



## ***A Family of Neglect and “Dysfunction” Personal Blames or Structural Constraints?***

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**Abstract:** Using various sociological concepts and perspectives, in this article the author presents a case study of a family where the personal troubles of parents (substance abuse and alcoholism) translate into neglect for the children’s well being. The impact of parents’ addiction on their own career, employment situation, and parenting duties are contrasted with the children’s efforts at finding alternative ways of doing family with others, and providing for themselves to make ends meet, at the expense of their educational and career outcomes.

In her article “Confessions of a Mainiac: The Family, Academia, and Modernity,” Macalester College student Jessica Sawyer writes that the **family** is “intended as a place to enrich children, so they are then able to leave and reach their full potentials” (195). While this may be society’s expectation of what a family must be, and even the definition for many families in many social settings, it is only a faint hope of what could have been for the Stewart<sup>1</sup> family. Sharon, Mark, and children Katie, Alex and Chris form the Stewart family. Over the course of their lives they have struggled with many difficult situations. With a mother so addicted to heroin that it was the only thing she truly cared about and a drug-addicted alcoholic for a father,

the three Stewart children could only pretend and wish that their family could function like other families.

Patricia Hill Collins states in her article, “It’s All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation,” that families in our society are

... expected to socialize their members into an appropriate set of ‘family values’ that simultaneously reinforce the hierarchy within the assumed unity of interest symbolized by the family and lay the foundation for many social hierarchies. (158)

The specific hierarchies that Collins suggests are those of gender, age, wealth, and sexuality. These hierarchies exist inside of the family and are comparable to similar

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<sup>1</sup> Family and personal names used in this article have been modified to maintain privacy.

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hierarchies in our society. Collins continues to say that hierarchy “in this sense becomes ‘naturalized’ because it is associated with seemingly ‘natural’ processes of the family” (Collins 158). There is little room in the Stewart family to create any type of solid hierarchy, however, as each member operates as an individual unit, providing for and relying only upon themselves.

In their article “Kinscripts,” Carol Stack and Linda Burton present a personal account by a man named Henry who believes that, “[s]omeone in my family must be at the helm. Someone has to be there to make sure the next generation has a start. Right now, we are a family of co-dependents. We need each other” (409). Mostly when the children were younger, but even so now, Katie, Alex and Chris in the Stewart family also needed someone to be there for them, to “take the helm” and give them enough direction and support to give them a start in life. In most families this is where **mothering** and **fathering** takes place. The adults, being the mother and father of a family, assume the role of running the family and taking care of the children and home. However, in the Stewart family, since Sharon and Mark were so overwhelmed by their own lives, addictions, and problems, they were unable to help their children at all. As a result, Katie, Alex, and Chris have been left to fend for themselves.

To truly understand the situation that the Stewart family is in, I think it is important to consider the background of each member of the household. To begin with, Sharon Stewart was as of three months ago, a recovering heroin addict. In the early 1970s, when Sharon was thirteen years old she began stealing her mother’s Valium---which had been prescribed to ease symptoms of menopause---and her life pretty much went downhill from there. Since then she has lived a life of lying and stealing to feed her addiction. Sharon seems to have no morals when it comes to getting what she wants. She has sunk low enough as to

steal jewelry that had been passed down to her sister and even stealing the pain medication her husband had been prescribed just days after a painful back operation.

Sharon has had frequent run-ins with the law but her most recent, and worst, came last year. She had gotten a job as a personal care assistant for a ninety six year old woman, whose family basically wanted nothing to do with her. After the woman passed away it was revealed that Sharon had been stealing items from her home, as well as forging checks from the woman, essentially clearing out her rather substantial bank account. As a result of this, Sharon was sentenced to six months in jail. Since being released over the summer, she has been at a drug rehabilitation home trying to beat her addiction to heroin.

The theme of secrets and lies in the movie *TransAmerica* is similar to Sharon’s situation. In the movie, Bree is about to have an operation to officially make her body that of a woman. Bree deals with secrets and lies as she does not initially tell her son that she was his father, instead choosing to lie and say that she worked for a church. Furthermore, when talking to her therapist after learning she had a son, Bree told the therapist everything had been worked out, when in fact it had not. The therapist did not believe this and I think, deep down, neither did Bree. While the exact situations of Bree and Sharon are incomparable, the fact that they harbor secrets and lies can be related.

