into Male, Female, and all other values missing, keeping in mind that almost 3% of respondents either preferred not to answer or considered themselves to be a sex other than male or female. I then converted responses on race to White or Non-White. To measure past reproductive history, I converted the unintended

pregnancies variable to a dichotomous variable indicating they either had gotten someone or been pregnant themselves or they had not. See Table 3 for the full results of the linear regression analysis.

Table 3: *Linear Regression Analysis*<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	8.637	3.028		2.852	.005
	ABORTION SCORE	.412	.194	.171	2.125	.035
	What is your age? Please type a numeric value.	-.021	.044	-.038	-.478	.633
	Are you currently registered to vote?	-.735	.541	-.095	-1.358	.176
	Would you consider your beliefs Conservative or Liberal?	-.368	.214	-.140	-1.719	.087
	Simplified Pregnancies	.302	.919	.027	.329	.743
	Binary Gender	1.519	.467	.231	3.254	.001
	Are you Hispanic/Latino?	-.133	.511	-.018	-.261	.795

a. Dependent Variable: Overall Opinion of Birthmothers

The results found that, when holding constant respondent age, voting registration, political beliefs, whether or not they had an unintended pregnancy, gender, and ethnicity, there is significance at the alpha=0.05 level ( $p=0.035$ ) that abortion opinions may have a relationship with opinions of birthmothers. This means I fail to reject my hypothesis that there is a relationship between attitudes toward abortion and college student's perceptions of birthmothers.

## DISCUSSION

A response that continually popped up under the abortion responses was that they were pro-choice, but they would never choose abortion for themselves.

*“I personally wouldn't get one because of my personal morals but that doesn't give me the right to say others can't. Personal morals and convictions are different than societal standards.”*

Or, as another respondent succinctly put,

*“Not a fan but understand it.”*

These responses suggest that there are many who do not identify with either end of the continuum. They represent the need for a continuum. There isn't language for someone who falls somewhere in between.

Another significant response was from males, who identified themselves as male within their response, who thought that their opinion on the subject doesn't matter.

*“As a male, I feel like it's not my job to feel about abortion. If a woman decides to abort, it's her right to, and she has her own mental consequences to deal with. My opinion should not be a contributing factor. From an objective, it's not a person but a number perspective, it seems like a responsible thing to do. She isn't bringing up a child into an undesirable life, and she isn't contributing to, yet again, the population problem.”*

This brings into question the male narrative on the abortion issue. Is the male point of view valid when it comes to abortion? If so, when is that viewpoint valid? These questions are answered

societally depending on who you talk to. Regardless of the answers, there is something within our society that contributes to the idea that these males felt that their own opinions should be suppressed, even when their opinions seemed to align with those of women activists.

*“I'm a dude, but if dudes could have kids and someone told me what I can and can't do with my body, you better bet your ass I would fight for my rights.”*

The above quote is important because the author states “I *would* fight for my rights” (emphasis mine). If men are permitted to have more of an active voice in what amounts to part of their own reproductive lives, they may become agents for change in that arena. Otherwise a problem may arise that those who are remaining silent are the ones who could most lend aid to their cause.

I expected the results to be more clearly correlated given previous observations that abortion commonly is brought up during participant discussion of birthmothers. This may be due to the questioning in general. In the case of birthmothers, participants are describing an individual. In the case of abortion, individuals are discussing a decision. Participants may have found it more difficult to judge a human being due to unknown factors such as reasoning behind the decision to place for adoption. The responses that fell within the neutral range indicated as much:

*“It's hard to answer any of these questions because every birth mother has a different story. You cannot generalize a subject as broad as this one...”*

Despite the differences in the way the variables were operationalized, this study could not rule out a relationship between abortion opinions and opinions of birthmothers. Further analysis and clarification of the differences between the choice to place a child for adoption or abort and

the woman who makes either choice would be necessary for future research regarding this subject.

## CONCLUSION

As recent current events continue to manifest themselves within our society, such as the debates over Planned Parenthood government funding, this niche of research grows in importance. Through the knowledge gleaned from similar studies we can truly assess the impact such events are having on our society. There are many ways that future research could improve upon this study. By obtaining more recent data, a clearer more accurate picture could be painted of public perceptions of birthmothers of adopted children. This study is important because through its limitations we have learned that perhaps if we ask about abortion from the perspective of the woman choosing it the opinions of outsiders may change. They may not. But, it seems, that humanizing the birthmother led many respondents to withhold judgment until they could obtain more information.

Most individuals surveyed had a positive opinion of birthmothers. Most of my respondents rated themselves as pro-choice. While there was no significant correlation between the two in my study, I believe more in-depth studies with an interview format could help get to the bottom of public perceptions of birthmothers of adopted children.

## REFERENCES

- Adamczyk, A. (n.d). The effects of religious contextual norms, structural constraints, and personal religiosity on abortion decisions. *Social Science Research*, 37(2), 657-672.
- Arat, G. (2013). Doulas' perceptions on single mothers' risk and protective factors, and aspirations relative to child-birth. *Qualitative Report*, (Art. 4), 1-11.
- Brodzinsky, D., & Smith, S. (2014). Post-placement adjustment and the needs of birthmothers who place an infant for adoption. *Adoption Quarterly*, 17(3), 165-184.  
doi:10.1080/10926755.2014.891551.
- Clutter, L. B. (2014). Adult birth mothers who made open infant adoption placements after adolescent unplanned pregnancy. *Jognn-Journal Of Obstetric Gynecologic And Neonatal Nursing*, 43(2), 190-199. doi:10.1111/1552-6909.12280.
- Finer, L. B., & Zolna, M. R. (2014). Shifts in intended and unintended pregnancies in the United States, 2001-2008. *American Journal Of Public Health*, 104(S1), S43-S48.  
doi:10.2105/AJPH.2013.301416.
- Finer, L. B., & Zolna, M. R. (2016). Declines in unintended pregnancy in the United States, 2008-2011. *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 374(9), 843-852.
- Herrman, J., & Waterhouse, J. (2010). What do adolescents think about teen parenting?. *Western Journal Of Nursing Research*, 33(4), 577-592.



- Jones, R. K., Frohwirth, L. F., & Moore, A. M. (2008). 'I would want to give my child, like, everything in the world': how issues of motherhood influence women who have abortions. *Journal Of Family Issues*, (1), 79. doi:10.1177/0192513X07305753.
- Kennelly, I. (1999). 'That single-mother element': how white employers typify black women. *Gender and Society*, 2. 168.
- Lee, J. S., & Twaite, J. A. (1997). Open adoption and adoptive mothers: attitudes toward birthmothers, adopted children, and parenting. *American Journal Of Orthopsychiatry*, 67(4), 576-584.
- Parsons, J. E. (2008). Life chances, choices and identity: single mothers in post-secondary education. *Atlantis*, (2), 136.
- Rompf, E. L. (1993). Open adoption: what does the "average person" think?. *Child Welfare*, 72(3), 219-230.
- Stroud, J. E., Stroud, J. C., & Staley, L.M. (1997) Understanding and supporting adoptive families. *Early Childhood Education Journal* 24(4), 229-234.
- Turner, K. M. (2004). Young women's views on teenage motherhood: a possible explanation for the relationship between socio-economic background and teenage pregnancy outcome?. *Journal Of Youth Studies*, 7(2), 221-238. doi:10.1080/1367626042000238730.
- Wedlund, B. I. (2015). *Student perceptions of birthmothers of adopted children*. (Unpublished). University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL.