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Perceptions of Alternative High School Teenage Mothers Regarding Their College Success

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MPhil, Walden University, 2020

MA, La Sierra University, 2011

BS, Mountain View College, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Women who have children during high school are at-risk for poor educational and economic outcomes. Literature lacks information regarding college readiness among pregnant and mothering teens (PMTs) who graduated from alternative education (AE) programs. Teen mothers who receive college preparation in high school may go on to earn degrees, improving their chances at more stable and secure financial futures. A basic qualitative approach and purposive sampling was used to locate 10 former PMTs who graduated from AE programs and college and shared their stories via one-on-one semistructured in-depth interviews regarding their experiences in AE programs and how they prepared them for college. Schlossberg's transition theory (TT) was used as the conceptual framework and provided the structural lens to interpret participants' life transitions into motherhood, AE programs, and eventually college. Participants' experiences involving AE programs and academic practices for college success were explored. Transcribed data underwent qualitative content analysis through a directed approach and via manual coding and thematic analysis, produced five emergent themes that aligned with the TT: parenting and childcare accommodations, academic practices for high school without college prep, increased levels of support in college, personal traits and habits, and self-navigation to locate college academic assistance and finances. Administrators and teachers in AE programs may benefit from results of this study by maximizing PMTs' potential for college success.

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Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation work to my loving and supportive parents, Freddie and
Bliss Castañeda, who watched me go through the ups and downs of life cheering me on
and praying for my success. You both believed I could reach my highest potential in spite
of life's obstacles. Those obstacles were simply opportunities to jump high and to
strengthen me. With every leap and bound, you were there. This work is for you.

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Thank you, Texico Conference officers, for supporting me financially as I embarked on this journey. Your assistance was tangible evidence that you believed in me. Along this line, I thank cousins Rodney and Gaye for helping me through this program. I am so thankful for your generous hearts.

To my children, Danny, Dyanna, and Chanai, thank you for being good kids. Danny and Dyanna, your hard work and academic successes inspired me to move forward with mine. Chanai, thank you for the times mommy had to research instead of play. You were always very patient.

To my husband, Tony Daggs, thank you for understanding all the late nights and weekends this study took from our quality time together. I have a lifetime of making up to do. I love you.

Finally, thank you to all the teen moms that strive so hard to balance adolescence, academics, and parenting. You go, girls!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Women in their teen years face a variety of challenges as they transition from adolescence into adulthood. Those challenges intensify when they become pregnant and mothering teens (PMTs; Humberstone, 2018). Although motherhood at any age is a life event that presents new and difficult challenges, teen mothers have burdens that include completing high school (Almanza & Sahn, 2018), earning college degrees (Modesto, 2018), fighting social stigma (Chase, 2017), experiencing financially insecurities (Gbogbo, 2020), and losing the support of family and friends (Moseson et al., 2019).

Most teen pregnancies are unintended (Modesto, 2018), which can derail life plans and threaten employment status, social relationships, mental health, finances, and education (Dibaba Wado et al., 2019; Dowden et al., 2018; Kalucza et al., 2021). Teen mothers often find pregnancy and motherhood overwhelming because PMTs lack resources to care for themselves and their babies (Copeland, 2017; Nkwemu et al., 2019). Unintended pregnancies have also caused severe emotional stress, harming the health of both mothers and babies (Moseson et al., 2019).

The welfare and education of adolescent mothers is a global concern. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020), over 12 million girls between the ages of 15 and 19 deliver babies annually. In America, teen mothers commonly are young ladies who come from unstable and economically insecure families who after delivery tend to continue living lives of poverty well into their adult years (Smith et al., 2018). Pregnancy and the new responsibilities of motherhood have led some teen mothers to find purpose and direction in terms of completing high school and college (Cox et al.,

2021; Sheeran et al., 2018).

 The focus of this study was high school experiences that contributed to college successes of former teen mothers. I specifically examined PMTs who graduated from alternative education (AE) programs and college. AE programs are any nontraditional high school program that prevents dropout among at-risk kids (Espinoza et al., 2019; McGee & Lin, 2020; Modesto et al., 2020). In this study, this included nontraditional high school settings where students earned high school credits in modified programs. This included independent study on or off campus, online, in-person, and hybrid curricula, modified class schedules, and school days. I explored PMT experiences involving AE programs to identify what they perceived worked best that contributed to their college success.

 This study provides information about PMTs in AE programs who desire postsecondary education but may be experiencing difficulties in terms of transitioning from AE programs to high school graduation. It also contributes to literature involving teen mothers and their education, as well as participants' journeys involving college success. Potential social implications involve informing AE administrators and teachers about best ways to educate and prepare PMTs for higher education.

 Chapter 1 begins with background information about the topic. I highlight challenges PMTs face when completing high school, the role of social and family support, changes in terms of educational opportunities through time, and advantages and disadvantages of AE programs. In Chapter 1, the problem is described with supporting literature ensuring that this problem is relevant and significant to the discipline.

I then continue with the purpose of the study, followed by research questions. I then address the theoretical framework, Schlossberg's TT. Theory concepts are explained, as well as relevance to the study. I then present the nature of the study, key concepts, assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations. I then present the significance of the study and a summary.

Background

I identified and described common challenges PMT face, their transitions into motherhood, and issues with educational attainment. Selected empirical studies were reviewed to explain the impact teen mothering had on completing high school and college. I also provided broad descriptions of the functions, strengths, and weaknesses of high school AE programs.

Teen pregnancy and parenting is a complicated social problem. PMTs who drop out of high school may already possess preexisting demographic factors that make them susceptible to dropout even prior to pregnancy (Dibaba-Wado et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2018). Chase (2017) said the struggle to stay in school is not always related to academics or schoolwork but rather maltreatment and stigma towards PMTs.

In traditional high schools, low-quality academics were offered to PMTs, and they were punished for missing classes due to pregnancy-related issues (Costello, 2018; Gbogbo, 2020). Furthermore, they were often treated like nonparenting students in situations that were disadvantageous to PMTs. Because of stigmatized treatment in traditional schools, some PMTs chose to attend AE programs for high school (Brouwer et al., 2018).

AE programs are the best educational option for PMTs because they are environments where PMTs feel accepted and are academically successful (Modesto, 2018; Modesto et al., 2020; Vincent, 2016). Watson et al. (2017) said PMTs who graduate from AE programs and desire to attend college felt they lacked academic preparation needed to face postsecondary schooling.

Little is known about contributions AE programs make in terms of preparing PMTs for college. I attempted to fill a gap involving knowledge of AE programs and contributions to college success. I focused specifically on AE experiences of PMTs who successfully graduated from college. Improving educational outcomes in college for PMTs who graduate from AE programs was the concern of this study. Moreover, I addressed college attainment among PMTs.

Problem Statement

Educational outcomes for young women who give birth during high school are poor (Chase, 2017). Pregnant and mothering teens are at risk for dropping out of high school (Bravo et al., 2017). Not only is teenage pregnancy the primary cause for high school females who drop out, but of those who do return to high school, only 50% graduate (Brouwer et al., 2018; Watson et al., 2017; Weiss & Harris, 2018). According to Chase (2017), among teen mothers who graduate high school, many of them experience attendance interruptions and fall behind, delaying their graduation.

More so than high school graduation, college completion among teen mothers is low and needs attention. Maslowsky et al. (2021a) said by the age of 30, four teen mothers out of a total of 300 had earned a college degree. Almanza and Sahn (2018) said

pregnancy-related dropout often led to lack of any further academic attainment in high school or beyond. Failing to graduate college can result in low incomes and wages over a lifetime (Karageorge, 2019).

Educational attainment and household income are adversely affected by teen pregnancy. Gigante et al. (2018) compared teen mothers to non-teen mothers and found that mothers between the ages of 11 and 15 had an average of 4.4 years less education, and mothers between 16 and 19 had an average of 2.8 years less education, which later in life led to significantly lower incomes compared to non-teen mothers. Reasons involve pre-pregnancy demographics, educational expectations, and postpregnancy childcare (Maslowsky et al., 2021b). Many teen mothers have recognized this disparity and worked hard to stay in high school and college despite facing stigma and parenting responsibilities (Calver, 2020).

To balance motherhood and academics, some teen mothers enroll into AE high schools. In alternative settings, teen mothers often have access to on-campus daycare, infant and childcare training, flexible attendance policies, high school credit recovery or advancement, and emotional support (Brouwer et al., 2018). Modesto et al. (2020) said PMTs felt hopeful and confident as they completed high school. McGee and Lin (2020) said AE programs were effective for dropout prevention.

The impact of AE programs on college preparation among PMTs is unclear. Watson et al. (2017) said while PMTs had earned high school credit in AE programs, they were unprepared for college. Only 2-3% of teenage mothers graduate college (Breier, 2017; Navarro-Cruz et al., 2020). Therefore, the problem that prompted this

research was that PMTs are attending AE programs and graduating from high school, but few PMTs graduate from college.

The literature lacks information regarding college readiness among PMTs who graduated from AE programs. There is little discussion about what takes place in AE programs to prepare PMTs for college. Instead, research involves mainly high school completion and various life challenges that PMTs often experience in high school. Furthermore, studies regarding AE have focused on outcomes of the program itself, such as high school completion, improved relationships, and confidence to raise children but not college preparations.

The primary focus of this study was to fill a gap in the literature by exploring experiences former teen mothers had when they were in AE programs and how they contributed to their college success. Specifically, I describe AE programs and how they prepared them for college. This may be useful in terms of improving college success for teen mothers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and describe perceptions of college graduates who were once teen mothers enrolled in AE programs regarding their experiences in these programs and how they may have contributed to their college success. By speaking with mothers who experienced teen parenting in AE programs and college success, I aimed to capture specific aspects of AE participants experienced and perceived as contributing to their college completion. Overall, the objective was to identify what happened in AE programs that helped PMTs attain college diplomas.

I chose to use a basic qualitative design for this study because data were experiences lived by participants. Patton (2015) said qualitative studies that do not involve exploring phenomena, case studies, ethnographical inquiries, grounded theories, or narratives can be considered generic studies and used to evaluate programs or gather human perspectives. Percy et al. (2015) said a basic qualitative design involves actual experiences of people and facts involved in their experiences, and not how people similarly experienced an event or phenomenon. Additionally, Percy et al. recommended using a basic design if data did not fit one specific traditional approach.

Research Questions

This study had one overarching question:

RQ: What academic practices in AE programs do mothers who gave birth in their teens and successfully completed college identify as important in terms of transitioning into college and experiencing college success?

I also used the following subquestions:

SQ1: How did mothers who gave birth in their teens and successfully completed college describe their experiences involving AE programs?

SQ2: How did those experiences contribute to their college success?

Conceptual Framework

Schlossberg's transition theory (TT) guided the organization, analysis, and interpretation of this study. I investigated how PMTs transitioned successfully from AE high school to college. The TT was used to explain how people face life events involving coping processes and adaptation. There are three sets of factors that influence one's

ability to adapt into a transition: characteristics of the transition, characteristics of pre-
and posttransition environments, and characteristics of the individual (Schlossberg,
1981). These factors determine and explain one's ability or failure to adapt.

Schlossberg et al. (1995) said the process of coping through life transitions is
constant and is contingent on four categories (Schlossberg's 4S's) and individual
resources. This chapter contains a concise description of the 4S's and transition model. A
more detailed analysis is provided in Chapter 2.

Schlossberg's 4S's

The 4S's are categories which influence people's abilities to cope with life
transitions: situation, self, social supports, and strategies (Schlossberg, 2008). They
guided data collection of this study and were used to frame interview questions to ensure
that questions focused on transitions. In general, these categories are present in all life
transitions, and people who have more resources transition more smoothly compared to
those who have less resources (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Situation involves considering
external factors that triggered an event, duration of transitions, and role changes. With the
self, people identify their own personal traits, experiences, demographics, and how much
control they have over transitions. Social supports involve identifying those who are
capable of providing assistance and support. With strategies, people consider ways to
modify their roles and manage transitions.

Data collection led participants to describe details of their situations as they
transitioned into AE programs and college as PMTs, their experiences, personal traits,
demographics, and levels of control they had during transitions into motherhood, their

social supports, including teachers, family, and programs that provided assistance and guidance, and strategies they used to manage transitions as they balanced motherhood and education. Identifying their resources and deficits in each category provided information about how they coped and successfully adapted to motherhood and higher education.

Schlossberg's TT

Individuals respond differently to similar transitions, but experience similar patterns of coping (Schlossberg et al., 1995). These patterns are illustrated in Schlossberg's TT, which has informed and guided counselors in terms of what they can expect to see and hear from people in transitions. The three-step transition model was used in this study to interpret and discuss the findings. Schlossberg identifies the three progressive steps as: approaching the transition, taking stock of coping resources, and taking charge of the new situation (Anderson et al., 2012; Goodman et al., 2006).

TT and this Study

Schlossberg's TT was used for the data collection phase of this study and guided interpretation of findings. It served as the lens to explore AE programs and college success among PMTs. Additionally, the 4S's and TT were used to form connections between new data. Moreover, using Schlossberg's theory allowed for creating recommendations to administrators of alternative high schools that enroll PMTs.

Nature of the Study

I applied a basic qualitative approach that resulted in an interpretive description of findings. I explored participants' perceptions of their high school experiences in AE

programs and how they related to their college success. The basic generic approach was most appropriate for this study because I focused on identifying actual and real-world experiences of PMTs and not the essence of their experiences. I sought to explore what academic practices worked for PMTs as they completed high school and college. This approach is suitable when the focus is on outward and real experiences of participants and not inward and subjective experiences (Percy et al., 2015).

Semistructured and in-depth interview data were collected from former teen mothers who graduated from AE high schools and completed college. Participants had delivered a child during their adolescent years, graduated from an AE high school, and graduated from college. Every participant was over the age of 18. Data were hand-coded and underwent qualitative content analysis. Emerging patterns and themes were interpreted using a pragmatic interpretation to address practical knowledge that could be learned from this study.

Definitions

The following terms are working definitions that were used in this study.

Academic practices: Any curricular activity with or without teacher assistance that results in earning high school credits towards graduation.

Alternative education (AE): Educational activities that fall outside the traditional K-12 setting which serve students who are at risk for school failure (Porowski et al., 2014). For this study, I looked at high school secondary level programs that were either held on a traditional high school campus, online, or in-person.

At-risk students: High school students who face severely difficult life circumstances, resulting in a high probability of dropping out of school (Great Schools Partnership, 2013).

College success: The completion of an associate or bachelor's degree in college (Hinojosa et al., 2019). This includes graduation from community colleges or universities via online, in-person, or hybrid models. This also includes earning graduate degrees such as master's or doctorates.

Pregnant and Mothering Teens (PMTs): Women between the ages of 13 and 18 who were pregnant and had given birth and cared for their child (Gbogbo, 2020).

Social support: A network of family, friends, teachers, and organizations who provide assistance with finances, lodging, childcare, and transportation, as well as people, groups, or organizations who provide emotional support (Schrag & Schmidt-Tieszen, 2014).

Assumptions

I assumed that participants provided their honest perceptions and most accurate recollections of their experiences in AE programs and effectively communicated them, so that I captured accurate information about their experiences. Further, I assumed that descriptions and findings of this investigation came from participants who provided accurate data because they would not personally benefit from falsifying their experiences. Moreover, they participated in the study to share their experiences and not to promote the AE program in which they had been enrolled. Furthermore, some participants were older than others; and, therefore, there was a larger gap between high school graduation and

interviews. However, I assumed they were able to recall enough of their experiences in AE programs and contribute fully to this study.

Another assumption was that education received by participants in AE programs was from qualified, and state-accredited schools. AE programs operate to help at-risk students graduate from high school. Therefore, if helping at-risk students complete high school is the goal of AE programs, then it is reasonable to assume that teachers who worked at participants' programs had been trained to educate at-risk youth.

One final assumption I had for this study was that participants completed all high school and college requirements themselves. Academic dishonesty is a possibility in any academic setting; however, given the experiences and academic successes of participants, I assumed they had qualities and skills to complete coursework themselves. Colleges screen for dishonesty, and if participants were able to complete their higher education, I assumed their colleges deemed their coursework genuine and honest.

Scope and Delimitations

This study was an investigation of AE programs as experienced by mothers who gave birth when they were teenagers between the ages of 13-18 and graduated from college. Experiences of participants included, but were not limited to curricular, extracurricular, and supportive programs in an AE high school and college. The investigation also included life events participants experienced between high school and college. I did not investigate participants' GPAs or academic performance prior to pregnancy. I did not focus on any gaps of time between high school graduation and

college enrollment. I also did not explore experiences involving pregnancies or motherhood outside of education.

This study is transferable to other settings and respondents due to thick, rich details given during the participant selection process, data collection and analysis, and findings and discussion. Purposeful sampling was used to allow replication of this study in other settings. By describing in detail participants, settings, data collection, and data analysis procedures, other researchers interested in this topic will be able to replicate this study and contribute further to this topic.

Limitations, Challenges, and Barriers

Demographics and socioeconomic status of participants placed limitations on this study. Such factors are known to influence academic attainment among PMTs (Marteleto & Villanueva, 2018); however, these factors were not the focus of this study. I concentrated on high school experiences participants had in AE programs and how their experiences contributed to their college successes. Generalization of findings may not be possible for all populations of teen mothers since demographics vary and the rigor of one AE program may differ from others.

Access to participants was the greatest challenge of this study. Locating a sample of 10 qualified participants among a scant population was uncertain as the recruitment process began. To address this challenge, I used social media to locate participants who could provide information-rich data for the study. A sample size of 10 was obtained and due to use of social media.

Another challenge in this study was potential bias as the researcher. As a teen mother who earned a college degree by the age of 29 and went on to earn a master's degree 4 years later, my own life experience could have led to bias when interpreting the data. To address this potential bias, I created an audit trail to record my personal feelings about responses I received from participants and allowed data and findings to guide analyses and interpretations for this study. The audit trail contains information about pattern recognition, coding, thematic analysis, discussions, and conclusions.

Significance

Immediate and positive outcomes of AE programs for PMTs are unclear. It is important to study and understand what helps PMTs in AE programs best prepare for college. The primary focus of this study was to fill the gap in the literature by exploring experiences former teen mothers had when they were in AE programs and how they contributed to their college success.