For many years Sharon denied that she had a problem with drugs, and would lie to anyone who suggested that she did. She has been in rehabilitation four times and every time she left before she was truly ready. Sharon would say she was ready to leave; however, her counselors would say otherwise, knowing that she would turn right back to drugs upon being released. Furthermore, when she was back on drugs and the signs were obvious, she would become enraged at anyone who suggested

she needed help, and deny she was back to using drugs. Therefore, even though the situations may be different, the central theme of lying is evident in that of Bree's and Sharon's situations and behaviors.

While Sharon offers little to her children there is also no support or structure that comes from her husband either. He is a drug addicted, alcoholic that is more consistent in showing up to drink in the local bar than showing up to his job. On occasion he has been known to stumble home from the bar and begin to verbally abuse any one of his kids that crosses his path. He commonly chooses Katie as his target for his verbal attacks, tearing her down for anything from the fact that she dropped out of school, to his disgust that she cannot find a better job than making sandwiches at Subway, which is ironic because at least she consistently shows up to work, unlike her father. Mark every now and then tries to "make up" for his behavior by making empty promises to his victims, such as promising a car to Katie. He knows that he can barely afford food for the family to eat, yet alone a car; however, he makes these promises to have his family view him in a better light than when he is abusive.

Society's **family ideal** expects parents to provide a loving and safe environment for their children to reside in. In "It's Late At Night, And I'm Screaming At My Kids Again," author Christopher Scanlan, like Mark, also invokes terror in his family by taking out his anger and frustration in the form of screaming at his family. However, Scanlan, unlike Mark, understands that what he is doing is detrimental to his family and makes an effort to change his behavior. He recognizes this when he states that "I don't want my children to remember me...as this looming, frightened man" and attempts to mend the problem by recording his thoughts and frustrations in a "Temper Log," where he can monitor his behavior (Scanlan 304). By doing this, Scanlan is internalizing society's standards of **parent-**

**ing** and also behaving the way he knows he should. I believe that Mark recognizes that his behavior is inappropriate, which is exemplified in the way he makes big promises to his family. However, unlike Scanlan and many in our society, he does not know how to harness his anger and addictions in a way that will allow him to function on a normal level with his family.

Katie is the oldest child and after a troubled childhood dropped out of school at the beginning of her freshman year of high school. Currently she is pregnant and spending the majority of her time at her boyfriend's family's apartment where she now lives. The middle child, Alex, never seemed to fit in with her family as she was an extremely gifted student who was the only one of her siblings that consistently went to school. However, she dropped out of school her sophomore year and has recently become involved with a group of kids known for causing trouble. The youngest child, Chris dropped out of school after the eighth grade and was a troubled boy growing up, often trying to light the walls of his apartment on fire. He was involved with the murder of a homeless man in 2004, but since he was only present at the murder and not directly involved, was sentenced to six months in a group home. The last time I talked to him he was nervous because "some kids from the projects" were supposedly looking to "kill" him.

In "Child Abuse in Context: An Historian's Perspective," John Demos defines **child abuse** as "physical force, applied intentionally, so as to inflict substantial" injury to a child (655). Demos continues to say that "neglect---the failure to provide for the central needs of the child" is not included in the definition of abuse (655). In my view, the definition of abuse cannot be broken down to simply mean physical abuse. Neglect causes children's physical needs to go unmet in terms of lack of proper nutrition, suitable clothing for

changing weather conditions, and hygiene needs. In terms of emotional needs, children can be verbally berated or ignored, either of which can cause numerous psychological problems for a child. As far as I'm concerned, I would imagine the scars from feeling unwanted or being constantly screamed at will last long after the bruises from physical abuse have faded.

