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The Experiences of Post Secondary School Completion of Academically Talented African American Teenaged Parents

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Abstract

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by

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MA, Columbia College, 2008

BS, South Carolina State University, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Teen pregnancy and parenting are cited as the reasons 1 in 3 teens drop out of high school. For African American teenagers, the drop-out rate is slightly higher, with 38% of teen parents leaving high school without a diploma. Living in impoverished communities with substandard educational facilities and opportunities, academically talented African American teen mothers must make choices about education and parenting. Pregnant teens must consider their future and decide whether to keep their baby, to complete high school or dropout, and if to attend a postsecondary institute. The problem is the low college attendance and graduation rate for parenting teens who were identified as academically talented in high school. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and describe the lived experiences of 8 academically talented African American women currently between 21 and 30 years of age who were pregnant while teenagers in high school using the lens of Erikson's psychosocial development theory. Participants completed a questionnaire, and the data were analyzed using NVivo software. Findings included participant descriptions of the key influences on their postsecondary education decisions and outcomes. The results of this study support the need for multiple forms of support, including familial, institutional, and societal, as major contributors to the participants' successes. This study may inform positive social change by providing guidance on how teen parents can reach their full academic and employment potential.

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Table of Contents

iv

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Teenagers who choose pregnancy and parenting have had a difficult time completing high school and attending college (Darra et al., 2020; Plascensia, 2022). Sixty-two percent of teen pregnancies are unplanned (Bogan, 2020). There is a relationship between teen pregnancy, teen parenting, and academic failure regardless of the student's academic ability before the pregnancy (Kindu et al., 2024). The media has negatively depicted pregnant and parenting teenagers as impoverished, disadvantaged, and uneducated, and illuminated the negative consequences of becoming a teen parent (Brindis et al., 2020; Harding et al., 2020). Social service and helping agencies have missions to assist disadvantaged populations; however, at times pregnant and parenting teens were treated as disadvantaged clients, minimized to case numbers, and humiliated (SmithBattle et al., 2020; Toft, 2020). Although the high school drop-out rate of pregnant and parenting teens was high, members of the phenomenon did not share the same negative opinions of the teen pregnancy experience the media portrays (Nimato, 2022). Teen parents had points of view and insights about teen parenting that differed from the research, media, and social agencies (Balanda-Baldyga et al., 2020; Morris, 23). Teen parent opinions also differed in terms of thoughts and perceptions concerning the decisions to complete school and attend postsecondary institutes (Harding et al., 2020).

Background

Although the number of American teens becoming pregnant continued to decline from the high point of the 1950s (Goodreau et al., 2022), the United States of America

remained the leader in the teen pregnancy rate of the Western industrialized countries

(World Population Review, 2021), and within the United States, the South has the most

cases of any of the country's regions (Yee et al., 2019). In 2018, the birth rate for teens

aged 15 to 19 was 17.4 per 1,000 females, and 16.6 per 1,000 females in 2019 (Ramirez

& Watson, 2021), down from 89.1 births per 1,000 females in 1960 (Nyoni, S.P. &

Nyoni, T, 2023). Teenaged pregnancy was cited as the reason only half of parenting

teens graduate from high school (Maslowski et al., 2022) compared to a graduation rate

of 90% for women who prolong childbearing until they are older (Manlove, 2018). Not

completing high school has been identified as both societal and economic areas of

concern for parenting teens (Macchia et al., 2021). Students drop out for a myriad of

reasons, and warning signs for these future behaviors can be seen as early as elementary

school. Macchia et al. (2021) cited Rumberg (2011) and Beatty (2011), in identifying

risk factors for future dropouts as family structure, ethnicity, race, language, and the

family's socioeconomic status.