Findings of this study contribute to information about teen mothers in AE programs and their pursuits of college degrees. I identified specific practices in AE programs that participants perceived helped prepare them for college. Participants' perspectives were used to address strengths and weaknesses of AE programs, which inform administrators of the best ways to prepare young mothers for college.

Participants helped identify AE and college completion issues for those who are at risk for not attending college. In addition, parents and family members of PMTs also benefit from this study via the roles that home life plays in terms of academic attainment of PMTs.

Summary

Experiences of PMTs who graduated from AE programs and their pursuit of a college education are understudied. While the special services AE programs provide for PMTs are well-described and identified across educational systems, how those services contribute to college preparation is unclear. Investigating perceptions of former teen mothers who attended AE programs and graduated from college is one way to evaluate college readiness for women who are balancing student and parent roles. Voices and perspectives given by participants in this study will inform AE administrators and policymakers about the most effective ways of preparing young mothers for college success. This study involves best practices AE programs provide PMTs which increases the chances young mothers have at earning college degrees.

Chapter 2 includes Schlossberg's TT and how it guided this study. The literature review section includes syntheses of studies involving services, advantages, and disadvantages of AE programs, personal and scholastic challenges PMTs experience, and general college environments. College experiences of PMTs as reported in the literature were also compared to other populations to identify which challenges in college are specific to PMTs and which are not. Chapter 2 includes information about AE programs for PMTs as well as their experiences with college enrollment, attainment, and success.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Lack of college attainment among PMTs is a social problem that affects the long-term livelihoods of PMTs and their children. To alleviate this problem, AE programs operate to prevent PMT high school dropout and prepare them for college. However, there is a lack of information about experiences of AE graduates and their postsecondary roles. It is unclear if PMTs who graduated from AE programs found the programs helpful in terms of earning college diplomas.

Educational consequences among PMTs include elevated high school dropout rates (Marteleto & Villanueva, 2018) and low college attendance rates (Berthelon et al., 2017; Maslowsky et al., 2021a). Completing high school is one of the most difficult challenges PMTs face, and challenges become even more daunting during college (Bravo et al., 2017; Mohr et al., 2019). According to Chase (2017), of the different reasons young ladies drop out of high school, motherhood is primary. Chase also reported that approximately 50% of teen mothers complete high school, and among those who proceed to college, about 2% of them earn a college degree by the time they are 30 years old.

AE programs are a nontraditional type of education intended to prevent high school dropout and assist at-risk students like PMTs complete high school (McGee & Lin, 2020; Modesto, 2018). The programs offer academic credit recovery as well as special services, like early childhood education, parent and life education, and mommy support groups (Brouwer et al., 2018). For some students who were delinquent in high school, AE programs helped them recover credit to get back on track or accelerate beyond their grade level (Maillet, 2017).

AE programs can help delinquent students get back on track for high school reentrance and postsecondary schooling (McGee & Lin, 2020). Henderson et al. (2018) said graduates of AE programs had positive perceptions about the program and believed it to be the best option for them in terms of improving their chances of graduating high school. Studies regarding AE programs have reported both positive and negative impacts programs have had on at-risk high school students, but few studies have specifically explored the experiences of PMTs and the role AE programs have had on their abilities to attend college.

College may mitigate the disadvantages of adolescent motherhood (Carter, 2018). College completion may offer economic advantages for PMTs and their children financially, and may also motivate PMTs to ensure their children also earn college degrees (Callender, 2018). However, in Maslowsky et al.'s study (2021a), only four teen mothers earned college degrees by the time they were 30 years old. If PMTs graduate from college, they may be able to earn more income over their lifetimes compared to if they only graduated from high school (Hinojosa et al., 2019; Karageorge, 2019).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore perceptions of college graduates who were former teen mothers who attended AE high schools. Data involved educational experiences to prepare PMTs for college. Chapter 2 includes a brief explanation of how literature was found for this study as well as databases and keywords used in the search process. Next, Schlossberg's TT is presented and described, and its relevance to the present study is explained. This chapter includes a review of literature involving AE programs, PMTs, and college. I concentrated on what is known, what is

unknown, and what may be controversial about AE programs and their roles in terms of educating PMTs. This chapter ends with a summary of major themes in the literature.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review consists of peer-reviewed empirical studies and dissertations. Databases used were Academic Search Complete, Education Source, ERIC, Google Scholar, Medline with Full Text, ProQuest, and APA PsycINFO. Keywords were *academic achievement*, *adolescent maternity*, *adolescent mothers*, *adolescent pregnancy*, *alternative education*, *adolescent pregnancy* and *alternative education*, *at-risk students*, *college attainment*, *college success, college success* and *teen mothers, coping strategies*, *early childbearing*, *education of mothers*, *maternal education*, *older teen mothers*, *parenting teens*, *post-secondary education*, *pregnant students*, *schoolgirl mothers*, *second chance schools*, *secondary education*, *teen mothers*, *teen parenting, teen pregnancy*, *teenage childbearing*, and *young mothers*.

Keywords produced a wide variety of literature about PMTs, mainly causes and effects of teen childbearing and parenting, and few were relevant to AE or college success. To locate studies specific to PMTs and AE programs, a combination of terms was used in the search between 2016 and 2021 as indicated in the list of terms. Finding literature led to other studies by way of citation-chaining via Google Scholar.

As a result of this search, 83 studies involving experiences and education of teen mothers, college success and attainment among teen mothers and traditional students, and Schlossberg's TT were used in this review. I did not address teen mothers' mental health, prevention of repeat teen pregnancies, and AE programs outside of the high school level.

Conceptual Framework

Frameworks help guide the research process, design, and analysis (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). I used Schlossberg's TT as the framework for this study for collecting and analyzing data and interpreting findings. The TT involves how and why people respond as they do to life events (Schlossberg et al., 1995). There are three sets of factors that influence one's ability to adapt into a transition: characteristics of the transition, pre- and posttransition environments, and the individual (Schlossberg, 1981).

Characteristics of a Transition

The characteristics of a transition influence how people initially perceive a new life change. Transitions have positive or negative impacts, sudden or gradual onsets, and temporary or permanent durations (Schlossberg, 1981). Additionally, Schlossberg explained that life changes are either anticipated, unanticipated, or nonevents. Most teen pregnancies are unanticipated, according to Mosher et al. (as cited in Modesto, 2018) who reported that 77% of teen pregnancies in the US involved teenagers who did not plan on having babies. In this study, the characteristics of the transitions experienced by participants were identified during data collection and are discussed in Chapter 5.

Characteristics of Pre- and Posttransition Environments

Pre- and post-transition environments include physical settings and support systems (Schlossberg, 1981). Differences in terms of one's physical settings and support systems from pre- to post-transition influence the ability to adapt to new situations. Furthermore, adaptation is more likely for those who have support systems in place

before transitions occur and then sustain that support system after the transition occurred (Schlossberg, 1981).

In the context of teen pregnancy and motherhood, environments pre- and post-transition have been highly discussed in the literature. Several studies have indicated that supportive teachers and family members during a teen's pregnancy and parenting have contributed to high school graduation (Assini et al., 2018; Hernandez & Abu Rabia, 2017; Jumba & Githinji, 2018; Vaithianathan et al., 2021). For this study, the characteristics of pre-and post-transition environments were explored during data collection and interpreted in the interpretation of findings.

Characteristics of Individuals

The characteristics of the individual include psychosocial competence, sex, age, state of health, race-ethnicity, socioeconomic status, value orientation, and previous experience with a transition of similar nature (Schlossberg, 1989). According to Schlossberg, a balance between resource-deficit in these characteristics highly impacts the ability to cope with the transition. Resource-deficit has been discussed in the research literature (Gigante et al., 2018) and were also investigated during data collection.

The characteristics of the participants in this study were explored through resource-deficit according to Schlossberg's (1989) 4S's: situation, self, supports, and strategies. In each "S," self-inventories were conducted to determine resource-deficit. The 4S's were integrated into the interview questions to determine the accuracy of this postulate and how the 4S's were manifested in the participants.

TT in Similar Studies

TT has been used in studies involving different life events, i.e., marriage and divorce, gain or loss of employment, educational pursuits, military discharge, and widowerhood (Benner, 2011; Bonanni, 2015; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Howell, 2013; Patton & Davis, 2014; Ryan et al., 2011). Among the studies that have used TT, those that pertained to transitions into motherhood or in college were chosen for this discussion because the concern of this study is adolescent women who transitioned into parenting and into college. The researchers also explained how TT has been used in different ways to create research tools, support research findings, analyze data, and form recommendations.

TT has been implemented in creating tools for data analysis and for creating recommendations. For example, Moffett's (2018) qualitative inquiry based in the UK of 11 first-time mothers who transitioned back into the workplace after maternity leave implemented Schlossberg's 4S's to create a tool to interpret the data collected. The self-created tool presented four overarching situations that new moms transitioning back to work experienced. For each situation, the researcher defined the remaining 4S factors. The researcher linked each emergent theme to one of the 4S's. As a result of the 4S tool analysis, it was found that most mothers identified with possessing strategies that affected and modified the outcomes of their situations. Another example where TT has been used to create research tools is in Wall et al. (2018) who created a model called, EN to RN Transition Model. This model identified educational interventions that enabled successful

transitions of students in a pre-registered nursing program into a registered nursing program

The proponents of TT have been used in previous studies as recommendations for people experiencing transition. For example, Herridge (2017) applied TT to make recommendations to help first-year college students with disabilities transition out of high school and into college. The review yielded a list of obstacles that students with disabilities faced as they transitioned into college. The obstacles were analyzed and aligned with the 4S's and as a result, Herridge created four recommendations directed at high schools and colleges to assist students with disabilities transition into college. His findings indicated that among the 4S's, *self* was the strongest component in making the smoothest transition, and when the students understood the impacts their disability had on their academics, and if they self-advocated, disclosing their disabilities to the college, they were given much-needed accommodations, improving their college transition.

It is evident that TT has been found helpful and contributory to studies involving life events of motherhood and higher education. However, in the discussion of teen parenting, few studies have applied TT. Gbogbo (2020) is one of the few who have implemented the proponents of TT. This qualitative study of teen mothers in Ghana used TT to describe the participants' coping as they are transitioning into motherhood. The study was limited to the participants' high school experiences and did not explore college experiences. Another study that used TT for teen mothers, and the most relevant study that pertains to mothering teens, their college experiences, and TT, was found in

Thompson-Webb's dissertation (2015). Apart from Thompson-Webb, few studies have used TT for adolescent mothers and their college experiences.

The lack of TT involving mothering teens and college is understandable and may be contributed to what Navarro-Cruz et al. (2020) reported regarding a low population of adolescent mothers who go on to attend college. Although TT is scantly used in this population, it has been widely used in studies pertaining to educational transitions from high school and into college among other types of populations (Jones & Dean, 2020; Scribner et al., 2020; Sewell & Goings, 2020).

Rationale for Choosing the TT

TT was an appropriate framework for this study because it explains human adaptation to transition. Pregnant and mothering teens in this study experienced adult life transitions early in life and at a rapid rate: from entering adolescence to entering the stages of pregnancy, and then from entering AE – a non-traditional type of educational setting, into parenthood, and then finally from parenting their children into different developmental phases while they entered and completed college. Planning and designing this study under TT provided a framework to understand these multiple successions of transitory phases. The postulates, 4S's, and transition model provided direction in creating interview questions for gathering data that addressed the topic in light of transition. TT's framework also guided the interpretation of the findings so that the data made sense and applicable recommendations for social change could be made.

Moreover, I selected TT because it has been used in previous studies of teen mothers' transitions into motherhood (Gbogbo, 2020) and of student transitions into

college (Herridge, 2017; Scribner et al., 2020; Sewell & Goings, 2020). I also considered its postulates of life transitions. It will connect the findings of this study to existing knowledge.

TT related to the present study by explaining the life transitions PMT have had and how they managed and coped. The research questions in this study were built upon TT. The participants revealed their 4S's for coping through two major life events: teen motherhood in AE and teen motherhood in higher education.

AE and College Success in the Literature

The purpose of this literature review was to present studies that were relevant to AE and college success. The studies contain reports of what teen mothers experienced during their educational pursuits. I present these studies in three major sections. First, I described challenges that PMT often face in their educational pursuits. Second, I described AE as a response PMT make to complete high school. Last, I discussed the factors that contribute to college success and include reports from PMT and non-PMT student groups because, according to Navarro-Cruz et al. (2020), college success is rare for PMT and few studies exist, limiting the discussion on college success. Therefore, it was important to this study to add discussions regarding college success among other student groups to give the bigger picture of what college success is and the challenges entailed.

Challenges PMTs Face in Education

Pregnant and mothering teens often face challenges in academics, mental health, and relationships as they attend school, but some of these challenges existed pre-

pregnancy (Kalucza et al., 2021). Parenting responsibilities, academic performance, stigma, and stress were frequently discussed in the research literature regarding PMT and their education.

Parenting Responsibilities

Balancing schoolwork and parenting responsibilities can be difficult for PMT. To discover the impact parenting responsibilities have had on educational attainment, researchers like Modesto et al. (2020) interviewed PMT high school graduates and found that practicing daily home and school routines kept them in school and motivated. Brouwer et al. (2018) found that the burdens of parenting were alleviated at schools that provided parenting classes. Both studies were conducted in AE settings where support of PMT were integrated into the curriculum. Traditional high school settings may not be equipped to provide parenting support.

Qualitative researchers have explored PMT experiences in traditional high schools and have reported a lack of support for PMT. For some PMT, mainstream schools denied their enrollment and suggested they attend alternative settings (Howell & Lynch, 2020). In Tanzania, PMTs are banned from enrolling into regular public schools (Fute & Wan, 2021). Vincent (2016) said PMTs who were enrolled in traditional schools left and enrolled into AE programs because the participants felt traditional schools did not accommodate their needs, but AE programs did. Additionally, teen mothers who attended traditional high schools reported attendance issues and low grades due to their lack of babysitting and frequent pediatric doctor's visits (Chase, 2018). Absences due to pediatric visits and other child-related absences were generally not excused (Navarro-

Cruz et al., 2020). However, when childcare was not a concern, teen mothers who were academically proficient were able to attend school regularly, complete high school credit, and graduate (Lin et al., 2019).

Academic Performance

Poor academic performance has been considered a contributing factor to teen pregnancy (Smith et al., 2018). Pre-pregnancy, teen mothers were found to have low performing academic skills and low scores on standardized testing (Almanza & Sahn, 2018). Teen mothers who have pre-existing scholastic deficiencies may be at greater risk of dropping out of high school. However, Sheeran et al. (2018) suggested that teen pregnancy can also serve as a motivating, driving force to do better in life as seen in disadvantaged teen mothers who found direction and purpose in life after becoming pregnant.

Studies have reported conflicting high and low educational aspirations for PMT. Modesto (2018) reported that PMT in AE had higher educational aspirations and engaged more in goal setting compared to PMT who were non-AE students. However, Bravo et al. (2017) claimed that educational aspirations among PMT depended on their pre-pregnancy academic performances and on-track statuses, so that if prior to pregnancy, PMT were on track in school, attended regularly, and earned good grades, they were able to complete high school with few academic concerns. Schoolwork rigor may not have been the issue for some PMT but rather parenting duties, physical limitations due to pregnancy, and emotional strain as described by Navarro-Cruz et al.'s (2020) PMT participants who successfully graduated from college.

Stigma and Stress

Stigma has been reported as the leading cause that forced PMT out of traditional school settings (Dowden et al., 2018; Nkwemu et al., 2019). Many have hesitated to return to high school or proceed to college because of the negative feelings that their families (Gbogbo, 2020), classmates, and teachers (Bermea et al., 2018) had towards their pregnancy. In Zuilkowsky et al.'s study (2019), 44% of 300 PMT left high school because they were teased by classmates. The stigma that some PMT have felt, from both teachers and peers, has often times hindered their abilities to perform well academically or even return to school (Nkwemu et al., 2019; Stringer, 2018).

On the other hand, stigma can act as a driving force for some PMT. Among the indigenous people of New Zealand, childbearing is seen as an honor, even if the mother is in her adolescent years. According to Pio and Graham (2018), the Maori support teen mothers because of their belief that mothers bear and nurture children. However, among the teen mothers in the study, who pursued higher education, they claimed that while teen mothers are supported in their culture, there still exists a stigma that teen mothers will not go on to complete their education. These girls wanted to be different and instead, used stigma as a driving force to strive hard academically and complete college. This resonates with Watson et al.'s study (2017) which also reported that PMT did not want to become part of the statistics involving teen pregnancy and dropout. In this study, six PMT were interviewed and each one claimed that the motivation to graduate high school came from wanting to provide a better future for their children and also wanting to prevent being associated as part of the statistics of teen mothers who drop out.

Maltreatment and social stigma have also been reported by some PMT who attended traditional high school settings (Dowden et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2019; Nkwemu et al., 2019). Teen moms reported that their situation of pregnancy or motherhood was often viewed by teachers as contagious and a negative influence on other students (Nkwemu et al., 2019). Teachers have also doubted the abilities of teen mothers to finish high school (Zuilkowsky et al., 2019). When teachers have felt that teen mothers were unable to perform basic coursework, the teachers offered low-level academics instead of college preparation material (Russell, 2016; Vincent, 2016). For some teen mothers, feeling unaccepted by their teachers has led to dropping out of high school (Nkwemu et al., 2019).

Psychological stress and stigma can negatively impact the chances young mothers have at being successful in high school (Dowden et al., 2018). Stigma is present across cultures (Nkwemu et al., 2019; Tirgari et al., 2020; Zuilkowsky et al., 2019). Older teen mothers have stigmatized younger PMT and labeled them as irresponsible and troubled girls (Jones et al., 2019). When PMT are treated like outcasts by fellow students and teachers, they have had a difficult time accepting and meeting the demands of their new roles as mothers (Dowden et al., 2018). Instead of accepting motherhood, they have been regretful and ashamed (Copeland, 2017).

Although young mothers have been capable of academic success, stigmatized treatment has made transitioning into motherhood difficult (Kalucza et al., 2021). The feeling of regret and other emotional issues have contributed to their inability to graduate from high school (Chase, 2019; Copeland, 2017).