The three children have been neglected in many ways over the years; however, one area that stands out is that they have never been to the doctor for anything except emergencies or dental work. The reason for this is that the family does not have health insurance and cannot afford to pay for doctor's visits, therefore putting the children's health in danger. All have crooked teeth, Alex and Chris are missing teeth, and Chris severely chipped a tooth in an accident when he was younger, one which has never been fixed. In addition, one winter when the children were still in school, their lack of proper winter clothing alarmed a teacher, prompting one of many visits from the Department of Social Services (DDS) to the family's apartment. The lack of dental hygiene has caused their physical health to suffer and as a result I feel that it can be classified as abuse.

In an example of emotional neglect, I can remember a then-fourteen year old Chris crying, and saying that he had nobody that cares for him, after a relative of mine had to post his bail money after he had been arrested. Sharon was nowhere to be found at this time and Mark was apparently at the bar while their son was attempting to contact them from the police department, leaving my mom to collect Chris and take him home. The feeling of not being cared for seemed to be more painful than any physical abuse Chris could have endured at that time.

While Katie, Alex, and Chris have not taken the traditional route of graduating from high school, considering college, and participating in things like sports or extra-

curricular activities like many children in our society do, they do seem to attempt to make the best of their situation. As a result of their father's inconsistency in going to work and their mother's habit of using all available money for drugs, money was often hard to come by. While the children were younger, they often had to rely on others to scrape by. For instance, my mother would frequently drop a week's worth of food by their home and my uncle Mike tried to make sure they had enough, suitable clothing to wear. Once Katie, Alex and Chris grew older, they quickly became tired of often not having electricity or a phone line, a result of the bills not having been paid.

Since the three children had all dropped out of school, they had plenty of time to work, to supply money for themselves and each other. Katie had her job at Subway, Chris was employed by Blockbuster video, and Alex at a convenience store. The three worked, as Immanuel Wallerstein states in "Households as an Institution of the World-Economy," "not for the individual but the **household**," meaning that each child worked to be able to promote a better situation to their family members and home (243). Furthermore, they were able to "pool income coming from multiple sources in order to ensure their individual and collective reproduction and well-being" and contribute to the family economy (244). Basically the three children worked to be able to pool their money to be able to afford food and occasionally take care of issues such as not having electricity. Clearly their efforts could not make any significant changes, but they did what they could.

While the children were able to afford food once they were old enough to work, when they were young there were many times when there would be no food at all in their home. I can remember countless occasions when my mother would get a phone call from one of the children, often calling

from the pay phone on the corner of their street because they didn't have a working phone line in the home, to say that there wasn't a single thing to eat in the home and they were starving. As a result, to keep the children from being malnourished, at one point my mother would drive the forty five minutes it takes to get to the Stewarts' apartment, once a week, in order to bring them food. My mother did this because the Stewart children are family. Even if we do not see and interact with them as a normal functioning family would, we are still related and therefore as members of their extended family need to take care of them if their immediate family does not.

In "Affluence and Poverty in Feeding the Family," Marjorie Devault observes a "disturbing" fact that "income differences mean considerable variation in the amounts and kinds of food consumed" by families (171). She continues to note that "a significant group of people continue to experience hunger and malnutrition" (Devault 171). While most families who experience hunger and malnutrition in our society do so because of being in a single-parent situation or have parents that work at minimum wage paying jobs, the Stewarts are in this situation because of the selfishness and addictions of Mark and Sharon.

Mark is the co-owner of a construction company that he runs with his brother which allows him to have an irregular work schedule without getting fired. His brother is a wealthy man, which would lead one to imagine that if Mark actually worked a normal schedule he would be able to sufficiently provide for his family. Mark is able to take off so much time from work because his brother and other members of his family make up for the work that Mark misses. I do not know why his brother puts up with this but I would surmise that it has to do with the fact that they are family, and his brother may not want to discipline or fire him. Since Mark would often go for weeks without a single day of work, it sometimes

happens that there is no money to buy food during the times he would not work. To further this situation, Mark spends a significant amount of money that he does earn on drugs and specifically alcohol.

Sharon's behavior make the family's financial situation even worse. Since she comes across as a friendly and outgoing person, she is often hired for jobs as employers assume that she will be a decent worker based on her personality. However, she does not last more than a few weeks before she begins stealing from her employers, resulting in her termination from these jobs. She also has been known to frequently ask family and friends for money to buy food for her children. The people that she asks for money, would for a while give her enough money to provide food for a week, with no questions asked. However, once after a couple of years it was revealed that Sharon took the money that people gave her, and spent it on drugs. So while people like my mother and uncle Mike thought Mark and Sharon were helping their children by providing food for them, instead they were fueling Sharon's addictions.