Harding et al. (2022) cited a correlation between teen pregnancy, high school

attendance, and graduation for parenting teens. Pregnancy reduces the probability of teen

mothers completing high school (Darra et al., 2020: Plascenia, 2022). Teen mothers had

completed the requirements to receive a high school diploma by age 22, while 90% of

women who had delayed having children had diplomas (Harding et al., 2020). Parenting

students of any age enrolled in secondary school are 50% more likely to be female than

male, and 22% are African American women. (Goldrick et al., 2020). Though the

number of women who became mothers as teens has decreased in recent years, fewer

than 2% obtained college degrees before age 30 (American SPCC, 2024). This lowered

educational attainment also affected the mom's ability to earn wages, (Bae, 2020)

Teenagers becoming pregnant and parents was not a new phenomenon, nor was it

isolated to the United States. The United States had the highest teen pregnancy rate of all

the Western industrialized countries, although the numbers were declining (Blake, 2023).

In 1960, statistical data reported the teen pregnancy rate of 89.1 births per 1,000 females

in comparison to 26.5 births per 1,000 females in 2013 (Nyoni, SP & Nyoni, T, 2023).

Nkhoma et al., in 2020 published statistical data from the World Health Organization

(WHO) the following statistics; globally 21 million 15 to 19 year old girls gave birth

annually, and of this number 2.5 million were under 16 years old.

Even though fewer infant births were reported to teenage women in the 21st

century than in the mid to end of the 20th century, the lifestyle and family development

of the teen parent population was remarkably of poorer quality (Harding et al., 2020).

Marriage remained a controversial option for pregnant adolescents, (Johnson-Dahl,

2020); adolescence is defined as between 10 and19 years of age (Nkhoma et al., 2020).

Usually forced and often with little or no consideration to protect the physical or mental

health of the teen or adolescent mother, adolescent marriages were performed to cover

rape and subsequent pregnancy, to cover pregnancy, and to protect the religious standing

of the father (Ochieng, 2020).

The traditional family of a wife and mother who stayed home and raised the

children, and a husband and father who went to work and supported the family is

declining (Chambers & Gracia, 2021; Schmidt et al., 2023). As a married stay-at-home

mom, teen mothers would not have been focused on completing an education, nor was there a concern with entering the job market, developing employment skills, or having to provide for their family (Johnson-Dahl, 2020; Schmidt et al., 2023). As a single mom, there would be no husband or father to assume financial responsibility for the mom and their children (Nkhoma et al., 2020). There is no creation of a family, defined as mother, father, children, blood relatives, adoptees, husband, and wife (Chambers & Gracia, 2021), and the subsequent change in the marital status that would have obscured the age of the mother (Ochieng,2020).

There has been a shift in social behavior that coincides with an increase in the number of pregnant and parenting teens choosing to remain single or marriage was not an option (Maslowsky et al., 2021; Sevareid et al., 20023; Turkdogan, 2021). Illegitimacy, the consensual sexual union without the benefit of marriage or wedlock resulting in birth, became a social concern as rates in America rose and mothers looked to social service agencies for assistance (Wall, 2023). The African American illegitimate birth rate in 2018 was 69.4%, compared to 39.6% of all American births, 68.2 % American Indian/Alaska Natives births, 51.8% Hispanic births, 28.2% Caucasian (Clegg, 2022), even as the national birth rates were declining (Osterman et al., 2020). The 2021 birth rate for teenagers aged 15 to19, was 13.9 per 1000 births, a decrease of 7% from the previous year, 2019, and 67% from 2007 (Ostermanm 2020). Single-parent teens were the number of teens who became parents outside of marriage, gave birth rather than terminated the pregnancy, and kept the baby instead of offering the child for adoption (Kroese et al., 2021a) Without a husband to provide for the mother and the child, social

service agencies were tasked with the responsibility of providing assistance (Wali, 2023, Krose et al., 2021a).

The challenges presented for teen mothers included the disruption of relationships, isolation, battles with self-esteem, marital status concerns, and complications in attending and completing high school (Blake, 2023; Johnson-Dahl, 2020). 21st-century teen parents faced those same challenges with changed educational expectations (Blake, 2023; Goodreau et al 2020, Johnson-Dahl, 2020). Marriage allowed early 20th-century teen mothers to not be concerned about their education or employment outside of the home because the husband was the provider (Kroese et al, 2021a; Schmidt et al., 2023; Wall, 2023 As a married woman, the teen mother would be provided for, and societal expectations were that she remain at home and care for her family. School was no longer a necessity or expectation (DiNallo & Oesch, 2023; Schmidt et al., 2023).