Special Needs of PMTs

Feeling supported at home and at school helps PMTs cope with unintended pregnancies (Moseson et al., 2019). Social supports also improve PMTs' high school and college completion (Bravo et al., 2017; Sheeran et al., 2018). Given challenges faced by PMTs to complete high school, they appeared to perform best in school when they received help from their family members and school staff (Sheeran et al., 2018). During high school and college, PMTs who received financial and emotional support experienced school completion (Chase, 2017; Hernandez & Abu Rabia, 2017). Copeland (2017) said teen mothers who attended high school and received parental support felt less psychological stress, fewer feelings of regret, and less socio-economic difficulties which enabled them to focus on graduating high school.

Support Systems at Home and School

Homelife appears to affect the academic performances of PMT. Sheeran et al. (2018) discovered that over time, PMT were more successful in school when they experienced stability in their family relationships. The greatest support was found in positive and accepting relationships between PMT and their mothers or mother-figures (Bravo et al., 2017; Causadias et al., 2018). Additionally, teen mothers achieved higher educational attainments when their mothers provided financial assistance, transportation, housing, childcare, verbal encouragement, and motivation. Other studies have reported that support from both parents produced favorable educational outcomes (Copeland, 2017; Sheeran et al., 2018). Support from both parents is limited to PMT who have both mother and father.

The school environment has been noted as another place where PMT had found support (Jumba & Githinji, 2018). Since many disadvantaged PMT come from unstable homes and have had traumatic childhoods (Smith et al., 2018), school may be their only place to find support. Schools that provided childcare, social services, and mentoring to PMT had higher graduation rates than schools that did not provide support services (Vaithianathan et al., 2021). According to Chase (2019), if schools changed the way they viewed teen childbearing as a problem and instead viewed it as an educational response to provide assistance and support, then more PMT might complete high school instead of being shunned, expelled, or silenced.

Almanza and Sahn (2018) also recommended that schools be responsible for helping teen mothers become successful students and parents which requires more than academic support. Hernandez and Abu Rabia (2017) suggested that young mothers in college receive a holistic approach to their education that includes a focus on supportive topics such as health, values, faith, and family.

Importance of School Accommodations

Young mothers who parented in high school and graduated reported that the most important factors in their academic success were the supportive teachers and school staff (Hernandez & Abu Rabia, 2017). Chase's (2018) interview of three teen mothers reported that high school completion had been possible when schools accommodated and supported them. Among Gbogbo's (2020) twelve PMT participants, most felt that having teachers to talk to about personal problems and receiving academic guidance for credit recovery or advancement played the largest roles in finishing high school.

Accommodating PMT's parental responsibilities in a school environment helps improve their chances of completing high school (Brouwer et al., 2018). Teen mothers reported childcare as most helpful (Modesto, 2018; Vincent, 2016), especially since many teen mothers cannot afford childcare and has prevented them from attending school regularly (Hernandez & Abu Rabia, 2017). With today's technology and the recent boom in online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Adnan & Anwar, 2020), teen mothers may now have the option to complete high school online while caring for their children at home.

Depending on the trimester of pregnancy, PMT may experience frequent urination, nausea, vomiting, swelling of hands and feet, hunger, or back pains. As the pregnancy progresses, PMT may require more visits to the obstetrician. Traditional high schools that did not accommodate these needs were found to have caused PMT discomfort and inconvenience (Dowden et al., 2018). In Modesto's (2018) study, participants who were pregnant in high school reported that teachers would not excuse them to use the restroom in the middle of class nor excuse their absences if they were not feeling well enough to attend school. As a result, the lack of consideration to the girls' pregnancy conditions resulted in some of them dropping out of school or transferring out of the traditional school setting into alternative schools (Modesto, 2018).

AE

AE is a non-traditional method of educating high school-aged students who lack credits for an on-time graduation, and who are at-risk for dropping out of high school (McGee & Lin, 2020; Porowski et al., 2014). The at-risk students are those who have not

completed formal education, who are off-track from a timely graduation due to personal circumstances, or who require accelerated coursework to recover high school credit (Espinoza et al., 2019). Some AE programs are located on traditional high school campuses while others are off-site on their own campuses (Brouwer et al., 2018). Students may volunteer to enroll into an AE program if they are academically deficient, but sometimes students with behavioral issues are court-ordered to enroll (Modesto et al., 2020).

Many AE programs are designed to re-engage students who exhibit behavioral problems and cannot attend traditional settings (McGee & Lin, 2017, 2020) and for students of juvenile delinquency (Reimer & Pangrazio, 2020). Across the United States, students with emotional and behavioral disorders receive mental health services and academic recovery through AE programs (Kumm et al., 2020).

Many researchers in studies described, evaluated, and supported AE's short-term outcomes (Brouwer et al., 2018; McGee & Lin, 2020; Modesto et al., 2020; Reimer & Pangrazio, 2020); however, its influence on college readiness was rarely discussed. A nationwide investigation, under the U.S. Government Accountability Office conducted by Nowicki (2020) reported that graduation rates and student proficiency were low in AE high schools when compared to non-AE high schools. In addition, it was reported that AE did not support college preparations but rather focused on career readiness.

Advantages of AE

One of the main advantages of AE is its scholastic structure that accommodates students' needs. Students experienced smaller classes than those in the traditional setting,

one-on-one tutoring, and a modified curriculum that considers their learning disabilities (Kumm et al., 2020). McGee and Lin (2020) reported that their participants felt less overwhelmed in the alternative setting because of the flexible schedule which included shorter class periods and fewer classes per day when compared to traditional high schools. In a mixed group of parenting and non-parenting students across 18 alternative schools located in Chile, 66% of students believed that AE was the only way to make progress in their lives (Espinoza et al., 2019).

Another advantage of AE is the opportunity for credit recovery. McGee and Lin (2020) reported that students who fell behind in traditional schools were able to regain credit in AE and eventually transitioned back into mainstream classrooms. Formerly incarcerated students recovered high school credit through an AE program that operated from a van visiting their homes (Reimer & Pangrazio, 2020).

The last advantage may be the most meaningful to students with emotional and behavioral problems. Teachers of AE are trained to work with students who have mental health issues (Kumm et al., 2020). Maillet (2017) reported that when positive relationships were formed between students and teachers, there was an increase in student re-engagement. Graduates of AE have reported increased confidence and goal attainment after high school (Zolkoski et al., 2016).

Disadvantages of AE

Not all studies that evaluated AE high schools reported positive outcomes. According to Fish (2017), AE is a form of exclusion, separating students who are labeled by the general society as troubled kids or problem students because they attend AE due to

pregnancy, incarceration, or other life events that caused an off-track high school experience. Fedders (2018) reported that African Americans and students with disabilities are unnecessarily placed in AE, and Modesto et al. (2020) reported that some AE programs are known as "dumping grounds" (p. 1).

Another disadvantage of AE is indicated in Shafi's qualitative study (2019) that involved incarcerated students in an AE program located in a custodial facility. The participants were described by Shafi as disengaged youth who viewed AE as boring and irrelevant. Maillet (2017) warned that if an AE program's curriculum does not promote activity and is not creatively designed for student engagement, the at-risk students that attend may disengage further and drop out. Kumm et al. (2020) suggested that AE teachers be highly trained educators with regular professional development that will equip them with effective strategies for keeping AE students engaged because students who enroll come with different behavioral and emotional disorders.

Possibly the greatest disadvantage of AE is the ambiguous definition of the program and measurements of success across the United States (McGee & Lin, 2017). According to McGee and Lin (2017), there are no federal guidelines or definitions of AE, but instead, each state is given the flexibility of defining AE and how its success is measured. Kumm et al. (2020) elaborated on the inconsistent definitions of AE by explaining that the settings of each program and the type of students enrolled make it difficult to find one definition across the country.

AE for PMTs

Some AE programs specifically enroll PMT who have fallen behind in academic credit due to pregnancy conditions and childcare (Brouwer et al., 2018). When enrolled in an AE program, some PMT students were able to complete credits equivalent to two grades of schooling in one year (Espinoza et al., 2019). Some at-risk teens and PMT considered AE as a setting where they felt welcomed and accepted, and where they received a second chance to finish high school (Espinoza et al., 2019; Vincent, 2016).

Title IX mandated all federally supported schools to accept into their enrollment PMT when previously these young women were prevented from attending school (Guldi, 2016). This mandate protected PMT by inhibiting school administration from disenrolling the girls and instead, it allowed the girls to decide on their own if they desired to remain in school or leave. However, for some PMT, the traditional high school has been an uncomfortable setting due to stigma and negative treatment from teachers (Dowden et al., 2018; Nkwemu et al., 2019), which may ultimately result in drop out. For PMT who chose to continue their high school education, they often decided to attend alternative high schools where special services were available (Brouwer et al., 2018; Modesto, 2018; Rudoe, 2014; Vincent, 2016).

Students of AE have received more than academic skills and a generic high school curriculum but have also been provided with socioemotional support to help them cope with their personal life issues (McGee & Lin, 2017). Some AE programs also provide social services to help PMT with family and economic issues (Brouwer et al., 2018). Other AE programs have provided mentoring services which, in the long run, Lin

et al. (2019) reported high educational attainment among the PMT who received mentorships. These services may be essential for PMT since, according to Gbogbo (2020), mental health can be severely compromised in PMT due to the rapid transition they experience from teen to mother. Pre-pregnancy, many PMT have already experienced life trauma and suffer from behavioral and emotional instabilities (Fish, 2017; Kalucza et al., 2021).

The socioemotional component and provision of social services are some of the highlights of AE programs. Some AE programs offer classes like Forgiveness Education to help students who have anger issues (Freedman, 2018). Other classes help students build self-esteem, practice self-awareness, foster positive relationships, develop socioemotional competence, and other habits for healthy mental wellbeing (Brouwer et al., 2018). According to McGee and Lin (2020), the goal of AE programs has been to support students who cannot function productively in traditional high schools due to disciplinary issues, academic delinquency, unintended pregnancy, or other situations that prevent meeting traditional standards. McGee and Lin (2020) and Brouwer et al. (2018) suggested that AE programs ought to provide at-risk teens with a creative curriculum that helps with academics, behavior, and practical living.

While several studies reported disciplinary issues as being one of the factors that have led students to enroll into AE (Kumm et al., 2020; Maillet, 2017; McGee & Lin, 2020; Shafi, 2019), this study does not consider PMT as students with disciplinary issues, but rather students who needed special support related to premature parenting and childcare. AE for PMT aims to provide an atmosphere of acceptance and hope for the

future by providing socioemotional support, parenting skills, academic recovery, career and college preparation, and skills for self-sufficiency (Brouwer et al., 2018; Modesto, 2018).

Advantages of AE for PMTs

Brouwer et al.'s (2018) study reported positive feedback from eight former PMT who graduated from AE and felt that the program provided life skills and helped them build confidence. Other teen mom graduates have expressed that individual instruction, daycare, bus transportation, and at-home instruction postpartum were the advantages of attending AE (Modesto, 2018). The same results have been reported in Vincent's study (2016) where PMT in AE have expressed that teachers not only helped them academically but also provided them with life skills and guidance for life after high school (Vincent, 2016). Modesto et al.'s (2020) study of seven AE graduates, each pregnant or mothering during their enrollment, reported that the AE program in the study contributed to the students' diploma attainment.

Authors of additional studies of AE specific for PMT have also reported that PMT experienced a place of acceptance and belonging when enrolled in AE versus traditional high school (Brouwer et al., 2018; Rudoe, 2014). Attending school with other girls who were either mothers or pregnant, reduced the feelings of stigma and perceived gossip among PMT as noted in Modesto's 2018 study. AE as a safe place appears to contribute to PMT's high school success. Modesto (2018) reported that PMT who attended AE had better breastfeeding practices, better educational attainment, more diploma success, and post-secondary attendance. In addition to PMT, students who are non-parents, but possess

behavioral and/or emotional disorders, have found AE to be a place where they can receive education that caters to their specific needs (Kumm et al., 2020).

Disadvantages of AE for PMTs

Pregnant and mothering students in AE are often stereotyped as delinquent members of society or problem children (Chase, 2019; Henderson et al., 2018). Many PMT have felt unwanted by teachers and criticized by fellow classmates (Gbogbo, 2020). Though some studies claim that students feel welcomed in the AE setting (Brouwer et al., 2018; Rudoe, 2014), outside of the school setting, they may also feel stigmatized.

Further critiques of AE indicated that AE lack structure and academic rigor (Brouwer et al., 2018). The emphasis on therapeutic socioemotional literacy often times devalued education (Fish, 2017). Though Vincent's (2016) qualitative study of former AE students reported benefits and favorable outcomes, those same participants also reported having no access to higher learning after high school graduation. In addition, academics were not geared towards a post-secondary pathway and provided low-level qualifications for college. Brouwer et al.'s (2018) study reported that while the self-paced environment helped PMT recover high school credit, it did little to prepare them for college. Costello (2014) noted that there was little information on college enrollment and completion for PMT who graduated from AE.

College Success

Little research has been conducted regarding supportive pathways to college and college completion among teen mothers (Costello, 2014; Hernandez & Abu Rabia, 2017). Instead, studies have focused on the reasons why teen mothers fail to obtain college

degrees (Dowden et al., 2018). The few authors that have addressed PMT and college had reported that pre-pregnancy expectations of college attainment and PMT's family income determined college completion (Barr & Simons, 2012; McDermott et al., 2021).

Earning a college degree increases one's chances of obtaining better job security and higher pay when compared to jobs that only require high school diplomas (Hinojosa et al., 2019; Shea, 2019). Having a college degree could reduce the need for teen mothers to depend on government welfare assistance (Karageorge, 2019). Teen mothers have recognized that earning a college degree offers a better socioeconomic future (Gatbonton, 2021; Neill-Weston & Morgan, 2017; Rudoe, 2014), and there has been an increase in teen mothers obtaining college degrees by age 29 in the last 30 years (Pirog et al., 2018).

In addition to economic benefits, attending college has been a sign of responsible behavior. Despite teen pregnancy, PMT who attended college did so to prove that they can be responsible adults (Gatbonton, 2021). Several PMT considered college attendance the path to a better future (Navarro-Cruz et al., 2020). Having higher educational attainments have also improved PMT's parenting skills and decreased the chances of repeated teen parenting among their offspring (Hendrick & Maslowsky, 2019).

College success is a challenge for many types of students, not just PMT (Dawborn-Gundlach, 2018; Flanders, 2017; Hinojosa et al., 2019). Other populations that face life challenges, like those with learning disabilities and physical limitations, and even traditional-aged students struggle with completing college within the typical four-year time period (Knight et al., 2018; Shea, 2019; Zarifa et al., 2018). This section

contains the challenges that college students face and how those challenges may affect PMT.

Enrolling into College After High School

When teen mothers enroll into college, they may choose community colleges where according to Sublett (2019), the admission process is less selective than 4-year institutions. Community colleges enroll higher populations of students from low socioeconomic statuses, who are less ready for college work when compared to college-aged students who directly enroll into 4-year institutions (Lichtenberger & Dietrich, 2017). Conveniences like lower tuition, less selective admission processes, and online classes attract students to the community college setting. However, despite these conveniences, on-time completion could be compromised if students are underprepared for college or lack academic goals (Knight et al., 2018), which some PMT have felt from AE (Brouwer et al., 2018).

Times to College Completion

Time to college completion is a popular topic in post-secondary research, with an embedded assumption of the traditional 4-year timeline, but the roads to college completion involve different routes. College students have options for earning a college degree: community college with transfer to a 4-year institution, direct enrollment into a 4-year university, and online classes. The traditional route is generally considered as attending college after high school graduation.

Within certain college programs, courses are offered online, and students have the option of taking some or all classes via virtual learning. Teen mothers may favor online

college as a convenient route in balancing college studies and childcare; however, Sublett (2019) reported that online college courses can be more difficult to complete and have higher withdrawal and dropout rates than face-to-face education. On the other hand, Shea (2019) found that taking online classes part-time improved students' upward transfer, noting that the online environment had benefitted students most when taken in combination with face-to-face education, when student support was provided by the college, and when a high GPA was maintained.

Studies have reported that college completion has been exceeding the traditional four years. Zarifa et al. (2018) reported that the average time to complete college is 6.33 years, and in the same study, 55% of the participants who completed in that time stated they had one or more dependents. Zarifa et al. (2018) did not identify the ages of those who had dependents, and it is unknown if teen mothers were among those who took six years or more to complete college. For college students who were parenting children 18 years old and younger, Crispin and Nikolaou (2019) reported that parents spent less time on homework and extracurricular activities when compared to non-parents.

Overall, on-time college completion is a challenge for all types of students, teen parent or not (Johnson & Stage, 2018; Zarifa et al., 2018). The few studies about teen mothers and college completion use the age of 30 as the timestamp for earning degrees but do not report on the total number of years it took for completion (Perper et al., 2010 as cited in Chase, 2017). Gigante et al. (2018) also used the age of 30 as the cutoff to determine the socio-economic outcomes of adolescent parents. Transitioning into higher

education is a much smoother process when teen mothers are resilient and supported (Pio & Graham, 2018), regardless of the time it takes to complete a college degree.

The impacts of a 4-year versus 6-year completion timeline for PMT is unknown. What the literature has revealed, however, is that while the traditional time to earn a bachelor's degree is 4 years, students nationwide struggle to finish in that time. Therefore, in terms of adolescent mothering, the delayed college completion rate of 2% who earn bachelor's degrees by the age of 30 (Chase, 2019) may be an acceptable timeline considering that their non-mothering counterparts are taking 6 years to graduate.

Student Age and College Completion. The ages of PMT enrolling into college can vary because they are faced with the decisions of immediate college enrollment after high school graduation or delaying college enrollment to raise children. Some may enroll after high school graduation, and others may wait a few years. Delaying college enrollment for PMT may be an advantage. Zarifa et al. (2018) claimed that older students are more likely to succeed in college.

Student age may contribute to college success and could also affect time to finish. Older students with more life experiences and maturity have been known to be less likely to withdraw from college (Zarifa et al., 2018). However, they have also had a more difficult time transitioning into college work during their first year than younger, traditionally aged students (Dawborn-Gundlach, 2018). Dawborn-Gundlach (2018) found that more time out of high school and having family life responsibilities made college adjustment more difficult.