Sharon's and Mark's working situation and commitment to supplying for their family sharply differ from the majority of other parents in society. While most parents start a family to take care of it, Sharon and Mark have done the opposite of what is expected of them by barely working and paying little attention to their children. Anita Iltta Garey, in "Constructing Motherhood on the Night Shift: 'Working Mothers' as 'Stay at Home Moms'" describes how many women with children under the age of fourteen work the night shift. Garey states that

working the night shift allows employed women with children to construct a definition of 'working mother' that preserves the dominant cultural ideal of a 'traditional' family form in which the mother is

at home during the day. (710)

The women that work these shifts basically have two full-time jobs, caring for their children during the day to maintain the ideal of a traditional stay at home mother, while earning an income for her family at night. Garey explains that mothers working the night shift are “able to emulate non employed mothers in their availability to participate in children’s school and extracurricular activities” (714). One mother explains how working at night allows her to bring her daughter to karate and dance classes, saying that if she worked days her daughter would miss out because her mother would not be around to take her (Garey 714). These mothers work hard to be able to provide both time and money for their children.

The level of poverty the Stewarts have experienced is much lower than most could ever imagine. As a result the children have been forced to fend for themselves. While they are able to provide for themselves as of now, their jobs may not be enough in the future. Since none of the children graduated from high school, their job opportunities will be restricted to minimum wage paying jobs. Once the children are grown adults, they will have to provide a shelter, food, and necessities for themselves, all on a low salary. Collins writes that “[f]amilies use wealth to create opportunities, secure a desired standard of living, and pass their social class status to their children” (167). This has proven true for this family. Sharon and Mark have “passed their social class status to their children,” which is not one to be desired. Like their parents, Katie, Alex, and Chris will most likely have to struggle to make ends meet for the rest of their lives. Katie may feel this strain earlier than her other siblings as she is now pregnant. She will now have to pay for her own necessities while also covering the expenses of another human being, all on her salary from working at Subway.

In their article “The Anti-Social Family,” Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh state that “most boys will live out their lives in the same class and even in the same section of it [as their father’s]; most girls will marry a man in a situation very similar to their own father’s” (219). Since Katie, Alex, and Chris have little education and no current plans to change their level of schooling, they are and most likely will continue to live in the same class as their father. Similarly, since the children hang around with friends that are much like themselves, it is most likely that the girls will marry a man in the same financial situation as themselves and their father. This is because the type of men they have been around all their lives, poor and uneducated, is the only type they have ever known. A world of a higher social class and more opportunities is unknown to them, so all three children have nothing to strive for as they do not know that it is attainable to them or even exists.

In “Time Squeeze: The Extra Month of Work,” Juliet Schor discusses how “**time squeeze**” has become a major issue with today’s families and households. Schor believes that as a result of members of families and households working more and longer hours, the time that individuals have to spend with their families is limited. Some factors that influence families working more is the desire to provide for one’s family, in addition to trying to “keep up” with those in their social class. Furthermore, Schor states that women are the “most visible group” that is affected by the “time squeeze.” This is because women often have double the responsibilities by having to care for the family while maintaining a job to provide income. It is described that “many working mothers live a life of perpetual motion, effectively holding down two full-time jobs.” The author continues on to describe a typical day of a working mother. The day begins with the mother doing some housework, preparing the children for school, and going to work, only to

come back home to have to clean, cook, and take care of the children (Schor 115).

This theory is somewhat applies to the responsibilities of the children in the Stewart family. As previously discussed, the two parents in the family contribute little to the well being of the family, so the children provide what is needed for themselves, participating in **domestic labor**. The children often felt the "time squeeze" when they were younger and still in school. In the children's situation I believe school can be substituted for work, as school is the child's equivalent to work as they spend the majority of their day there, like an adult does with work. Like Schor's example of a working mother who does housework, gets the children ready for school, goes to work, and comes home to clean, cook, and take care of the children, the Stewart children would often act in a similar day. For instance, all three children would go to school and do housework. However, I think the greatest strain was placed on the girls, Katie and Alex. Since Katie was the oldest she often felt responsible for taking care of her brother and sister. Similarly, Alex felt responsible for taking care of her siblings as she always put others before herself. While Chris would help, he would do little of the cleaning and as he was the younger child, approximately eight years old at the time, there was little he could do to help with cooking.