The shift in the social behavior of the country created an environment where unwed pregnant teens were choosing to remain single or marriage was not an option (Ladner, 2020; Schmidt et al., 2023). The decision to remain single and raise the unborn child created what became known as the single-parent household (Kroese et al., 2021b), or single-mother home, a female-headed family system where the biological father is not present physically in the home, and may or may not offer assistance caring and providing for the child (Wood, 2021). Without the benefit of a husband to provide for their financial needs, single mothers looked to social service agencies for assistance in supplying the needs of their children (Kroese et al., 2021). As the number of illegitimate births rose, societal concern increased along with the rise in the number of unmarried

teen mothers requiring assistance (Kroese et al., 2021a,b; Nkhoma et al., 2020). Social

conversations focused on the age of the mothers, the cost to taxpayers, and the link

between early parenthood, educational attainment, and poverty (Goodreau et al. 2020;

Kroese et al, 2020: Nyoni, SP, & Nyoni, T.; 2023). Teen pregnancy was framed as a

social (Goodreau et al., 2022; Nyoni, SP & Nyoni, T, 2023) and public health issue

(Goldrick et al., 2020; Maslowsky et al., 2022), and the negative media imagery of teen

pregnancy and parenting focused on African Americans (Brindis, 2020).

Researchers linked this phenomenon to poverty, cultural differences, and a

disparity in services offered as minority teenagers chose to deliver rather than terminate

their pregnancies (Johnson-Dahl, 2020). Teen pregnancy and parenting interfered with

the ability to complete high school and attend college (Goodreau et al, 2020; Schmidt et

al., 2023) which directly affected employability (Goodreau, et al., 2020; Popoola, 2021).

Without the minimum of a high school education, and oftentimes with only a high school

education, parenting teens struggled in the attempt to secure employment sufficient for

financial stability and independence (Bae, 2020; Blake, 2023; Diabelkova et al., 2023).

The struggle resulted in low socioeconomic income levels, low-wage jobs with no

security, and long periods of unemployment (Bae, 2020; Macchia et al., 2021). Limited

incomes increased the dependency on government assistance and fostered a lifestyle of

poverty and subsequent teen births (Bae, 2020; Blake, 2023: Macchia et al. 2021). Living

in impoverished environments and a single-parent home, parenting teens were predicted

to live a life dependent on government assistance (Bae, 2020; Macchia et al, 2021;

Popoola, 2021). The cycles of poverty were difficult to break and early educational

interventions offered the most hope and were the most effective in breaking the cycles (Matziarak, 2021; Munir et al. 2022; Silva-Laya et al., 2020). African American women and teens were disproportionately affected by cyclic poverty (Johnson-Dahl; 2020; Ochieng, 2009). Dropping out of high school perpetuated these cycles and hindered steps toward self-sufficiency (Harding et al., 2022; Hua, 2023). Government assistance required recipients to work to be able to receive temporary benefits, offering temporary support for food, housing, medical, and childcare (Greibrok, 2023: Macaluso, 2021). Non-Hispanic white teens are less likely to receive societal disapproval (Le, 2020) are more likely to come from middle-class, suburban, two-parent families, and are less likely to terminate pregnancies than minority teens (Jones, 2020).

Problem Statement

Teenage pregnancy is not a new phenomenon in America. America has had the highest teen pregnancy rate of the Western industrialized countries since the 1950s (Blake, 2023; Brindis et al, 2020). Teen pregnancy has been considered to be an American public health issue since the 1950s when pregnant teens began choosing to remain single and parent rather than marry (Cohen, 2024: Macchia et al., 2021; Wall, 2023). Pregnant and parenting teens looked to the government for financial assistance to provide for their children in the absence of fathers and husbands (Kroese et al., 2021a,b; Nkhoma et al., 2020). Poverty, education attainment, and socioeconomic levels were believed to be indicators in the incidences of teen pregnancy (Blake, 2023; Johnson-Dahl, 2020).