Academic Performance and College Persistence. The researchers in the literature did not report on PMT's academic performances and persistence in college, but studies have indicated that academic performance contributes to college persistence. The first semester GPA in college has been noted as one of the determining factors of student re-enrollment in the second semester. Flanders (2017) discovered that when comparing semesterly GPA's, students with a 3.0 were 127 times more likely to re-enroll than those with a 2.0. The study of McKinney et al. (2019) also reported similar results that students with less than a 2.0 had a withdrawal rate of 22.1%, while students above a 2.0 had a lower withdrawal rate of 11.4%.

Teen moms who graduated from AE have reported a lack of academic rigor in the program (Brouwer et al., 2018), which may threaten their first semester in college. The participants of this study will provide information regarding their college academic performance and if AE played a role in it.

Personal Traits and Skills for College Success. The literature about college completion is inundated with predicting factors that claim to facilitate completion. Some studies claimed that academic success is earned with cognitive skills (Flanders, 2017; McKinney et al., 2019), while others highlighted personal traits and behaviors of persistence as determinants for college success (Rossi & Bower, 2018; Zarifa et al., 2018). Knight et al. (2018) suggested that a combination of both academic and behavioral traits lead to college completion.

Adolescent mothers who graduated from AE may lack both cognitive skills and persistence (McGee & Lin, 2017), which make pursuing a college degree difficult. The

mental and emotional effects of unplanned pregnancy and adolescent motherhood may stunt cognitive development and injure intrinsic motivation, preventing academic success. However, teen mothers who did complete college reported that social supports, personal drive, parental responsibilities, and positive thinking helped them to graduate even with the added challenge of raising their children while attending college (Hernandez & Abu Rabia, 2017; Pio & Graham, 2018). This fact may indicate that while cognitive skills and personal traits help college success, for PMT, social support is essential for college success.

Support Systems

Support systems were found to be the highest contributor towards college attainment (Gatbonton, 2021; Maslowsky et al., 2021a; Navarro-Cruz et al., 2020). Financial support from parents (Assini et al., 2018) and from college tuition assistance have helped PMT manage the costs of higher education (Callender, 2018). If PMT's parents provided financial support, then PMT were five times more likely to return to school after childbirth (Assini et al., 2018). Receiving childcare support helped PMT manage parenting responsibilities and schoolwork (Maslowsky et al., 2021b). Teen moms who received childcare were four times more likely to complete some college when compared to PMT who did not receive childcare support (Crispin & Nikolaou, 2019).

College supports for student-mothers can be found in specific departments that assist with transitioning into college. At-risk students are identified, and interventions are created to keep them in school. For example, Knight et al. (2018) reported that the Office of Retention and Graduation was established to explore students' life situations that

might place them at-risk for college dropout and direct those students to appropriate campus resources. Mask and DePountis (2018) also reported useful transition services for visually impaired college students who in spite of their disability, managed to complete college with the help of campus support services.

Both studies, although involved non-PMT college students, described the transition process of college students. According to TT, although people vary demographically, their abilities to cope with life events follow a similar process (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Therefore, Knight et al. (2018) and Mask and DePountis (2018) offer recommendations that may help PMT transition more smoothly into college. If colleges identify the needs of teen mothers, such as childcare, finances, housing, transportation, academic deficiencies, or others, they might be able to increase the college graduation rates of these young, parenting mothers.

For many teen mothers, navigating through college is a new experience, especially if their parents did not attend college. Some teen mothers, motivated by their new roles of parenting, desired to attend college but lacked knowledge of how to enroll, to set college goals, and to determine timelines (Weiss & Harris, 2018). Colleges that reached out to local high schools have helped initiate the enrollment process and have improved college attendance (Gurantz et al., 2017). AE that creates a bridge between PMT and local colleges might help improve college attendance and completion among teen mothers and even more if AE provided college counseling after graduation.

Not all support systems are helpful for college completion. Family life has been reported as a source of disrupting college completion, either delaying completion or

leading to withdrawal (Marteleto & Villanueva, 2018). For example, studies found that cohabiting couples or those in early marriages, whether having children or not, and students who are single parents, including teen mothers, all fall into the at-risk category of college dropout (Marteleto & Villanueva, 2018; Shea, 2019; Zarifa et al., 2018). Managing family life and higher education is a difficult balance since both areas require attention and responsibility. Though family was noted as the major source of support for teenaged mothers who graduated from college in one study (Hernandez & Abu Rabia, 2017), other studies have indicated otherwise (Marteleto & Villanueva, 2018; Shea, 2019; Zarifa et al., 2018).

Summary and Conclusions

The lives of PMTs contain challenges that affect their educational outcomes which in the long run affects their livelihood (Erfina et al., 2019). Earning a college degree is one way to improve their chances of surviving economically, for themselves and for the children they are raising (Hernandez & Abu Rabia, 2017; Karageorge, 2019). The disadvantages of adolescent pregnancy may be negated with college preparations in high school and continued support during college experiences.

The low percentage of PMT who earn college degrees speaks to a disadvantage that young mothers share. Their families and their local schools may be able to help change this by supporting them through high school and college. For PMT to achieve academic success, specifically college success, they may need the assistance of a supportive community.

According to the studies in this literature review, AE for PMT is one avenue that facilitates educational progress for young mothers. In an environment where PMT felt accepted, where stigmatized treatment was reduced, and where socioemotional strategies were taught, AE impacted the lives of PMT, often leading to high school graduation. However, it is still unclear if PMT from AE are prepared for college.

The participants in some of the studies mentioned felt that AE had the responsibility of providing rigorous academic programs to prepare them for college rather than keeping the goal low at obtaining a high school diploma (Brouwer et al., 2018; Chase, 2017; Watson et al., 2017). Some PMT who graduated from AE wished they had a more rigorous and challenging academic experience in high school (Brouwer et al., 2018). Teen mothers recognized the importance of college education as a way to give their babies a better future (Gbogbo, 2020). In Rudoe's qualitative study (2014), adolescent mothers preferred to attend college over immediate employment after high school and believed that the more education they might have, the better mother they may become. PMT from disadvantaged backgrounds also viewed college attendance as the best way to secure a good future (Espinoza et al., 2019; Modesto, 2018).

College is challenging for all types of students. The academic workload, life responsibilities, and personal limitations may vary among students; but all are affected in some way. Mothering in college is especially difficult, specifically for former teen mothers. Student mothers are at high risk of dropping out of college for several reasons: academic skills deficiencies, lack of social supports, inadequate funding, and the high demands of raising a child. Overall, what is known in the discussion of teen pregnancy

and education is that PMT are at a disadvantage; and AE has been reported as an effective avenue for high school completion. The degree to which AE provides college preparatory education is unknown.

The gap in the literature will be addressed in this study by implementing sound research methods as will be described in Chapter 3. The use and rationale of a basic qualitative design will be described and explained. In addition, Chapter 3 contains the methods of collecting and analyzing data which align with the purpose of this study. The chapter ends with a detailed explanation of establishing trustworthiness and the criteria it entails.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore perceptions of college

graduates who were former teen mothers, about their experiences involving AE programs

and how it prepared them for college. I aimed to capture participants' descriptions of

college preparation involving AE programs. Participants graduated from different AE

programs, such as on-site programs that shared a campus with traditional high schools,

off-site facilities, and hybrid programs between home and school. Participants did not

include PMTs who attended AE programs and then returned to traditional high school.

This study helps fill the gap in the literature regarding PMTs and their experiences in AE

programs related to their college successes.

Chapter 3 contains the study's research methodology. The study's problem,

purpose, research questions, and analyses guided the writing of this chapter. The chapter

begins with an extensive description of the research design and justifies the use of a

qualitative approach for the study. Next, the role of the researcher and potential biases are

described as well as specific strategies for reducing them.

The chapter continues with the methodology section, which includes processes of

participant selection, instrumentation, and data analysis. The chapter concludes with a

discussion of establishing trustworthiness and then a summary of key points and a

transition into Chapter 4.

Research Design and Rationale

I chose to use a basic qualitative design for this study because data involved

experiences lived by participants. The concept of interest in this study was identifying

experiences. Patton (2015) said qualitative studies that do not particularly explore phenomena, case studies, ethnographical inquiries, grounded theories, or narratives can be considered generic studies and used as practical methods to evaluate programs or gather human perspectives. Percy et al. (2015) said a basic qualitative design involves actual experiences of people and facts involved in their experiences. Additionally, Percy et al. recommended using a basic design if the data did not fit one specific traditional approach.

Dowden et al. (2018) said teen pregnancy often led to poor college attainment. A basic qualitative approach offers the appropriate methodology for exploring perceptions and ideas of participants. According to Patton (2015), qualitative research involves exploring emotions of people and expounding on quantitative findings, all for the purpose of solving or minimizing problems.

Using this basic research design, I implemented a pragmatic approach for data collection and interpretation. Data collection using the pragmatic approach allowed for locating the best participants that fit the study and under realistic timelines. Additionally, interpretation of data conducted using the pragmatic approach guided me in terms of seeking practical ways findings could contribute to AE and college success.

Role of the Researcher

I was actively involved in conducting one-on-one, semistructured interviews with participants. I had no personal or professional connections with them. However, as a former teen mother who graduated high school from an AE program and experienced college success, I shared similar life experiences with participants. Creswell (2008) said

researchers with personal experiences related to the phenomenon of a study may influence interpretations of findings and potentially lead to bias. To address potential bias, I created an audit trail to record my thoughts objectively about interviewees' responses and practicing reflexivity and mindfulness. I minimized my own perceptions instead maximized the number of concrete descriptors from participants. I triangulated the data from different informants, or participants, and member checked interpretations so that findings accurately represented perceptions of participants.

My task was to gather data without mentally or emotionally harming participants , and accurately describe the phenomenon as lived by participants. Use of effective word choice, empathic neutrality, and level of interaction between interviewers and interviewees could affect quality of data . Therefore, during interviews, I observed closely for any signs of discomfort participants may have exhibited as they shared their lived experiences, and I used effective questioning tactics to keep participants comfortable. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), effective interviewers help interviewees feel comfortable by adjusting ways they ask questions. In addition, I avoided making any subjective comments.

Methodology

Participant Selection Process

Participants in this study were former teen mothers who graduated from both AE programs and college. To select participants, purposive sampling was applied to create a homogenous group sample. Patton (2015) said this strategy involves gathering participants who share similar characteristics or experiences. Purposive sampling suited

this study because the research questions pertain to a specific population who share similar experiences.

Population

Choosing participants for qualitative studies is done intentionally, so that people who can best describe the phenomenon are selected (Creswell, 2008). This study required careful selection of participants. Purposive sampling was used to locate participants who relayed their experiences and best provided information-rich data to answer research questions. Participants were teen mothers who between the ages of 13 and 18 delivered and parented a child, graduated from an AE program, and successfully completed college, earning at least an associate degree or higher.

Sample Size

I interviewed a sample size of 10 participants. Sample sizes in qualitative studies are not generalizable (Creswell, 2013) and do not need to be in large numbers (Patton, 2015). Credibility in small samples is generated by using purposive sampling where participants are chosen based on their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Because only 2% of teen mothers graduate from college (Dowden et al., 2018; Gigante et al., 2018; Marteleto & Villanueva, 2018), the population for this study was expected to be scarce and availability of participants low. Mason (2010) said smaller sample sizes allow for deeper analysis of data.

Professional qualitative researchers commonly use data saturation as a guide in terms of determining and justifying sample size (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Justifying sample size, when a sample size is considered small can threaten validity (Vasileiou et

al., 2018). Mason (2010) described that in many studies, saturation was found in sample sizes ranging from 5 to 100. Among the many discussions pertaining to sample size and saturation, Vasileiou et al. (2018) suggested that in determining sample size, researchers would benefit from referring to other methodologies.

A sample size of 10 college graduates who were teen mothers in AE was an appropriate sample because each participant had the best experience and knowledge of the topic. The sample size was also based on pragmatic considerations due to the low population.

Locating Participants

After obtaining the Institutional Review Board's (IRB) approval, #11-01-21-0525429, I mailed a set of three hardcopies of the recruitment flyer (see Appendix A) to four alternative high schools and three non-profit organizations. I emailed a digital copy to a university alumni association and posted the flyer on two social media groups. I also posted an ad in my university's participant pool. Nine participants responded to the recruitment flyer posted on social media, and one participant responded via the university participant pool.

The participants differed in ages of pregnancy, actual age, number of children they had in high school, types of college degrees earned, family demographics, and other factors. According to Shenton (2004), using a wide range of informants is a method of triangulation and may increase the credibility of this study.

Obtaining rich information to answer the study's research questions drove the participation selection process. As a heterogeneous sample, it was expected that

participants from diverse backgrounds may have provided varying responses, or they may have provided similar perceptions resulting in data saturation. During data collection, I monitored and assessed for data saturation through regular review of the data gathered. Braun and Clarke (2021) suggested that implementing data saturation in determining sample size requires the researcher to carefully define saturation and justify its use.

Therefore, for this study, saturation was defined as the presence of reoccurring data and the lack of new data (Guest et al., 2020) pertaining to academic practices and AE descriptors. If data saturation was met before all 10 participants were interviewed, then I would have decided to cease interviews. However, since saturation was not met during data collection, the study continued with the interviews of all 10 participants.

Instrumentation

I used a semistructured, in-depth one-to-one interview to collect data. The interview contained five background questions and 10 questions that I created by integrating Schlossberg's 4S's and transition model, the study's research questions, and the literature regarding college and AE (see Appendix B). The five background questions were direct, closed-ended questions that helped the participants ease into the interview. Their answers described their backgrounds which I kept in my audit trail but were not included in the final study to maintain participant confidentiality. The details of their AE experience and pregnancies were specific that disclosing the information in the final study would have revealed characteristics identifying the participants. Responses to the background questions established triangulation among participants.

The interview instruments were developed based on this study's purpose, research questions, and by referring to the literature. To refine the questions, I conducted two mock interviews using participants who met two out of the three required criteria for this study's selection process. The mock interviews revealed that most of the questions encouraged the participants to describe their perceptions specific to their education as teen mothers. I modified some of the questions to ensure that the responses were relevant to the purpose of this study and answered the research questions. Questions that elicited responses irrelevant to the study were omitted.

The order of questions was based on Brod et al.'s (2009) "funnel shaped" description where the flow began with general questions to elicit unbiased perceptions. Next, questions related to the broad domains were asked, and then finally, probing questions for more specific answers (p. 1266). Given the sensitive nature and emotional responses the interview questions evoked during the mock interviews, I began the interviews by asking questions about the participants' college successes and achievements: the more positive topic compared to questions about pregnancy and AE. I based the decision to begin the interviews with college questions because participants, during the mock interviews, when asked about pregnancy tended to cry and become emotional which then delayed responses about college success.

In constructing the instruments for this study, I referred to Brod et al. (2009) for content validity so that both instruments were relevant and aligned between the theoretical framework and the overall direction of the study. I created interview questions that answered the study's research questions and conducted two mock interviews. Patton

(2015) shared that validating instrumentation involved consistent methods of data collection between participants, constant comparison of participant responses, and continuous examination of alignment between the study's design, purpose, and data collected.

I used the instruments during one-to-one interviews via Zoom. Interviewing via email, cellphone, and in-person each have their own advantages (Opdenakker, 2006); but due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I collected data via Zoom audio conferencing. Zoom's special features, like video and audio access, recording ability, and chat box feature, helped keep data organized, confidential, and accurate. Zoom stores data on a cloud and is password protected which have kept the data safe. Zoom also allows for download of recordings that were stored on password-protected drives. Using Zoom also allowed access to participants who live in distant geographical areas.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The recruitment process followed strict protocols to respect participants' privacies and provided them the details of their participation. To find participants, I posted recruitment flyers on social media groups, and I mailed hardcopies to both AE schools and non-profit organizations that help teen mothers attain college education. Participants contacted me via email and Facebook messenger. I sent consent forms via email to each respondent, and each one submitted the consent forms properly according to the directions.

Semistructured Interview Guide

Once consent was obtained, I scheduled Zoom meetings for the one-to-one interview. I conducted the interviews as each participant was available. Each interview took 30 – 50 minutes. Data was recorded by using Zoom's audio, video recording and closed caption features. I also used an iPhone as backup audio recording. Each participant was emailed a copy of the interpretations and analysis of the interview and was encouraged to give any feedback or clarifications.

Exiting the Study

Participation in this study was strictly voluntary; and if the participants wished to leave at any time, they were given the opportunity to do so with or without notifying me. For those who completed the interview, I emailed an Amazon gift card of $20.

Data Analysis Plan

To make sense of the data collected, I conducted a qualitative content analysis (QCA), a systematic approach of data analysis where the participants' original words were used to describe their experiences which is most often used when the design of the study focuses on the manifest, or descriptive, content of the data (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). Using QCA benefitted this study because, according to Renz et al. (2018), QCA is commonly used to analyze written or verbal data. The data collected for this study were verbal responses from the sample and not observed behaviors or field notes.

Another benefit of using QCA was in fulfilling the research purpose of this study. The purpose was to identify specific events in AE that contributed to college success.

Qualitative content analysis guided me in analyzing the content of the language and spoken words of the participants, so that I identified the specific events in AE that contributed to college success. The steps of QCA focused on using the participants' own words to describe their perspectives. Vaismoradi and Snelgrove (2019) suggested that when researchers apply abstract interpretations to data analysis and focus on latent content, there is a possibility of losing the original perceptions of the participants.

To implement QCA, I used the directed content analysis approach described by Hsieh and Shannon (2005), where theory is used as guidance for coding and analysis. Because the framework of this study was based on Schlossberg's TT, I used the 4S system to guide the coding scheme and thematic analysis. I pre-determined initial codes from the 4S's: situation, self, support, and strategies. Saldaña (2021) identifies pre-determined coding as provisional coding when codes are selected a priori; before the coding process actually began.

After manually coding the data, I classified the codes by placing them into categories. Researchers who conduct QCA become the main instrument of data analysis as they go back and forth between data, creating categories and comparing those categories with each other and with knowledge of the concepts (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). The categories were then clustered into themes that answered the research questions. The themes were keywords or sentences that summarized the categories (Saldaña, 2021). Further, themes are the final products of data analysis (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019) that answered the research questions of this study.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Researchers of qualitative design have the task of ensuring trustworthy research. Shenton (2004) and Anney (2014) stated that positivists oftentimes question the validity of research conducted under naturalistic inquiry because the findings of a qualitative study can include weaknesses in data collection and analysis brought into the study by the researcher's own biases and subjective interpretations. Similarly, Patton (2015) warned that the integrity of qualitative studies is placed under suspicions that researchers shape findings according to their own predispositions.