Many times, Katie would wake up early to make sure that Alex and Chris had clothes to wear to school as well as to make lunch for the three of them with whatever food she could find in the home. Before heading off to school, Katie and Alex would try to find something to prepare for breakfast for the three, even though they often went without breakfast because of the lack of food. Once the three got home from school, Katie and Alex would try to clean up as much as possible before all three children would try to find or prepare dinner. After dinner, Katie would try to help Alex,

and Alex would try to help Chris with homework. However, as there was no parental figure making sure that homework got done, most of the time Katie's and Chris's did not. The two had never liked school so homework got completed probably only a couple of times a week, unless Alex, the more studious one, tried to make the other two complete their homework.

While these activities may not be as intense as those of a working mother, they come pretty close considering it is three children doing the work, not an adult. These children took on a great deal of responsibility, which most children would not even have to think about doing. Instead of engaging in normal childhood activities like sports or playing with friends after school, these children were given the responsibility of having to "fill in" for their often absent parents. As a result, a "time squeeze" was placed on the amount of time the children had doing normal childhood activities, as well as the time they had to spend together when not engaged in "responsible activities" like cleaning and cooking.

While the exact situations for each are much different, while reading "Mothering From a Distance: Emotions, Gender, and Intergenerational Reactions in Filipino Transnational Families" by Rhacel Salazar Parrenas, I found the motivations behind the individuals reported in the article and those of Sharon in her current situation to be very similar. Sharon's recent effort to provide for her children draws bleak comparison to the efforts of the Filipina women. While Sharon has put her needs before everyone else for most of her life, since finishing her prison sentence and entering her rehabilitation home she has mentioned how she feels remorse for not being able to provide for her children in the way other mothers care for their children. As a result, in an attempt to "start over" and begin supporting her children any way she can, Sharon got a job close to her rehabilitation

home. She works the maximum amount of hours a week that her program will allow her and with the exception of buying herself a pack of cigarettes a week, she sends the rest of her earnings to be split among the three children. In the article, Parrenas states that in order for many Filipina women to provide for their families, an increasing number are "mothering from a distance," and leaving their children behind in the Philippines while they "take advantage of the greater labor market opportunities in other countries" (404). These women leave everything they have to go to work to provide the best life they can for their children.

Parrenas says that the "pain of family separation creates various feelings, including helplessness, regret and guilt for mothers and loneliness, vulnerability, and insecurity for children" (405). While the situations that have caused mother and children to separate are much different in the Filipina mother's situation than Sharon's, all mothers seem to be working in their situations because they care about their children and want them to live comfortable lives, even though for Sharon's children it may be a little late for that.

The Stewart family is similar to that of the Binghamton University student Rena Dangerfield's as reported in her essay, "Mom and Dad's Waltz: A Dance of Love and Sacrifice," where she describes how "unfortunately, our home, with the privacy afforded it, was a dangerous place" (64). Dangerfield grew up in an impoverished home where her father was an alcoholic that abused her mother. As a result, times at home were seldom happy for Dangerfield and her siblings. Things were so bad at her home that they also interfered with her ability to form bonds with others outside of her blood family. She recalled how her and her sister were viewed as "daughters of the town drunk," resulting in their being frequently excluded from social situations and "none of [their] friends were allowed

in [their] house" (Dangerfield 64).