Since the 1950s, African American parenting teens had a higher high school drop-out rate (Blake, 2023; Cohen, 2024; Love, 2023) and a lower post-secondary school attendance rate than Caucasian Americans (Love, 2023). Teen pregnancy and teen parenting were the reason almost 50% of Black teen mothers dropped out of high school compared to 25% of white teens (Love, 2023). Teen parents had a difficult time completing high school and attending college, even when students were academically capable (Blake, 2023; Love, 2023). Harding et al., (2022) and Blake (2023) documented the correlation between teen pregnancy, teen parenting, and the high school dropout rate. Traditional school education programs were not effective in providing pregnant and parenting teens the special and additional support necessary for the successful completion of high school and preparation for college attendance (Bogan et al., 2020; Harding et al., 2020; Hua, 2023). The problem to be addressed by this study was the low attendance and graduation rate of academically talented (Williams & Cholewa, 2023) African American women who became parents as high school teenagers.

Purpose of the Study

The media representation of teen parents did not always match how members of the phenomena viewed themselves (Brindis et al., 2020; Harding et al., 2020). Teen mothers often were not asked by the media, society, social service agencies, or educators about their perception of their situation and circumstance, and when asked, the answers provided often did not match those stated as societal norms for the phenomena (Balanda-Baldyga et al., 2020; Morris, 2023; Nimato, 2022).

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the descriptions of academically talented African American teenagers who became pregnant and parents while still in high school regarding factors that influenced their decisions around their high school graduation and post-secondary school attendance. The explanations of the participants provided insight into the phenomena and expanded the body of knowledge of the issues and challenges faced by these young women (Hancock et al., 2021). Research participants were allowed to describe thoughts and feelings while pondering education options (Hancock et al., 2021, Small & Calarco, 2022). I provided a voice for the teen pregnancy and parenting population that comes from the experience of being a teen mom. I allowed the participants to express opinions and perceptions of what it was like to be a pregnant and parenting teen while filling the void in the literature that is the voice of persons who experienced the phenomena. I explored the influences that made accomplishing school a struggle, and in some cases, an impossibility. I described the individual and shared perceptions of the triumphs and trials as the teen mothers made decisions regarding teen pregnancy, teen parenting, and education.

It was important for parents, the community, educators, and social service workers to hear the description of what it is like to be pregnant and a parent while still a teen from members of that population. The accounts from the collected data revealed the perspective and points of view of phenomena participants. Not all teen mothers perceive their pregnancy or their teen parenting as troubling, a bad decision, or a societal problem as often portrayed in the media (Feasey, 2023). Hearing the personal testimonies of individuals affected by the phenomena could enlighten teens who were currently

pregnant and parenting as veteran participants shared a voice and opinions through descriptive stories and perspectives Feasey, 2023; Stroble, 2023). The personal perspectives provided readers with a firsthand account of decisions, emotions, thoughts, challenges, and successes.. Once analyzed, the shared perspectives have the potential to influence future decisions about teen pregnancy, teen parenting, and education (Allsop et al., 2022). Members of society, including educators, local businessmen, politicians, and those persons whose job it is to set, maintain, and monitor public policy are informed having heard the perspective of these members of the teen pregnancy and parenting phenomena (Hancock et al. 2021; Small & Calarco, 2022). This study provided women who were pregnant and parents as high school teenagers the opportunity to describe their experiences, educate society, and encourage other pregnant and parenting teens. The members of the phenomena were not alone and could encourage each other and learn advocacy skills.

Research Question

The primary research question was: what factors impacted post-secondary school attendance for academically talented African American women who became parents as high school teenagers?

Participants were asked to:

1.   Describe perceived barriers academically talented African-American pregnant and parenting high school teens overcome to continue a post-secondary education.

2.   Describe influences that contributed to the decision to attend post-secondary institutes for academically talented African-American women who became pregnant and mothers as high school teenagers.

Definitions

Academic success: the ability to meet the academic expectations of an institution measured against the academic standing and progress of other students toward an academic goal, often grades and GPA (Song, 2021).

Academically talented/high achieving: students testing in the top 25% nationally on the ACT and SAT assessments and GPAs (Williams & Cholewa, 2024).

Adolescent/adolescence: children between 10-19 (Nkhoma, et al., 2020); ages 15-19 (Brindis et al., 2020).