Trustworthiness is confidence that the research findings, analysis, and recommendations are true to the phenomenon under investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers can establish trustworthiness by presenting a convincing case that a study has indeed followed sound research methods, produced findings that are data driven, and do not involve the researcher's bias or own inclinations (Shenton, 2004).

Establishing trustworthiness improves the quality and rigor of an investigative study (Shenton, 2004), and steps can be taken by researchers to ensure that qualitative studies demonstrate academically sound methods. Lincoln and Guba (1985) presented four criteria to ensure a trustworthy investigation: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Shenton (2004) and Anney (2014) described strategies within each criterion to ensure trustworthiness.

Credibility

Shenton (2004) and Anney (2014) described credibility as a method used to promote confidence that the findings about the phenomenon are true and genuine.

Establishing credibility assures readers that the findings are interpreted solely from the participants' realities and views. Researchers are expected to accurately describe the phenomenon of study in detail and to question if the findings adequately reflect the true reality of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I used two basic strategies to establish credibility: triangulation of informants (Anney, 2014) and created an audit trail.

Triangulation is collecting and analyzing data using multiple sources of information, methods, theories, or investigators (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Anney (2014) posed that triangulation of informants is using a variety of participants having different experiences and characteristics. In this study, data were gathered across different participants who covered a range of life experiences and had different perspectives of AE. They attended different types of AE programs, were enrolled in AE for different lengths of time, and completed college degrees in different fields.

Although not included in the interview questions, some participants reported being married, divorced, having one child or more than one. Current age was not solicited from the participants; but based on their responses, some had recently graduated from college while others graduated some time ago. These different characteristics created opportunities to gather data from multiple sources of information.

Shenton (2004) stated that the contributions from participants with varying viewpoints and perceptions will produce a robust description of the phenomenon. After the interviews, I compared responses to each other and allowed the data to reveal the participants' perceptions of what worked in AE for college successes. I took their responses and compared them against each other's to create a detailed description of the

phenomenon (Shenton, 2004). Each participant offered different and similar viewpoints of AE. Informant triangulation in this study assured credibility by cross-checking participant responses and by presenting those responses as the true reality of each participant. As a result, the triangulation of participants served as one method of ensuring credibility.

Next, I used member checking as a second method of establishing credibility. Shenton (2004) explained that member checking is taking the findings and their interpretations back to the participants for their review. Further, Anney (2014) explained that participants are given the chance to suggest changes to the analyzed and interpreted data.

Member checking opportunities were given to all participants approximately 4 to 6 weeks after their interview. I emailed my thematic analysis of their coded data in the form of an easy-to-read flow chart. Two responded without any suggestions and the other eight did not respond at all. Member checking by two participants were valuable to this study because it offered them the opportunity to review, add to, and delete from their transcripts. It also established credibility that my analysis truly reflected their realities.

Additionally, I maintained a digital audit trail to record the decisions I made in collecting, analyzing, and managing the data. I used a spreadsheet with multiple tabs to organize my audit trail. The audit trail contains in-depth descriptions of participants and their personal information, reflections about the research questions, decisions I made in coding the transcripts, and the steps I took in thematically analyzing the coded data. More importantly, I recorded my reflexive thoughts about participants' responses to ensure that

in the analysis phase, I reported their beliefs and not mine. The audit trail helped establish credibility by promoting confidence that the findings and analysis were true and genuine interpretations of the participants' perspectives.

Transferability

Establishing transferability is the application of one study to another context and ensuring that the results of one study can be transferred to another set of respondents (Anney, 2014). The goal of transferability provides readers to re-create the investigation (Shenton, 2004). Anney (2014) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that the most effective strategies in establishing transferability are via thick descriptions and purposive sampling.

Providing thick descriptions requires that researchers describe in extensive detail the methods and context of the study so that readers can replicate the study in another setting (Shenton, 2004). Purposive sampling is the intentional selection of participants to find those who can best answer the research questions and have the most experience with the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2008). Purposive sampling facilitates transferability by providing readers with an accurate description of the participants so that readers can determine if participant characteristics are applicable to other sets of participants (Anney, 2014).

I addressed transferability by providing thick descriptions of the study's background, methodology, and participants. Thick descriptions also included details of the AE programs the participants attended. Academic and supportive programs in AE

vary from school to school (McGee & Lin, 2020); therefore, providing thick descriptions of each AE program enhanced the opportunities of transferability.

In addition to providing thick descriptions of the AE programs, I also provided rich descriptions of the procedures used in locating participants through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling helps transferability by keeping participant characteristics stable in the event the study is replicated.

Dependability

Researchers are expected to ensure dependability by accounting for a study's instability and change, so that if the study were replicated in another context, it would produce similar findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). Guest et al. (2012) suggested that consistency and comparable results across one study to another creates dependability but is often difficult to establish in qualitative studies since the use of qualitative methods are intended to explore a phenomenon and not intended to be replicated. However, Given (2008) suggested that if a study is too unique or specific and cannot be replicated, then it contributes little to other contexts except its own. Shenton (2004) addressed this issue and recommended that researchers provide the full details of the research process without the expectations of another study yielding the exact same results.

I established dependability by creating an audit trail to record the steps I performed during the analysis and synthesis of data, to keep my methodology notations, and any reflexive thoughts I had. All my decisions and activities performed throughout the research process were recorded in detail.

Guest et al. (2012) described two major benefits of an audit trail. First, it provides researchers the opportunity to contemplate on each decision that is made during investigation. Second, it communicates those decisions to readers who may have questions about the study's process and provides them the details for replication. Patton (2015) pointed out that audit trails reduce bias and maximize the reporting of objective analysis.

Another strategy for establishing dependability is the use of peer examination. Anney (2014) recommended conducting a peer examination with a colleague to help maintain honesty about the study's process, analysis, and reflexive notations. Patton (2015) identified this type of review as an expert audit review and acknowledged this as the role of a doctoral committee for graduate students. My committee chairperson and methodologist conducted an expert audit review of my study and helped to establish this study as dependable and trustworthy.

Anney (2014) described other strategies for establishing dependability that included stepwise replication and code-recode. Stepwise replication and code-recode strategies were not chosen for this study since stepwise replication requires a second researcher to analyze the data and code-recode requires a gap of time between codings. Given the independent work in this academic dissertation and the time to completion, these two strategies were not included as part of this study's methodology.

Confirmability

Stahl and King (2020) described confirmability as corroborating the findings with other researchers to create the most objective research as possible by. Anney (2014)

agreed with Stahl and King (2020) and suggested that confirmability is achieved when the results of the study can be confirmed by other researchers. Lincoln and Guba (1985) pointed out that confirmability by authenticating the data can be accomplished when researchers acknowledge their own potential sources of bias and document themselves as the research instrument. Patton (2015) reported that the use of audit trails helps verify the rigor of a study and enhances confirmability.

In my audit trail, I maximized accuracy by reporting on empirical data that I collected during the study, and I recorded and reflected on my sources of bias. I also documented the connections between the findings in the study and my interpretive analysis. Finally, I referenced other studies on teen mothering, AE, and college success to my study to confirm my approaches, analysis, and findings.

Ethical Procedures

Qualitative research involves probing into the lived experiences of people, and in some way, data is collected by entering their lives, thoughts, and emotions (Patton, 2015). The interview process can impact both interviewer and interviewee, affecting the mental and emotional health of both parties (Creswell, 2008). Interviews can reopen old wounds, but if conducted using ethical considerations, it can bring healing (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

It is important for researchers to create a framework to address ethical issues before data collection begins and to attend to emergent ethical concerns that may arise unexpectedly during data collection (Creswell, 2008; Patton, 2015). The ethical procedures pertaining to the treatment of the participants and the data are discussed in this section and serve as the framework for addressing ethical concerns in this study.

Treatment of Human Participants

The participants of this study were 10 female college graduates over the age of 18 who had birthed a child in their teen years and overcame the educational struggles teenage mothers often face. Although their college attainment is evidence of life achievement, it is possible that the participants could have experienced life traumas. Studies have reported traumatic life events for PMT (i.e., unwanted pregnancies by older men) (Zuilkowsky et al., 2019); poverty-stricken homes (Smith et al., 2018); and dysfunctional family relationships (Sheeran et al., 2018). Perhaps the most common trauma PMT have faced is stigmatization (Chase, 2019; Gbogbo, 2020). Being members of a stigmatized and traumatized group, the participants of this study will be categorized as a vulnerable population (Sieber, 2009).

An ethics review by Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was necessary to allow me to interview a vulnerable population. Institutional permissions were unnecessary since the participants were independent of any organization. After IRB approval was granted, #11-01-21-0525429, I sought participants via flyers and announcements on social media, on websites that support young mothers, and partner organizations such as local AE high schools. Organizations helped disseminate the flyer and had no other role.

Ethical concerns related to recruitment included confidentiality, open honesty regarding the purpose of the study, interview procedures, and data storage (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Gaining trust from a vulnerable population was another concern and was addressed by choosing non-biased language (Sieber, 2009), which I carefully addressed

as I drafted the recruitment flyers and announcements. Rubin and Rubin (2012) emphasize that participants deserve the interviewer's respect, and that respect can be established even before data collection begins by disclosing the full truth about the study's purpose.

During data collection, ethical considerations included participant privacy that was addressed by recommending that the Zoom interviews were conducted in a comfortable setting where they were free to speak without interruptions. The use of headphones was recommended to ensure privacy in the event either party experienced an unexpected intrusion. Another consideration was confidentiality which I addressed by assigning pseudonyms for each participant. I also ensured confidentiality by deleting identifiers, such as high school names, year of graduation, and geographic locations, from the transcripts.

Maintaining the participant's trust during the interview required my demeanor, word choice, and facial expressions to communicate empathic neutrality, a nonjudgmental concern for the interviewee (Patton, 2015). I encouraged the participants to discuss their life stories without pressure by assuring them of their options to answer questions they were comfortable with and refrain from responding to those they were not.

Treatment of Data

Confidentiality is the researcher's responsibility to safeguard all the data collected to prevent intentional or unintentional access by others (Sieber, 2009). The Zoom audio-recorded interviews, their transcripts, and voice memos were safeguarded in a password-protected cloud and on a password-protected laptop. The backup cloud drive will be

archived for 5 years. After the 5-year period, the original data will be destroyed by permanently deleting the file from the password-protected laptop backup drive and cloud repository.

Other Ethical Issues

Defining the boundaries of sharing my personal experience with the participants is another ethical issue. Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggested that interviewers express empathy and share personal experiences related to the phenomenon to earn the trust of participants. Sieber (2009) agreed but also warned against making the interview session about the researcher and not the participant.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I described the study's research design, methodology, and issues of trustworthiness. Overall, collecting and analyzing the data was based on respecting a consistent scientific inquiry that has produced meaningful and valid results. I recognized the power and impact of the interview process. As Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggested, interviewers have ethical responsibilities to prevent harming participants. Keeping the participants safe was important to me. I worked diligently at keeping each participant comfortable during and after each interview, so that when they completed the interview, they felt positive about contributing to this study.

In Chapter 4, I shared participant demographics, data collection processes, and content analysis. I explained the steps for manual coding and thematic analysis, and how those steps follow sound qualitative content analysis procedures under a directed approach. I used the 4S system to direct coding and theming. I also provided evidence of

how I implemented strategies that established a trustworthy study. To conclude, I present

five major themes that answer research questions.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe perceptions of college graduates who were once teen mothers enrolled in AE programs regarding their experiences in these programs and how those experiences may have contributed to their college success. Academic practices and enrollment in AE program were primary concerns of this study. Overall, the objective was to identify what happened in AE programs that helped PMTs attain college diplomas.

The following research question guided the data collection process:

RQ: What academic practices in AE programs do mothers who gave birth in their teens and successfully completed college identify as important in terms of transitioning into college and experiencing college success?

SQ1: How did mothers who gave birth in their teens and successfully completed college describe their experiences involving AE programs?

SQ2: How did those experiences contribute to their college success?

In this chapter, I present procedures and analyses to answer these questions. First, Chapter 4 begins with descriptions of participants as well as AE programs they graduated from. Each participant brought different experiences and corresponding perspectives to this study. Each participant offered information regarding their life transitions and successes. However, I extracted only the most relevant details about AE programs and college success to address the research purpose, questions, and theoretical framework. Next, I present a detailed description of steps I took in ensuring that relevant data were collected and analyzed. Tables and figures are provided to facilitate understanding of the

multi-step process I took to identify major themes of the study. I present evidence

regarding ensuring trustworthiness of this investigation. To conclude Chapter 4, I present

and discuss five major themes that emerged from data.

Setting

At the time of study, the world was experiencing a pandemic caused by COVID-

19. While the pandemic affected the health and wellbeing of many people, participants in

this study did not report any stress factors that may have influenced their abilities to

recall their experiences in AE programs or college. A factor which affected some

participants' abilities to recall details of their experiences was the length of time since

their high school graduation.

Some participants indicated that it was difficult to remember details like names of

specific coursework and chronology of experiences. Most of these details were

considered minor and irrelevant to the study. Difficulties in terms of recalling specific

details did not prevent participants from sharing their perspectives regarding AE

programs and college success. Participants provided information-rich data that

contributed to this study.

Demographics

Participants of this study were located via online recruiting. Nine out of 10

responded to recruitment flyers (see Appendix A) posted on social media. As former teen

mothers, participants were between the ages of 14 and 18 when they delivered their first

child; the average age was 16. Current age was irrelevant to the study and not solicited

from the participants; however, in the consent form, each participant acknowledged that

she was over 18 years old and eligible to participate in the study. The total number of

children each participant had as a teenager or in the present was irrelevant to the study.

All participants were college graduates who earned an associate, bachelor's,

master's, or doctoral degree. All participants affirmed they completed high school with

an AE program. Types of programs varied in some ways (see Table 1). To receive AE,

four participants remained in the high school they were attending prior to pregnancy, five

participants relocated to a new campus, and one was attending an AE program prior to

pregnancy and remained enrolled after delivering her child.

Table 1

Participant Variations of AE Programs and Levels of Education

| Participant pseudonym | Type of AE program | | | | Highest level of education |
| | On campus | Hybrid | | | |
		Online	At Home	Correspondence	
1. Juanita	X				Doctoral
2. Tonya	X	X			Associate
3. Theresa	X		X		Bachelors
4. Fortuna	X			X	Bachelors
5. Fiona	X				Associate
6. Sue	X				Associate
7. Savannah	X				Doctoral
8. Edna	X				Associate
9. Nancy	X			X	Masters
10. Tenisha	X				Doctoral

Data Collection

I conducted one-on-one semistructured interviews with 10 participants who met

criteria for this study. Interviews were conducted 1 to 2 days after I received consent

forms. After each interview, I assigned a pseudonym that I selected based on their participant number. Pseudonyms were the same order in which they were interviewed. Pseudonyms in no way represented ethnicities, true names, or demographic backgrounds.

Interviews were conducted via Zoom and took 2 months to complete. Each interview took an average duration of 33.5 minutes. Using Zoom's audio recording feature, I stored audio recordings and closed-captioned transcripts on a password-protected Zoom cloud. As a backup, I also used the iPhone's voice memo feature to record audio and stored voice memos on both a password-protected iPhone and the cloud.

Zoom transcripts contained some errors and gaps when compared to interview audio versions. To correct these errors, I played iPhone voice memo interviews one at a time while I read and edited corresponding transcripts. I frequently paused voice memos to correct words and phrases, add punctuation marks, and format transcripts. I became familiar with each transcript and found this process beneficial for data analysis. Transcripts included participants' own grammar and expressions. I did not edit any grammatical discrepancies but maintained transcripts verbatim as reported by participants.

Each participant appeared to speak freely about their experiences as teen mothers in AE programs. Their academic experiences in AE programs and college were the focus of interviews. Details regarding the circumstances of getting pregnant or the experiences of pregnancy were not discussed. Participants demonstrated positive attitudes, smiles, and tears as they recollected support they received in high school and college. Several

expressed that they had never reflected on their AE experiences, but due to this interview process, they now had a desire to contact their AE teachers and thank them.

None of the participants appeared angry, distraught, or uncomfortable during interviews. However, several participants appeared somewhat frustrated when they spoke about coursework in AE programs, referring to the work as rushed. Overall, most of them addressed interview questions with excitement and were pleased that their college success stories were to be shared with an audience.

Data Analysis

As a novice qualitative researcher, I used Saldaña's fundamental coding techniques to guide me during the coding and categorizing process. It provided step-by-step instructions for manual coding that included data layout, frequencies, and analytic memos. Hence, to begin coding, I conducted line-by-line analysis of the transcripts and extracted the participants' words and phrases that described any academic practice in AE, their personal experiences in AE, and impacts of those experiences to their college successes. This process ensured alignment of data to research purpose, research question, and subquestions. This first cycle of coding is described in this section. I conducted a second cycle of coding to organize the data according to the 4S system. After coding was complete, the units of data were treated to thematic analysis. Figure 1 shows the order of data analysis that included two cycles of coding and two parts of thematic analysis.