While the Stewart children have been able to form bonds with others, as is shown in the significant amount of time they spend with those in their non-biological families, others in their community look down upon and assume things about them solely based on their home life. For instance, the neighbor's that Alex spends so much time with will not allow their children to spend any time at Alex's home, which is why she spends so much time at theirs. Furthermore, Alex, who is an intelligent girl who is never disrespectful, was often singled out by teachers and administrators at her school because of her family's reputation. For instance, one year, on one of the first days of school, Alex's teacher made a comment to the effect that just because Alex's family was so out of control did not mean that that type of behavior would be allowed by her. This teacher clearly did not know Alex as she never got in trouble at school, yet the teacher assumed Alex was just like the rest of her family. By stereotyping Alex based on her family's background, the teacher was not allowing her to live up to her full potential which will not help her in getting out of her current situation.

It is very obvious that Katie, Alex, and Chris do not receive much care or positive attention from their parents as their **nuclear family**. As a result, the three have turned elsewhere to find support and a feeling of being wanted from their **chosen families**, those people that are like family to them, even though they are not biologically related. Katie lives at her boyfriend's home and his mother treats Katie as her own. Alex spends most of her time at a neighbor's apartment, which she has gone to since she was young. In addition, Chris seems to have formed a type of family among his friends, most of whom are in somewhat similar situations with their own biological families. These individuals provide food, a place to spend the night, and even clothes for the Stewart children. As

well, the children even frequently celebrate holidays with the members of these families.

These types of "families" that the Stewarts have formed compare to what Katrina Wegar, in "Adoption and Kinship," studied. She noted in her article that "the concept of **kin** was not exclusively reserved for biological relatives but could include close friends as well" in the groups of individuals she observed (42). Furthermore, she stated that "familial relationships are nourished and sustained by the accumulation of thousands of daily acts of support and care" (42). As a result, while the families that the Stewarts have formed may not be conventional, at least they are a place of comfort and support that otherwise the children would not have.

I find that Martha Minow in "Redefining Families: Who's In and Who's Out" presents a perfect argument for the Stewarts' situation. Her argument "emphasizes not any particular definition of family, but instead, the interests of the child...[because] those interests, above all, are what must take center stage" (Minow 16). Basically, she does not think it matters what defines a family as long as the needs of the child are met. In the Stewarts' situation, their "families" may not fall into society's typical definition of a family, yet their needs are being met by their "families," and that is all that matters.

While the Stewarts do consider their non-biological families to be the only real family they have in their lives, my mother still tries hard to help the children with whatever they need and to include them in family gatherings and events. For instance, when a couple of years ago Alex told my mom that she wanted to get her GED, my mom drove her to the school to sign up, paid for her, and bought her books, only to have Alex decide that she really wasn't ready to go back to school. Furthermore, she makes sure the children know about every family gathering and offers to pick

them up and drive them home. My mother says that she does this because they are family, and especially because it is what her mother would want her to do. Her mother would always say that family never gives up on and always helps out family. These beliefs were instilled to her by her parents who always said that it was the "Greek way" to help out family, that it was an obligation that family members should be happy to undertake. As a result, my mom has put in so much effort to help the Stewart family because she knows it is the right thing to do, but even more so because it is what her Greek ancestors' culture expects of her.

While the concept of family does not apply normally to the Stewarts, neither does their home. During the years that the Stewarts lived in their apartment they were often late paying the rent and sometimes would not pay at all. Mark's brother was their landlord so he allowed them significant leeway in paying rent. However, there were many times that he threatened to evict them, until he finally did last year. During the time they lived at this apartment, the conditions inside the home were often repulsive. The family owned two dogs that were so vicious they were not allowed outside; as a result they often would relieve themselves inside the house. Many times, nobody would bother to pick up after the dogs. There was dirt covering every inch of the apartment and the heater did not work properly. In addition, for a period of about a year the family had no door to their apartment, so anybody could basically just walk in. In "It's All in the Family: Intersection of Gender, Race, and Nation," Patricia Hill Collins suggests that "'homes' provide spaces of privacy and security for families, races, and nation-states, they serve as sanctuaries for group members...these homes represent idealized, privatized spaces where members can feel at ease" (161). When thinking of the physical condition of the Stewarts' apartment, combined with

the emotional misery that the family must live with, it seems that their "home" is anything but a sanctuary.