Cycles of poverty: situations where at least three generations of a family are impoverished; low income, poorly educated, at risk, negatively stereotyped, with little to no expectations to improve (Williams, 2023).

Family: defined as mother, father, children, blood relatives, adoptees, husband and wife (Chambers & Gracia, 2021); a complex social system, traditional family-heterosexual, stable, cohabitating, monogamous, and nuclear (Simpson, 2020).

Gifted students: high cognitive ability; superior performance when compared to peers (Worrell et al, 2019); students with high achievement capacity in leadership, art, creativity, intelligence, or academia (Theodore et al., 2024).

Illegitimacy/illegitimate children: Children born to parents who are not married to each other at the time of the birth (Fitria et al., 2024; Wall, 2023); children born out of wedlock (Fitria et al., 2024).

Shot-gun wedding/marriage: Forced marriage because of pregnancy of an unmarried woman (Sah & Mahendru, 2022).

Single parent/parenting teen - unmarried teenager remains unmarried after the birth of the baby, (Kroese et al., 2021a; Wood, 2021).

Teenaged/teenager: a young person usually between the ages of 15 to 19 (Nkhoma et al. 2020; Ramirez & Watson. 2021).

Teenaged pregnancy/teen mom, young women aged 15 to 19 who became pregnant (Harding et al., 2022); public health and social problem (Sah & Mahendru, 2022).

Title 1 schools: classification based on student socioeconomic level, at least 40% of students receive reduced or free lunch (Mikesell, 2020).

Traditional family: consists of heterosexual couples, and persons who are related by blood, marriage, or adoption 21st-century families also include same-sex partners as parents (Smocked & Schwartz, 2020; Ulferts, 2020), blended families, step families, and single parents.

Summary

America's teenage and unmarried girls becoming pregnant and parenting has been a long-standing phenomenon in the United States. Until the mid-1950s, the majority of these pregnancies resulted in a marriage and the creation of a family. The second half of

the 20th century saw a rise in the number of teen births to single females who remained single after the child's birth. Marriage offered a protective covering that obscured the mother's age and educational attainment. The norm was the father and husband provided for the family, and the mother and newlywed wife cared for the home and the children.

The latter half of the 1950s witnessed the number of teen births to unmarried and single teens rise. As the single moms looked to the government for assistance, the age and education of the mothers at the time of the birth were now being tracked as the atinumber of births rose. Teen mothers were challenged with the disruption of relationships, challenges with self-esteem, and high school attendance and completion. Although the number of births to teen mothers has declined dramatically since its' highest numbers in the 1950s, pregnancy has been cited as the reason for one in two teens dropping out of high school (Maslowski et al., 2022). Fewer than 2% of parenting teens, parents before they were 18, had completed college before turning 30 (American SPCC, 2024).

The purpose of this qualitative case study was for academically talented African American women who experienced the teen pregnancy phenomena as high school students to describe factors that influenced high school graduation and post-secondary school attendance. Participants reflected on those experiences and how their decisions and ability to complete high school and attend college had been affected. The current literature is replete with the numbers of teens who became pregnant while in high school and their completed levels of education, however, data on their experiences and their perceptions during those experiences have been limited. The study had as its aim to

describe perceived barriers that needed to be overcome and list and explain influences

that contributed to the decision to attend post-secondary school.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19 years gave birth to 305,420 babies in 2012 (Akella & Jordan, 2015). Pregnancy and parenting have been cited as the reasons 1 in 3 teens dropped out of high school (Basch, 2011; Shuger, 2012). While 33% of all high school dropouts have been pregnant or parenting, fewer than 40% of pregnant and parenting teens have completed high school (Shuger, 2012). Students who did not attend college or complete high school have not been prepared to enter the local, national, or global workforce except in low-skilled and low paying positions (Davis, 2014). These positions have had limited opportunities for advancement (Davis, 2014; Lee, 2007). Without the education and skills necessary to earn an income adequate for financial self-sufficiency (Hong, 2013), pregnant and parenting teens have had to depend on government assistance to supplement and provide for the family (Bissell, 2000; Lee, 2007; Stout & Le, 2012).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe and explain factors that have impacted post-secondary school attendance for teen parents. The cohort of African American women in this study had been identified as academically talented in high school when they became pregnant. Their point of view was reflective of women who had experienced the phenomena and could describe and explain what those events were like. Smyth and Anderson(2014), SmithBattle (2006), Lee (2007), Roxas (2008), and Shuger (2012) have documented that pregnant and parenting teens have struggled to complete school.