Figure 1

Two-Cycle Coding Process & Two-Part Thematic Analysis
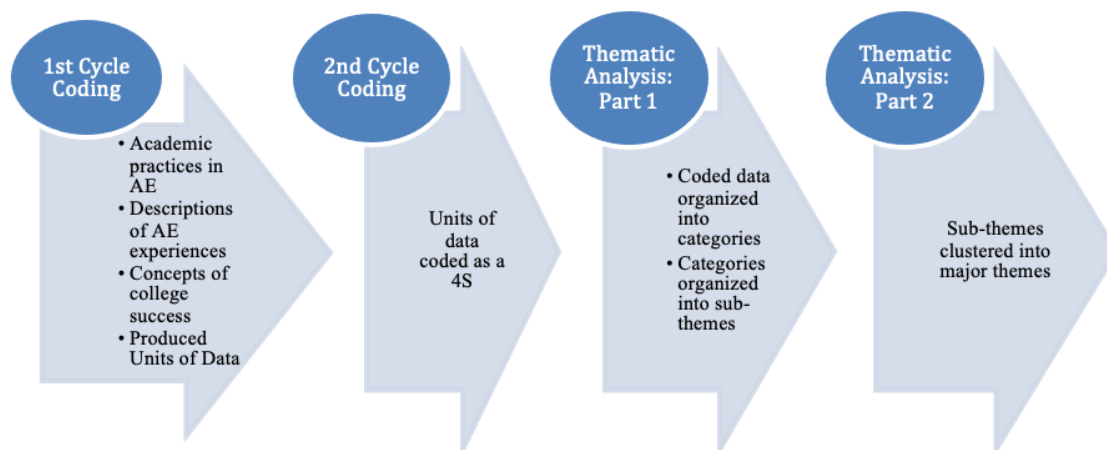
First Cycle Coding

The initial coding process began by examining each transcript line-by-line and extracting statements participants made about 1) academic practices in AE, 2) descriptions of AE experiences, and 3) concepts that pertained to college success. These three areas are the keywords found in the study's research questions. Extracting participant statements that were relevant to these three areas ensured alignment between research questions, data collection, and data analysis. The extracted statements were then placed in a table chart in chronological order as they appeared in the transcript and then numbered. Across the sample, the number of extracted statements ranged from 29 to 96, with an average of 48.5 statements. This first cycle of coding reduced each transcript into workable units of data that related to the research questions.

Second Cycle Coding

The units of data were then treated through a second cycle of coding. In this second cycle, units of data were assigned to one of four codes: *situation, self, support, strategy.* I selected these codes a priori to data collection, which Saldaña (2021) notes as provisional coding and is appropriate for qualitative studies that build upon previous research. This study builds upon previous studies involving TT. During this second cycle, on some occasions, a unit of data was placed into two S-codes when the data was relevant to both concepts.

Decisions in determining which S-code the datum would be assigned to were made by comparing the datum to Schlossberg's (2011) 4S definitions: Situation - external factors that triggered the event, the duration of the transition, the role changes, and other details; Self - personal traits, experiences, demographics, and how much control they have of the transition; Supports - those who are capable of providing assistance and support, and Strategies - ways to modify their roles and manage the transition.

Coding to the 4S's not only facilitated themeing, but it also served two important purposes: 1) manifested the existence of the 4S system in the life transitions among participants relevant to their situation, self, support, and strategies; 2) ensured alignment between data and conceptual framework of the study. In other words, the data collected were treated as concepts that both focused on the participants' life transitions from teen mom in AE to young mom in college and connected the data to knowledge regarding TT.

The second coding cycle produced units of data coded as a 4S (see Figure 2). I reviewed all the coded data and ensured that each unit was a description of either academic practices in AE, experiences in AE, or concepts of college success, and were characterized by Schlossberg's 4S definitions.

Figure 2

Example of Second Cycle Coding: Units of Support Data Coded to 4S

SUPPORT	College Success	AE Academic Practices & Descriptions
	(36) a case manager at a local agency that helps families and low-income people get off the streets or, you know, stay housed or whatever, and this sweet, sweet, sweet man he changed my whole world. He helped me just believe in myself a little bit more and gave me lots of tools at the time. I didn't have glasses. I couldn't see well. I got a voucher. And we talked about, you know what, what moved me, and then I opened up about my little brother and his autism and how education failed him. (37) EOPS program, they, they did so much more than just, you know, really priority stuff like anytime I had an outside issue especially these last couple years doing school remote with children at home during a global pandemic. They helped me find things or even just said like they would write to me you've got this like we're here for you (38) They have special counselors that they get you where you are, and like lift you to be something more	(1) The teacher that was in my independent study, she was, she was lovely and sweet and believed in education, and I could tell that she loved her mom-students a lot because she had pictures of the ones that graduated her program with their babies. (2) She was a doll (4) she was a lovely safe spot to be in my position. But everything else outside of her wasn't. (18) that's what the teachers and the school district pushed for they wanted me to graduate (22) they wanted, graduation so that they could, you know keep their funding (23) It didn't feel like, "Hey, we want this teen mom to have all the resources that she needs to maybe not be on welfare and maybe go to college or do, you know, career placement something." (27) if I didn't have access to childcare, I could bring my baby with while we went over my weekly assignments and things like that, so that was so beneficial.

After I completed cycle two, I proceeded in conducting a 2-part thematic analyses. In Part 1, I grouped similarly coded data from each participant's transcript to create subthemes. In Part 2, I organized emergent subthemes across the sample to construct major themes.

The steps taken are discussed in detail and two figures are provided to clarify the processes.

Subthemes

I began thematic analysis by reflecting on the 4S coded units and identified similarities and repetitions of concepts, words, and phrases. I also noted units of data that were independent of any similarities because standalone concepts may have similarities across the sample. I noted these conceptual commonalities and organized them into categories (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Example of 4S Coded Data, Organized Into Categories

| SUPPORT | **CASE MANAGER**
(36) a case manager at a local agency that helps families and low-income people get off the streets or, you know, stay housed or whatever, and this sweet, sweet, sweet man he changed my whole world. He helped me just believe in myself a little bit more and gave me lots of tools at the time. I didn't have glasses. I couldn't see well. I got a voucher. And we talked about, you know what, what moved me, and then I opened up about my little brother and his autism and how education failed him.

COLLEGE SUPPORT SERVICES & COUNSELORS
(37) EOPS program, they, they did so much more than just, you know, really priority stuff like anytime I had an outside issue especially these last couple years doing school remote with children at home during a global pandemic. They helped me find things or even just said like they would write to me you've got this like we're here for you
(38) They have special counselors that they get you where you are, and like lift you to be something more free tutoring | **BABY-TO-SCHOOL**
(27) if I didn't have access to childcare, I could bring my baby with while we went over my weekly assignments and things like that, so that was so beneficial.
A KIND TEACHER
(1) The teacher that was in my independent study, she was, she was lovely and sweet and believed in education, and I could tell that she loved her mom-students a lot because she had pictures of the ones that graduated her program with their babies.
(2) She was a doll
(4) she was a lovely safe spot to be in my position. But everything else outside of her wasn't.

ADMINISTRATION EMPHASIZED ON HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION
(18) that's what the teachers and the school district pushed for they wanted me to graduate
(22) they wanted, graduation so that they could, you know keep their funding
(23) It didn't feel like, "Hey, we want this teen mom to have all the resources that she needs to maybe not be on welfare and maybe go to college or do, you know, career placement something." |

Note. (Left) data college success (Right) data AE experiences. (Red) categories

Subthemeing the data occurred within each 4S. I kept the 4S coded units of data in their S code clusters to facilitate analysis of the data within the concepts of TT. Some data were interchangeable among the 4S's. For example, datum "if I didn't have access to childcare, I could bring my baby" was coded as *support* and a *strategy* because bringing one's baby to school was a support resource for the participant and a strategy she used to control her situation of teen mothering and high school completion.

After categorizing, I used a flow chart to organize the categories, identify larger patterns, and consolidate meanings. Figure 4 presents Tenisha's *support* codes. Categories *brought baby to school, kind teacher, administration emphasized on high school graduation, case manager, and college programs and counselors* created the subtheme: From AE to College – Teacher support in AE had increased support in college from case manager, school counselor, and school programs. As in Tenisha's example, all subthemes exclusively represented the consolidated meanings each participant had about their transitions from AE to college.

Figure 4

Example of Categories Organized into Subthemes
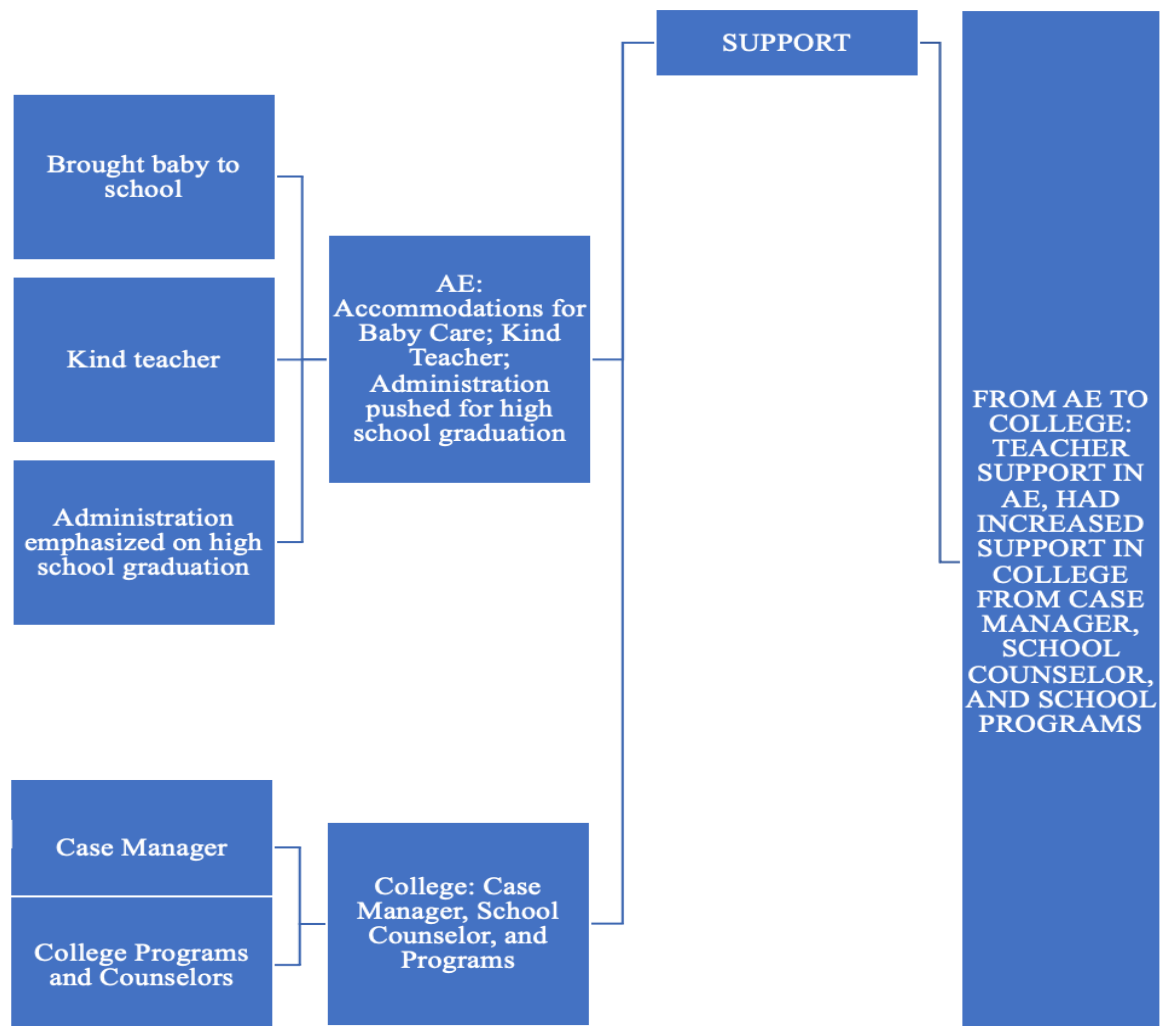
entire sample to construct major themes. To accomplish this, subthemes within each S

cluster were compared and analyzed for similar meanings and shared characteristics. Four

of the major themes are summaries of categorical analysis that correspond to one S.

Theme 1 summarizes the data in *situation*. Theme 3 summarizes the data in *support*.

Theme 4 summarizes the data in *self*. Theme 5 summarizes the data in *strategies*. Theme

2 differs slightly from the other themes. It is a summary and consolidation for data in both *situation* and in *self* because participant responses repeated in both S clusters.

The following subthemes were used interchangeably to describe (a) the participant situation in AE and college and (b) their self-traits/chacteristics:

- unprepared in college;

- not prepared for college work;

- unprepared academically, mentally, emotionally for college work;

- lacked college prep;

- felt unprepared for college;

- lacked college skills;

- lacked college readiness; and

- unprepared for college.

Since thematic analysis focused on patterns in each S cluster, the following subthemes were indicated:

- did not prepare for college,

- college work difficult,

- difficult transition into college, and

- easy, rushed high school work for accelerated graduation.

Collectively, these subthemes formed major theme #2: *Academic practices accelerated high school graduation but did not prepare for college level work*. In Table 2, I presented the development of major themes from the coded data.

Table 2

Summary of Major Themes, Codes, and Categories

Major Themes	Codes	Categories

THEME 1: Parenting and childcare accommodations in AE facilitated high school graduation

	Allowed baby to come to school	Provided accommodations for teen mom: breastfeeding and bring baby to school
	Accommodated teen mom's needs and accelerated high school graduation	Helped PMT succeed as a mother
		Modified school schedule
		Accommodations that prevented dropping out of high school
	Accommodating to pregnancy and parenting	Flexible attendance schedule
		Positive and comfortable environment
	Provided comfort, education in childcare, and mental health to prepare for college	Smaller school with convenient hours
		Great opportunity to finish high school quickly in a hybrid environment between home and school and spend time with children
		Home visits from main teacher
		Baby-to-school program that helped because PMT had to other source for childcare

THEME 2: Academic practices accelerated high school graduation but did not prepare for college level work

	Accelerated high school graduation. Hard adjustment into college	High school coursework rushed by teachers: Quantity over quality
		Academics self-paced and a breeze
		Hard adjustment into college
	High school completion easy	Easy online work
	College more difficult due to college level work	Graduated high school early
		Retook college pre-requisites
	Academics focused only on high school completion. No college preparations	Easy schoolwork, not challenging
		Independent work, correspondence, and night classes
	Unprepared for college	Not prepared for college level work in math or taking ACTs
	No college preparation	Not guided onto college path
	Focused on high school completion and not on college readiness	Academic credit earned via mail correspondence and on-campus attendance
		Emphasis only on high school completion, not on higher education
		Provided high school credit recovery
	No college preparation in AE, so college work was difficult	AE rush to give students their high school diplomas
	Felt traumatized in high school and unprepared in college	Did not promote college
		Completed AE coursework but did not feel prepared for college work
		AE supported high school completion but not college readiness
	Felt unprepared for college	Rushed to complete high school credit though self-paced online coursework
	Lacked college readiness	Developed college skills by observing others and through the use of college resource centers
		Did not provide any college pathway guidance
		Coursework: Zero challenge and no college preparations
		Completed testing and assessments in the school district offic
		Transition into college was academically difficult
		Low quality academic instruction
		AE administration emphasized on high school graduation only

THEME 3: Levels of support increased in college

	One teacher in AE; college teachers, and now husband; more supportive teachers in college	One kind teacher in AE – Kind amazing college teachers
		Parent support
		Husband support
		College teacher support
	Fully supported by school staff, husband, and mother-in-law from high school to college	Lacked support from AE teachers and staff
		Peer single-mom support in college for babysitting
		Government support for housing, food, and childcare costs
		Family and friends support
	Limited to parent support in AE and then support system	Found supportive environment
		Mentorship and peer support in college

Major Themes	Codes	Categories
	increased to include peers and college instructors Levels of support increased in college Fully supported by high school teachers, friends, and family Had constant support from high school through college Teachers were role models and peers were emotional and academic support Amount of support increased as time in college increased Support extended from one teacher in AE to government services, college student services, and peer support in college Teacher support in AE, Had increased support in college from case manager, school counselor, and school programs	Student study support group Received support from mom and husband after convincing them about college commitment College had student support services that assisted with childcare and gas vouchers Had a case manager to inform of the various government programs
THEME 4: Personal traits and habits contributed to college success		
	Determined self-motivated and determined to graduate determined and focused Persevering by nature and driven by motherhood to succeed in college determined to finish Possessed confidence and academic ability Used effective time management Adjusted study skills from easy academics in AE to more difficult in college Effective management of time, money, studies Clear priorities, good planning for childcare and finances Increased independence by seeking out resources and ways to balance both roles	Difficult and stressful to balance and manage both roles as mother and student Determined to graduate Balance of student-mom role was a struggle and needed persistence Determined to prove success to others Ambitious and goal-oriented Personal traits prepared her to do the college work: responsible, independent, organized, liked learning Learned to pace through work and get it all done Kept positive outlook Focused on completing college coursework Independent from a young age Motherhood motivated educational aspirations Finished homework at school to care for child at home Strict schedule to balance home and student life
THEME 5: Self-navigation to locate academic assistance and finances for college		
	Participated in college financial and academic programs Used resources from schools. Mental health support from others, from a professional, from self; time management and employment Self-navigated through college	Reached out to the school for assistance Looked for assistance from college instructors, counselors, and programs Funded college with scholarships and low-cost student housing

Major Themes	Codes	Categories
	Government services	Figured out how to get assistance from government programs to pay for college and daily needs
	Sought out resources to survive in college	Was not prepared for college path but figured it out
		Lacked resources in funding and in daycare

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is confidence that the research findings, analysis, and recommendations are true to the phenomenon under investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I have established trustworthiness in this study by following sound research methods, presenting data driven findings, and eliminating the possibilities of personal biases in the analysis, conclusion, and discussion.

Credibility

Establishing credibility assures readers that the findings are interpreted solely from the participants' realities and views. To ensure credibility, I implemented triangulation of informants and created an audit trail. Triangulation of informants described by Anney (2014) guided this study to collect data from a sample of people who experienced similar life transitions but experienced them under varying circumstances. None of the participants attended the same AE program. The variety of AE programs attended by the participants gave this study the opportunity to explore AE and college success from different angles. Interestingly, the major themes that emerged from this study were the patterns found across the sample, a sample of different people. Similar perspectives amid different walks of life enhanced credibility that the findings are true to the participants and to the lived experiences of PMT in AE.

Secondly, I used an audit trail to record all the decisions I made during the research process, and I recorded my own reflexive thoughts about participant responses that appeared quite similar or different to my own experiences. During analysis, I read my notes in the audit trail and ensured that those thoughts and inclinations were not included in the final study.

I attempted a transcript review in this study, but it was not implemented. Participants were emailed the analyses of their interviews. Two participants replied stating that the analysis "looked great" and "I have no suggestions." Ten days after I emailed the participants, the other eight had still not replied.

Transferability

Anney (2014) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that the most effective strategies in establishing transferability are via thick descriptions and purposive sampling. I implemented the use of thick descriptions by providing readers with clear steps involved in collecting and analyzing the data. To further clarify the steps that were written in this chapter, I provided tables and figures with examples of the steps I took in this research process. The thick descriptions found throughout this chapter allows for study transferability.