Even though growing up was tough for Katie, Alex and Chris---and I don't think anyone would blame them for harboring some resentment for their parents---the three don't seem to have any ill feelings at all. While the children seem to be indifferent to Mark, not overly caring for him but not hating him either, the three all have a mutual admiration and love for their mother. No matter what anyone says about her, all three will quickly jump to her defense, even if their reasonings make no sense. Furthermore, all three would drop anything they were doing just to see their mother for a second.

The actions of Katie, Alex, and Chris seem to be defined by Collins's view that "even when family members lack merit, they are entitled to benefits simply because they belong" (165). Collins continues on, saying that family members often feel that they are "responsible for members of their families" and as a result will "routinely help their family members by babysitting, lending money, helping relatives find employment or caring for the elderly" (165). While Sharon did not really provide much of anything for her children while they were growing up, they still feel obligated and more than willing to help their mother now. The children do this by supporting her with her treatment for drug abuse and recently by helping her find a new apartment, and even lending her money to buy furniture and supplies for it. While Katie, Alex, and Chris do not have to help their mother, they do simply because she is their mother.

While the children support their mother simply because she is their mother, Mark does not support his children just because they are his children. When Mark found out that Katie was pregnant, he told her that she would have to find another place to live. As Katie had no other options

and spends enough of her time there anyway, she moved in with her boyfriend's family. In one apartment will now reside, Katie, her boyfriend, his mother and brother, his brother's girlfriend, their two children, and Katie's daughter once she is born. Katie obviously would not have enough money to rent her own apartment so her only choice is to live there. Similarly, her boyfriend's brother also lives at the apartment to save money.

These situations are reminiscent of the situations depicted in Judith Seltzer's article "Families Formed Outside of Marriage." Seltzer writes that "**cohabitation** remains more common among those with less education and for whom economic resources are more constrained" (234). The boyfriend's family can be classified as poor since the only income comes from minimum wage paying jobs from the boyfriend and his brother, in addition to a small amount of disability money that the mother gets from having a respiratory problem. It is also significant to note that no one other than the mother in this apartment graduated from high school. If any one of those individuals had completed high school and maybe gone to college and had a higher paying job they may not be in the situation they are in, needing to cohabitate because their resources are "more constrained" than individuals that have finished school and gone on to higher education.

When Katie called to tell my mother that she was pregnant, my mom asked Katie what the current working situation was for her and her boyfriend. She did this because she knew that the income from the two of them would pretty much be the only means of support for the child, my mother most likely being the only outside source that would be contributing to the financial wellbeing of the baby. Katie replied that she would continue working at Subway and her boyfriend was in the process of finding a second job to be able to support the baby. Katie told my mom that one of her aunts

was very upset about the pregnancy, saying that it was a disgrace that the baby was being born into such a situation, where the couple is unmarried, poor, and unable to find work other than minimum wage paying jobs. The aunt said that the baby would end up living the same life that Katie has.

Katie admitted to my mom that she knew she wasn't in the best situation to have a baby; however, she thought everything would be alright. She said that having had the family life that she did growing up, she wanted to make sure her baby's life was better than that. This desire to provide a life as good as is possible for her child is illustrated in a passage quoted in Denise Segura's "Working At Motherhood." The quote by a single mother states that she's always wanted a family because she thinks "it was more like I didn't have a family-type home when I was growing up. I didn't have a mother and a father and the kids all together in the same household all happy" (Segura 732). I think Katie probably feels the same. While she did not intentionally try to get pregnant, she wants to try and create the type of family life now that she has always wanted and never had.

As a result, the members of the Stewart family have thus far lived a non-traditional, neglected life. The parents do not act as parents, therefore leaving the children to raise themselves. Consequently, the children have just scraped by in providing for themselves and in doing so have pretty much sentenced themselves to living the same quality of life as they grow older. Since they have little education they will have little job opportunities and little opportunity to find a better situation for themselves in the world. Therefore, Sharon and Mark Stewart have passed on their poor quality of life to their undeserving children, who were never given a chance to have better than their parents.

While one may blame Sharon and Mark for the situation passed on to their children, sociologically it would be logical

to also ask if Sharon and Mark were themselves products of similar familial or other social circumstances, and what this may tell us about social structural supports or constraints that make such familial and personal troubles public issues for many families across the nation and the world. This, however, should await another opportunity for further analysis.

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