Additionally, I used purposive sampling that contributes to study transferability. The participants were chosen based on the study's criteria. During the recruitment phase, I declined four people who responded to my recruitment flyer because they had either not attended an AE program or were not due to graduate college till next year. Transferability

is possible because the criteria for participants were intentional and consistent in this study.

Dependability

The findings in this study were based on the logical decisions I made using my audit trail and by consistently replicating data collection and analysis procedures across the sample. The steps taken in the one-on-one, semistructured interviews were implemented for each participant. The steps I took in coding and thematic analysis were also replicated between each participant.

Additionally, the results of the study have been reviewed by a committee of people who specialize in qualitative research and methods. Having someone other than the inquirer to review the research procedures is important in establishing the dependability of a study. As a doctoral student, receiving guidance and feedback is vital for the quality of this study. All raw data, steps in data collection and analysis, and the audit trail were sent to my committee chair for review. The consistency in the research process and the committee's audit review ensures the dependability of this study.

Confirmability

Strategies for confirmability as mentioned in Chapter 3 included the use of an audit trail for memos and comparisons to similar studies. The audit trail I created for this study was a valuable tool in establishing a trustworthy investigation. In the audit trail, I noted the personal qualities of each participant and ensured they were qualified participants who were able to contribute information-rich data for this study. Their unique life experiences offered vital information from a variety of perspectives that

produced quality results. The results presented in this section also referenced other literature of similar topics that confirm the findings and analysis of the study.

Results

Thematic analysis of the data produced five robust themes that address the research questions. The results of this study are presented and organized thematically so that themes correspond to the study's research question: What academic practices in AE programs do mothers who gave birth in their teens and successfully completed college identify as important for transitioning into college and experiencing college success? .

RQ

The participants in this study experienced several academic practices that helped them earn high school credit and graduate: flexible platforms like home visits, mail correspondence, hybrid models between on campus and online work, weekly meetings with teachers, and independent work. Their curriculum consisted of accelerated coursework through worksheets, packets, and online lessons that helped them to either graduate earlier than their expected graduation date, on time despite lost time due to pregnancy or motherhood, or within a short time frame initiating from AE enrollment.

Although the participants experienced these academic practices in AE, they did not identify these practices as important for transitioning into college and experiencing college success. These academic practices promoted high school completion but did not help them experience college success. However, the participants acknowledged that without AE, they would not have had the chance to enroll in college. Edna commented, "I cannot give credit to them (AE) for me. I could give credit for them for pushing me to

finish that because if without finishing my high school diploma, I wouldn't have been able to go on." Therefore, although the academic practices identified in this study did not directly impact the sample's college successes, the academic practices were important factors for high school completion which, in turn, were essential for transitioning into college.

SQ1

How do mothers who gave birth in their teens and successfully completed college describe their experiences in AE? Enrolling into AE was not the preference for 9 of the 10 participants because of the stigma AE has for being a school for "bad kids." However, after the participants enrolled and were given the accommodations they needed, they felt it was a favorable option. The participants described their AE experiences as "accommodating" to their needs as teen mothers, "academically easy and fast" to earn high school credits, and "supported by one teacher" to help them graduate.

SQ2

How had those experiences contributed to their college success? The accommodations of childcare, flexible platforms and accelerated coursework, and lenient attendance policies helped the participants graduate high school. The academic environment, although non-challenging, was a convenient and fast way to earn high school credit. The support from one teacher was important in completing their coursework and motivation. Their kind, consistent, non-judgmental teachers made them feel welcome and capable of completing high school despite being young mothers. According to the participants, college success would not have been possible if they had

not graduated high school. In essence, these academic practices helped them complete high school and graduating high school offered them the opportunity to pursue college.

Theme 1: Parenting and Childcare Accommodations

The participants began their descriptions of AE by narrating the events that led them to enroll into AE. Nine out of 10 participants left the traditional type of high school education and enrolled into AE programs that were either located on their high school campuses at that time or on a different campus. One participant, however, was an exception. Due to problems in her home life, she had dropped out of school in the 8th grade. As a result, prior to her pregnancy, she was already attending AE to recover deficient high school credit.

Most of the participants were unhappy at first about moving into an AE program that had a reputation for the "bad kids." According to some participants, enrolling into AE was not their preference. Tenisha reported that administration at her traditional high school suggested AE on a different campus because their campus' facilities were unsafe for her, and she may fall and hurt herself. Juanita was placed in AE because she was seen by the staff as a "travesty." Nancy attempted to remain in her traditional school but "halfway through after the first semester realized there was no way to make it work;" she eventually volunteered to enroll into AE.

However, while attending AE, many of them realized the benefits and accommodations they received. Tonya was thankful for the private room where she could breastfeed or pump, stating, "They assisted me by giving me another private room, so I could go and pump, 3 times a day for my baby." Theresa and Edna appreciated the

modified schedule of classes that allowed them to leave campus early to be home with their children or go to work. Theresa specifically mentioned, "I would leave early about like between 12:30 or 1 o'clock …daily…so that way…I would go home, …and be with my child," and Edna shared, "It was as you go. You could have done it as fast or as slow as you wanted. Savannah enjoyed being around other teen mothers, "The classes were full of young mothers, and we bonded, and learning parenting skills."

Among the special accommodations they received, the participants reported that having the flexibility to bring their children to school and lenient attendance policies while earning high school credit were the most beneficial. They found it difficult to locate available and affordable childcare but were thankful they did not have to miss school in the event childcare was unavailable. Tenisha commented, "If I didn't have access to childcare, I could bring my baby while we went over my weekly assignments and things like that, so that was so beneficial." Assini et al. (2018) had reported similar findings that the lack of childcare was a major hinderance to school retention among PMT. Maslowsky et al. (2021) also found that subsidized childcare was an opportunity to support teen mothers attain higher education.

The AE programs enabled the participants to complete high school while balancing parenting responsibilities and childcare. Juanita recalled how her math teacher would hold and care for her baby while Juanita finished her classwork. In comparing traditional high school to AE, Nancy reported, "There was no services through the [traditional] school," which eventually led to seek AE that could accommodate her needs

as a young mother. This finding aligns with Modesto's study (2018) where she concluded that daycare in AE and home instruction improved graduation rates for teen mothers.

Home instruction was provided by teachers who delivered class assignments to the PMT who experienced pregnancy-related health issues. Occasionally, these issues prevented them from attending school in person. Other programs provided mailing correspondences for PMT to submit class work. Mail correspondence gave Nancy full availability to care for her child at home while completing high school credit, "It gave me the flexibility to be home with my oldest kiddo." Absences were not counted against them, and they were able to make up work on their own pace. Theresa described the convenience of teacher home visits. The teacher would bring Theresa's assignments to her house and standby to tutor and to wait until Theresa finished her work. She gives credit to AE, "They provided me assistance with this teacher, you know, to help me finish off that grade." Tenisha reported that pediatric visits caused her to miss several class days, but her AE teacher would help her catch up on her work when she returned to school.

Theme 2: Academic Practices for High School Without College Prep

The participants were able to earn high school credits through a variety of academic platforms and course acceleration. Tonya was enrolled in a hybrid format where she attended on-campus instruction two days of the week and spent the rest of the week completing work online. Juanita attended campus classes full-time and completed packets that led to her graduating high school one and a half years earlier that her expected graduation date. Tenisha worked completely at her own pace and met with her

teacher once a week to submit assignments. Nancy and Fortuna submitted their coursework through mail correspondence, and Nancy knew that "the fastest and easiest way was to just finish up through correspondence." The flexibility in these platforms allowed participants to balance parenting responsibilities and quickly earn high school credit.

Coursework requirements were created to help the participants rapidly earn high school credit and consisted of reading material, test-taking, and then moving on to the next unit of study. However, according to the participants, the accelerated method compromised learning. Theresa shared that during home visits, the teacher would give her worksheets to complete and would help if Theresa had any questions. Theresa claimed that there was not any instruction or learning. "It was easy, said Theresa. "I would say it was easy, but I think the downfall of it was that I went into college, with a lot of questions." Tenisha described her math class as a joke stating, "But the math, like I mentioned was kind of a joke. It wasn't challenging or helped me learn in any way." Nancy completed high school before her own graduating class: "I was able to quickly finish things, but it certainly didn't prepare me for anything." These academic practices can be described as a modified curriculum to accelerate high school graduation for credit recovery and advancement.

When asked if they were academically prepared for college, the majority claimed they were not prepared at all or even close. A few, however, did give credit to AE for facilitating high school graduation because without a high school diploma, they would not have been able to enroll into college. The participants felt that the work they received

in AE was "easy" or "zero challenge." Juanita shared that when she got to college, she realized that she "forgot how to study" because in AE it was "just go get it done." Nancy, a straight-A student in high school, regarding AE coursework, "I could've finished it in my sleep." She went on to describe the lack of academic rigor as "sad." Savannah shared the same sentiments. She felt that the mentality of the AE teachers was for PMT to just graduate and that with high school diplomas, teen moms would be "good to go for life."

None of the participants reported receiving quality instruction in AE that contributed to college readiness. Theresa reported, "In that type of environment…it was more easy and not challenging. You know, it just helps you get by." They did not feel that AE helped prepare them for the academic challenges they met in college. Edna and Nancy mentioned that they did not know how to format college papers, and Theresa failed and retook several pre-requisite classes. Their academic experiences in AE were limited to submitting worksheets for grades. This finding corresponds to Brouwer et al., (2018) where participants wished they had received more rigorous education in AE. McGee and Lin (2017) reported AE as a supportive environment for high school completion, and this study confirmed that participants were supported and pushed for high school completion but went into college feeling unprepared for college work.

The academic environment in AE is a topic of concern among literature (Kumm et al., 2020; McGee & Lin, 2020). Studies have indicated that AE is effective in increasing graduation rates for at-risk youth who otherwise would have dropped out if they remained in traditional settings (Espinoza et al., 2019; Reimer & Pangrazio, 2020).

The findings of this study hold true that AE made high school graduation possible for PMT who acknowledged that they may have dropped out if they had not attended.

Theme 3: Increased Levels of Support in College

    All 10 participants experienced unanticipated teen pregnancies. How their parents or families responded to the unplanned pregnancies were not discussed in detail during data collection. The amount of support, meaning housing; finances; and moral support, during pregnancy and in motherhood as it related to their experiences in AE were highly discussed.

    At the time of pregnancy, eight participants lived at home with their parents but did not feel supported by them. Juanita's parents were angry about her pregnancy, and eventually had her marry and move in with the baby's father. Tonya also left home to live with her boyfriend and his parents. Fortuna remained at home, but her parents told her she was to take care of her own educational path. Sue lived with her aunt. Savannah and Edna both married and moved in with their husbands. Nancy's parents moved out of state shortly after she gave birth. Theresa was the only participant who received full support from her parents while she attended AE.

    Teachers were a source of support for most participants. Several of the participants worked mainly with one teacher to complete their high school credits. The participants who received this one-on-one mentorship described their one teacher as "sweet," "kind," "supportive," "reliable and consistent." Teachers were deemed "role models," "non-judgmental," and "just a doll." Tenisha admired her teacher but did not have the same feelings about the administration who she felt stigmatized her and just

wanted her to graduate high school and leave. Juanita shared the same experience. She could only say positive comments about her math teacher who made her feel like she "can do this."

Being in college increased the amount of support the participants received. They felt that their college professors had the mothers' best interests in mind. College professors were noted to be all around helpful and flexible. Some college professors even allowed children to be brought to class if childcare was a problem. Peer support in college also increased. In AE, some of the girls felt stigmatized by their peers but the college environment contained peers who were supportive and helped each other succeed. Some participants felt empowered in study groups, while another participant joined social groups and made friends.

The participants also found college services and government aid to be sources of support. Such services assisted with housing, transportation, tuition, and childcare. Some participants could not recall how they availed of those services but remembered the benefits of receiving aid to get them through college. One participant found it helpful to have a case manager who assisted her in applying for government aid.

The findings indicate that support in AE for the participants were limited to one teacher, some parents, and some family members. Assini et al. (2018) reported that parent support is the number one factor for high school attendance post-partum. Causadias et al. (2018) reported that in teen pregnancy, although family dynamics may change, family support remains high on the predictors for high school completion. Most participants of

this study experienced some support from their families even during unexpected pregnancies. This finding aligns with other studies affirming the importance of support.

Theme 4: Personal Traits and Habits

Major Theme 4 answers subquestion #2: How had those experiences contributed to their college success? This subquestion investigates if there were any connections between the participants' experiences in AE and their college success. The participants valued the opportunity to attend AE because the programs helped them graduate high school which allowed them to enroll into college. However, none of the participants felt that AE gave them college success. They acknowledged that some soft skills in AE, like time-management and the use of technology, helped them get through college, but college success was attributed to their own hard work.

The lack of college preparations in AE presented several challenges to the participants when they entered college. They claimed it was a "very hard transition" and most of them had a hard time with college work. Additionally, balancing both roles of mother and college student was difficult for all participants. In spite of these challenges, the mothers graduated from college.

Based on the findings of this study, AE experiences of special accommodations, accelerated coursework through worksheets, and teacher/family support played somewhat minor roles in completing college as reported by the participants. Instead, they gave credit to their personal traits and habits. All 10 participants stated that college success was possible because they were "self-motivated," "determined," "focused," "responsible," "organized," and other positive descriptive traits. The participants did not

feel that these traits were promoted by AE. Instead, some participants felt that motherhood and the desire to prove to others motivated them to finish college. Gatbonton (2021) suggested similarly that early motherhood in college propelled teen moms to create better futures for their children. Hernandez and Abu Rabia (2017) also found in a similar study that personal drive impacted college completion.

Four participants were confident about their abilities to complete college. They either claimed that prior to pregnancy, they were excellent students in high school, or that they were hard workers at home, taking care of siblings, or kept decent employment. Considering college success and what the participants experienced in AE, it was their personal traits and habits that contributed the most to their abilities to earn a college degree.

Theme 5: Self-Navigation to Locate College Academic Assistance and Finances

The last theme that emerged from the data is the participants' abilities to self-navigate. The term "self-navigate" originated from two participants but was actively performed by all participants. Several shared similar statements, "I did whatever needed to be done," "I still don't know how I did it," and "figuring it out on my own." The terminology used by the participants differed, but they all shared the same sentiment. All 10 participants actively sought to locate sources of academic assistance and finances for college.

For academic assistance, participants reached out to their colleges' tutoring centers, clarified assignments with professors, and joined study groups. Two participants took advantage of the writing centers and math centers. One participant received free

tutoring services and regularly met with college counselors, who she described as, "special counselors that they get you where you are and like lift you to be something more." Another participant received special services to help her obtain materials and supplies for school.

Finances were a challenge for all participants. Each one struggled to manage expenses for daycare, housing, meals, transportation, and tuition. Those that were married shared that even with a spouse, money was a challenge. One participant took seven years to complete college, and another took 10 years to finish. Both participants stated tuition was the major barrier for earlier graduations. Several participants worked multiple jobs seven days a week to afford college.

This theme addresses the participants' overall abilities to transition into college from AE and successfully earn college degrees. Self-navigation was not a theme I encountered in the literature. However, Navarro-Cruz et al. (2020) found that among teen mothers, persistence in higher education was influenced by psychosocial factors and initial commitments. The participants in this study committed to earning college degrees. Navigating through college was something they discovered to do. Therefore, even in an unfamiliar environment where academic and financial challenges could have hindered these women from graduating, they persisted and found the means to complete college.

Summary

Unexpected teen pregnancy was a major life transition for these 10 participants. The information they provided this research study was genuine and unique to them. Their struggles and their successes were their own life stories. Most teen mothers do not

graduate college, but they did. Collectively, their perspectives on AE and college success informed this study with five major themes that answered the following overarching question and two subquestions.

What the study revealed was that the participants felt it was their own personal traits and habits, along with their abilities to self-navigate, that contributed more to transitioning into college than AE academic practices. They credited traits of self-determination, motivation, personal drive, resourcefulness, resilience, and focus to their success. The habits they valued most were effective time management in balancing schoolwork and parenting responsibilities. They defined self-navigating as the ability to find resources for academic assistance and finances for college.

The results of this study gave voice to 10 resilient women who experienced a life-changing event during their adolescent years. Analysis of the data resulted in five major themes that illustrate the greater picture of AE attendance and its connection to college success. Ten women from different walks of life, different backgrounds, different college degrees somehow shared similar experiences in AE, even though their AE program types differed from each other. These similarities are reported in the five emergent themes of this study.

In Chapter 5, I present these themes and how they were best interpreted through Schlossberg's TT. The TT's postulates explain how people adapt to life events, and the theory guided the interpretations of the study's findings. Discussion of the findings considering the transition model and 4S system are also presented in Chapter 5. The objective in Chapter 5 was to make practical sense of the data and present a synthesis of

the findings to produce practical recommendations that AE administrators and policy

makers can use in improving education for PMTs.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore and describe experiences former teen mothers had in AE programs and how those experiences contributed to their college successes. Addressing the stories of women who successfully transitioned from teen mothering to AE enrollment to college-level work was worthy of an investigation because according to several authors like Dowden et al. (2018), Nkosi and Pretorius (2019), Stoner et al. (2019), and Zuilkowsky et al. (2019), most teen mothers drop out of high school. Among those that do graduate, only 2% earn a college degree by the time they are 30 years old (Chase, 2019). Participants of this study addressed what can be done to improve AE programs for teen mothers.

Through one-on-one semistructured interviews, 10 purposively selected participants provided data that underwent qualitative content analysis through the lens of the TT and resulted in five major themes: parenting and childcare accommodations, academic practices, support, personal traits and habits, and self-navigation. Key findings of the study based on research questions suggested that the academic practices AE programs provided participants facilitated a convenient and easy high school completion that opened the opportunity for college enrollment, but did not prepare participants for college level work. Furthermore, traits such as resilience and determination coupled with effective time management and self-navigation were believed by participants to be highly contributory to college success. Findings should prompt a deeper discussion that results in conclusions and recommendations that will lead to social change.

Interpretation of Findings

Emergent themes of this study contribute to this discussion of teen mothers and their educational experiences. Connecting findings of this study to current knowledge not only advances breadth of knowledge but is also necessary for completing sound research and contributing to social change. I present interpretation of findings by revisiting Chapter 2 concepts and discussing them from the perspectives of this study's participants. Additionally, I present findings in the context of the TT. I address life transitions as experienced by PMTs as they navigate their ways to earning college degrees.

AE Reduction of Barriers

PMTs face concerns that negatively affect their education, including parenting responsibilities, stigma, and stress. Challenges noted in the literature were confirmed in this study. Specific parenting challenges were regular and/or unexpected visits to the pediatrician, consistent childcare, and managing their children's elementary education and extracurricular activities. Finding the right balance between parent and academic responsibilities was described as difficult.

When AE programs provide PMTs with accommodations like childcare and flexible schedules, they were able to balance both parent and student responsibilities. Enrolling in AE programs alleviated the burdens of childcare. Childcare is the most helpful accommodation PMTs need to graduate high school (Modesto, 2018; Vincent, 2016). While adolescent motherhood is often a cause for dropping out of high school, AE programs reduce stress factors by providing a comfortable environment with practical measures to assist PMTs in graduating.

This study disconfirmed academic performance as a challenge PMT face. The participants reported that AE coursework was easy, fast, and lacked challenge. AE programs modified the curriculum for convenience in high school credit recovery and completion. Espinoza et al. (2019) said accelerated coursework was a remedy for deficiencies in credit. Participants who missed a significant amount of school days due to pregnancy-related issues recovered credit for either on-time or advanced graduation dates. One disadvantage of accelerating high school graduation, however, was that participants in this study felt unprepared for college. Some participants failed college classes or needed tutoring services to get by.

The barrier of stigma was mitigated through the presence of support systems. In this study, AE support involved one teacher and some family members. One implication might be that stigma and shock of teen pregnancy prevented family members from supporting participants. However, support resources increased in college, where participants felt supported by college professors, student support centers, peer study groups, and government programs.

College Success

Among nonparenting college students, academic performance in college and standardized test scores were high indicators of college success (Abuqaaud & Nassif, 2021; Flanders, 2017; McKinney et al., 2019). This study determined otherwise. Pre-pregnancy college expectations, the desire to prove their successes to others, and personal beliefs and values about college contributed to teen mothers and their college successes (Barr & Simons, 2012; Gatbonton, 2021; McDermott et al., 2021; Navarro-Crus et al.,

2020). In this study, I determined that academic ability was not significant in terms of college success, and instead found that successfully earning a college degree took persistence, determination, and the ability to navigate through higher education.

Prior to pregnancy, not all participants desired to attend college. For some, pregnancy inspired them to earn a college degree to provide a stable future for their child. The reality of becoming a mother and caretaker led to new beliefs and values involving education. For other participants, college was already in their plans. Although motherhood posed challenges and caused them to find alternative paths through high school and into college, they persisted.

Self-determination outweighs academic ability. Although participants felt unprepared for college, they enrolled, determined to earn degrees. They overcame challenges by finding solutions and persisting. Participants proved to others that teen parenting did not prevent them from college success.

Collectively, findings of this study establish that when teen mothers are given chances to succeed in AE programs, they develop motivation when pursuing positive outcomes for themselves and their children. Participants were faced with adolescent pregnancy which could have prevented them from finding confidence in themselves, especially when many drop out of high school. Earning college degrees for participants was not based on their academic abilities but rather their ability to persevere during life transitions from teen mother to college student. AE programs did not prepare them academically for college but helped them graduate high school and prevented them from dropping out. As a result, they were able to overcome barriers and graduate high school.

Findings Related to the TT

The TT involves human responses to life transitions which depend on the characteristcs of the transition, characteristics of pre- and post-transition environment, and the characteristics of the individual in transition. Schlossberg (1989) postulated that perception and acceptance of the new role, routine, and relationship play a significant part in adapting to a transition. This conclusion holds true with the findings of the study. This study revealed that the participants perceived their life changes into motherhood as difficult, hard, and challenging. Not one participant had planned to be a teen mother but had managed to overcome barriers to become successful college graduates. However, they were all aware that transitioning into motherhood was going to change their lives. The accepted their new roles, and just as Schlossberg suggests, acceptance of the transition fosters adaptation.

In reflecting on their new roles, they each believed that a college education was the best option to provide a stable life for their children. They also accepted that being mothers had, to some degree, negatively impacted their high school lives, family lives, and well-being. After becoming pregnant, they were aware of the disruptions that having children was going to be on their education. Their acceptances of the hardships into motherhood did not discourage them. Instead, the characteristics of the transition challenged them. From the challenges, they developed personal traits of resilience to what was and would be difficult for them to do as teen mothers, and they endeavored persistently to keep moving forward in their educational aspirations.

TT's second postulate describes that if support systems are put in place before the transition and maintained after the transition, then people move more smoothly into the adaptation process. The findings of this study indicated that levels of support varied among the participants. During their AE experiences, most participants received support from one main teacher, and some participants had one or two family members to rely on. Only one participant out of 10 was fully supported by all family members from AE into college. While the participants varied in amounts of support in AE, their experiences converged in college where all their resources of support increased.

The increase of support in college can be credited to the participants themselves. They actively sought support from college professors, support centers, peer groups, and government programs. As postulated in the TT, the characteristics of the pre- and post-transition environments of support were in place pre-and post-transition, but also improved as the transition progressed in time. As the sources of support increased, so did the participants' abilities to adapt into higher education and motherhood. Their situations became more manageable as they became more proficient in locating their own support services.

The last postulate TT makes is the idea that coping to adaptation is affected by the characteristics an individual possesses. The sample in this study consisted of women from different lifestyles and walks of life. However, in considering their characteristics, emergent themes suggested that in similar ways, they were all determined, focused, and passionate about earning college degrees. They developed the habit of effective time-management in balancing mommy roles and college student roles. They also self-

navigated their ways through college despite not having any college guidance from AE. These 10 women entered the unfamiliar territory of higher education, unknowing where to begin. They inquired tirelessly and discovered how to enroll into college, registered for classes, and applied for tuition assistance and scholarships. These findings align with Schlossberg's (1989) claim that psychosocial competence impacts transition. What is most impressive about these women is that they did not realize how resilient they were until they became teen mothers. This life experience unlocked personal traits they did not know they had.

The findings of this study manifest the concepts in Schlossberg's transition model (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The model's 3-part phases describe the patterns of transition as approaching the transition, taking stock of coping resources, and taking charge of the new situation. This study manifests the model in two cycles. The first cycle occurred when the sample experienced teen pregnancy and enrollment into AE. The second cycle occurred when the sample became mothers and enrolled into college. In each cycle, the sample experienced the full pattern and then re-cycled into the transition model. Re-cycling is not uncommon since the TT posits that people continuously go through transitions throughout their lifetimes (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The findings, in the context of the model's phases, are discussed by considering both cycles.

In *approaching the transition* during Cycles 1 and 2, the findings indicated that perceiving situations as permanent role changes and realizing the new roles as mothers, the sample approached the transition with positive outlooks and desires to create stable futures for themselves and their children. They realized the contexts of their transitions

and became determined to graduate high school and college. The participants of this study showed a clear example of the way people approach transitions with a positive mindset. Sudden, permanent transitions, when perceived with positive outlooks, appear to be the beginning of healthy coping and smoother transitions to adaption.

In addition, educational pursuits, whether in AE or in college, present certain patterns of classwork-coursework, tests-exams, pass class-fail course, and other similar requirements. The type of transitions in this study draws similarities between AE and college where assimilation into AE and then into college required similar patterns of coping and work ethic in similar environments. The similarities were indicated in the life stories of the sample as they described the work required to graduate AE and the work required to graduate from college. Although the rigor and levels of difficulty greatly increased in college, the work followed patterns enabling the participants to tackle familiar challenges in an unfamiliar setting.

In taking stock of coping resources, the findings of this study indicated that with certain types and levels of resources in each 4S, coping with the transition became manageable. Transitioning through AE and college did not become any less stressful. The situations remained difficult throughout the entire experience but were manageable with resources of support and personal drive. The kinds of practical supports received, like childcare and flexible scheduling, helped balance student-parenting roles. When there are helpful and positive resources in the situation, self, support, and strategies, transition flows more smoothly into the final phase.

In the final phase of the model, *taking charge of the new situation*, the findings of this study indicate that as time progressed and more resources were located, assimilation to the new situation resulted in adaptation. Locating resources requires people to take inventory in the second phase to identify the resources needed to move out of the transition into the last phase, but it is not enough. The last phase is not the end of transition.

The ability to locate resources appears to have initiated from personal drive, motivation, and persistence. The mind frame in which transitions are approached determine the flow of transition, as indicated in the model. Schlossberg's theory (1989) suggests that while the 4S's of a transition impact human response, it is perception and acceptance of the new role, routine, and relationship that play a significant part in adapting to a transition. By this phase, people have gained control of the situation.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study lies in the use of purposive sampling that sought participants who met specific criteria, but sampling technique did not consider participant socioeconomic statuses. Socioeconomic status is known in the literature to influence academic attainments and college completion because of the costs of college and parents' levels of education. During recruitment, it was uncertain if the sample size for this study was going to be obtained. Therefore, participants were accepted into the study shortly after each one responded to the recruitment flyer with no regard towards parents' ability to afford college, parents' college completion, PMT's employment, or PMT's ages during college attendance. These factors were not considered important to the purpose of this

study. Socioeconomic status could have been considered if attempting to create a more homogenous sample.

Furthermore, I did not explore other factors that impact college completion like, participants' lengths of time in AE; their GPA's, standardized test scores, or academic performances prior to pregnancy; college degree types; and length of college attendance. One participant described being an honor roll student prior to pregnancy and then correlated her academic achievements to AE coursework as being easy compared to traditional school coursework. The details of their college programs and academic backgrounds are unknown to this study.

The final limitation to this study is in the life experience of the researcher and the potential biases I may have brought into the analyses and conclusions. As a former teen mother who graduated from AE and earned a college degree, I share similar experiences with the participants. To avoid biases in the study, I maintained an audit trail that recorded and organized my thoughts about the data. I made every effort to ensure that those thoughts were excluded from the analysis.

Recommendations

This study captured the success stories from a special population of women who beat the odds. AE facilitated their high school graduation but failed to prepare them for college. As a result, much time in college was wasted, confusing, and frustrating. For this sample, they persisted, but how many teen mothers drop out because they were unprepared for college? How many enroll into college but decided it was too difficult an endeavor to pursue? It is recommended that further research be conducted among PMT

who enrolled into college but dropped out. It is important to this topic to discover the specific reasons PMT drop out of college. Discovering those reasons for drop out, in combination with the findings of college success can help inform AE programs and colleges about the best ways to increase PMT college success rates.

Another recommendation is to explore the career and college readiness efforts at the AE level. Studies ought to focus on the ways AE can improve not only their own graduation rates but the college graduation rates of their alumni. This study found that AE lacked a curriculum that prepared graduates for college. This study also found that AE lacked college counselors and personnel to guide PMT through the college application process. These deficiencies need to be addressed by future research.

The last recommendation for future studies involves changing the negative perceptions of teen pregnancy, eliminating stigma, and promoting positive perceptions in phase one of the TT model. Positive outlooks in phase one create a positive chain reaction that promotes effective coping along the transition process. I recommend studies be conducted to explore life transition positive perceptions.

Implications

This study implies social change at two main levels: the individual and the AE system. Teen mothers are inundated with the negative consequences of adolescent pregnancy and parenting. Research reports many disadvantages teen mothers experience in their educational, social, and professional lives. While the consequences for teen childbearing do exist for young mothers, there is hope. The results I found in this study imply that teen mothers are determined to complete high school and college. They are

able improve their educational outcomes with assistance in childcare, finances, and college preparedness in academics. Teen mothers have special needs. They need accommodations to help them through high school. Their needs and accommodations might be likened to the special needs of other students that many traditional schools already provide.

For the teen moms in this study, AE is a convenient platform for earning high school credit and a precursor for college success. It is the turning point that can lead to college, given the right tools. Effective AE programs reduce the number of barriers that prevent teen mothers from graduating. This implies that AE programs carry the responsibility of providing PMT with support, accommodations, and college preparation. College preparation is an academic area that AE programs lack. Improvements need to be made in graduating college-ready PMT.

What is postulated in the TT by Schlossberg (1981) is support by the results in my study. The participants' journeys from carefree teen to pregnant teen; from traditional school to alternative; from pregnant teen to young mother; and from young mother in AE to young mother in college illustrate the rapid succession of transition phases and hold true to the theory's phases of coping to adaptation. The participants coped and adapted in cycles that proved successful when they graduated college. They transitioned successfully through their life events and earned college degrees while so many other teen mothers could not.

Conclusions

Teen mothers desire a college education because they believe it will improve their lives and the lives of their children. Teen mothers are well-versed in the challenges that motherhood brings. They live it every day. They transition into a life of balancing acts between student and mother roles, and they locate resources to cope.

Balancing life in AE was the best option for graduating high school. It was an environment that catered to the special needs of young mothers. The accommodations AE provide foster high school completion, and the participants in this study acknowledged those accommodations and were grateful for them. AE did not, however, cater to their needs as incoming college students.

The participants felt unprepared for college, but they were confident they could graduate. Oftentimes, they were unsure of their next steps, but they navigated their ways through the college path and earned their college degrees. Earning undergraduate college degrees took some four years and others it took 10 years, but they all persisted. College success was possible for these 10 women because they believed in the value of college.

In this study I captured the success stories of 10 resilient women who have never shared their stories. The interviews I conducted served as meditative moments of reflection as the participants recalled their hardships and triumphs. They would not hold themselves up on pedestals, but this study has. This study acknowledges the hard work and persistence the participants invested into their lives and into the lives of their precious children. They fight against social stigma, and with this study, create social change.

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Appendix A: Invitation to Participate Recruitment Flyer

Appendix B: Interview Questions

SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

for the study

Alternative High School Education and College Success: Perceptions of Teenage Mothers

Interviewer: Chanda Daggs
Participant's Identifier: _____
Date: _____Start time: _____ End time: _____

Study description:
This qualitative study will describe and interpret the perceptions of mothers who had children between the ages of 13-18 and graduated from both an alternative high school and from college. The interviewees must meet the criteria for this study and are deemed eligible. This document contains the questions that will be asked during the semistructured interview.

Description of the Questions:
Interview questions were based on transition theory's 4S's to describe the participants' transitions from teen with typical responsibilities, to teen mom in high school with pregnancy and parenting responsibilities, to young mom in college with parenting and higher education responsibilities (see Appendix C). Questions relevant to the *situation* are asked in #1ab and #6ab. Questions relevant to *self* are asked in #2 and #7. Questions relevant to *support* are asked in #3 and #8. Questions relevant to *strategies* are asked in #4ab and #9. Questions specific to the study's research questions are asked in #5, #10ab.

The literature and the research questions guided the creation of each question, and Rubin and Rubin's (2012) guidance that participants leave the interview feeling better off than when they began helped with the order that the questions would be asked. Given the emotional nature of this phenomenon, the interview will begin with questions pertaining to college success, so that the participant is given the opportunity to reflect first on her accomplishments before reflecting on teen pregnancy and alternative education.

The Interview Questions:

Before we dig into your experiences, may I have some background information about you?
  a. At what age did you become a mother?
  b. How many months did you attend alternative education?
  c. What was the amount of time between high school graduation and college enrollment?

       d. How long did it take you to finish college?

       e. How many children did you have by college graduation?

1.a. Becoming a mother was a life-transition that gave you a new role. You had college work to take care of as well as parenting your little one(s). Can you tell me how you managed to balance both roles? Walk me through your story from your 1st year of college to graduation. (possible follow-up) 1.b. Before your pregnancy, had you already planned on going to college?

2. Academically, how prepared did you feel you were for college?

3. What help, if any, did you receive in adjusting from high school mom to college mom? Can you describe any specific programs in college that may have helped you?

4.a. What were some of your coping strategies with transitioning from high school to college? 4.b.What about college; what strategies helped you succeed, eventually leading you to graduate?

5. Describe how alternative education affected your college readiness and success.

6.a. Why did you enroll in an alternative high school? (possible follow-up) Can you describe your transition into alternative education? What was that like for you? 6.b. Please describe your educational, social, and emotional experiences in alternative school.

7. In alternative school, please describe the type of student you were.

8. Support is mentioned in several research studies regarding teen mom success. Studies claim that the more a teen mom is supported, the more she will likely graduate from high school. What were your experiences with support through high school?

9. If a pregnant teen, enrolled in alternative education, confused, scared, and discouraged about high school, came to talk to you, what strategies about completing high school would you share with her?

10.a. Looking back, in what ways did alternative education prepare you to be successful in college? 10.b. Can you identify some specific academic practices in the alternative setting that you think were most helpful in getting you through college?

Appendix C: Categorized Interview Questions Based on 4S's

	College	Alternative Education
SITUATION	1.a. Becoming a mother was a life-transition that gave you a new role. You had college work to take care of as well as parenting your little one(s). Can you tell me how you managed to balance both roles? Walk me through your story from your 1st year of college to graduation. (Possible follow-up questions) 1.b. Before your pregnancy, had you already planned on going to college?	6.a. Why did you enroll in an alternative high school? (possible follow-up) Can you describe your transition into alternative education? What was that like for you? 6.b. Please describe your educational, social, and emotional experiences in alternative school.
SELF	2. Academically, how prepared did you feel you were for college?	7. In alternative school, please describe the type of student you were.
SUPPORT	3. What help, if any, did you receive in adjusting from high school mom to college mom? Can you describe any specific programs in college that may have helped you?	8. Support is mentioned in several research studies regarding teen mom success. Studies claim that the more a teen mom is supported, the more she will likely graduate from high school. What were your experiences with support through high school?
STRATEGIES	4.a. What were some of your coping strategies with transitioning from high school to college? 4.b. What about college; what strategies helped you succeed, eventually leading you to graduate?	9. If a pregnant teen, enrolled in AE, confused, scared, and discouraged about high school, came to talk to you, what strategies about completing high school would you share with her?
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	5. Describe how alternative education affected your college readiness and success.	10.a. Looking back, in what ways did AE prepare you to be successful in college? 10.b. Can you identify some specific academic practices in the academic setting that you think were most helpful in getting you through college?