In this study, I illuminated the thoughts, challenges, victories, and perceptions of African American women who had been pregnant and parents as high school teenagers and provided insight into their home and school environments. The participants shared experiences, explained struggles and triumphs, and provided insight into what it was like being pregnant and a teen aged parent, and how this has affected the ability to attend college. In this study, I highlighted the challenges and victories of teen mothers who have shared descriptions of perceived barriers and influences surrounding the student teen parenting circumstance. Participants in this study expressed thoughts, feelings, concerns and confidences about school, relationships, support, the future, and parenting.

Teen Pregnancy History

Teen pregnancy and teen parenting have often been used to describe single girls and women between the ages of 15 and 19, who were pregnant and parenting as teens (Furstenbeg, 2003; Vejar, 2010). Teen parents have been depicted as uneducated, poor (Akella & Jordan, 2015; Dahl, 2010; Lee, 2007; Roxas, 2008), and unmarried (Hayford et al., 2014). Teenage girls and women becoming mothers has been happening for centuries (Dahl, 2010). Ancient Rome, the early Catholic Church, old world England and the newly formed America has had in place laws that made the legal age for marriage as young as 12 for girls and 14 for boys, the purpose was to start a family (Dahl, 2010). In the early history of America through the early 20th century, it was customary for brides to be teenagers and become mothers after the marriage (Dahl, 2010).

Since the inception of the U.S. Census Bureau *Statistical Abstract*, the United States has tracked and recorded the number of births, deaths, marriages, and divorces,

along with other statistical data concerning the American population (U.S. Census

Bureau, 2015). The early Statistical Abstracts specifically recorded the number of births,

the race of the mother, and the legitimacy of the birth, which referred to the marital status

of the mother at the time of the birth (Furstenberg, 2003; U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). The

abstract listed children born to an unmarried mother as born out of wedlock, illegitimate,

or as bastard (Furstenberg, 2003; & Goode, 1961; U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). In its early

years the age of the mother and educational attainment were not being tracked because

the majority of out of wedlock pregnancies resulted in a marriage (Furstenberg, 2003;

Goode, 1961; Patterson, 2015; U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

Statistical data from the U.S. Census Bureau reported 54.1 births out of every

1,000 had been born to teenage girls between 15 and 19 years of age in 1940, for 1945

there were 51.1 births per 1,000 girls, and 81.6 births in 1,000 for 1950. The highest

recorded number of births was in 1957 and was recorded at 96.1 births per 1,000

girls(Goode, 1961; Farber, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). The late 1950's continued

to have high numbers of teenage births, as the number of marriages had begun to decline

(Boonstra, 1996; Furstenberg, 2003; Hayford et al., 2014). The number of illegitimate

births continued to rise and pregnant teens were choosing not to keep their children and

not marry (Hayford et al., 2014; McLanahan & Jencks, 2015). The focus of the statistical

data collected shifted from the marital status of the mother to age (Basch, 2011,

Patterson, 2012).

The teen birth rate in America has been drastically reduced in recent years,

although the United States has remained the leader of the post-industrialized countries

(SmithBattle, 2012; Cox et al., 2014). The National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) has reported the teen birth rate for 15-year-olds has dropped from 17.9 births per 1,000 females in 1991 to 5.4 births per 1,000 females in 2012, for 16 year olds the 1991 rate of 36.9 births per 1,000 females fell to 12.9 births, and for 17 year olds the 1991 rate of 60.6 births per 1,000 females fell to 23.7 births (Cox et al., 2014). From 1960 to 2013, the rate of teen births to 15 to19-year-olds fell from 89.1 births to a record low of 26.5 (Kappeler, 2015).

Middle, junior, and high schools have been offered a myriad of prevention programs with a diverse range of success (Cox et al., 2014). Herman, Waterhouse, and Chiquoine (2011) has conducted research on the Baby Think It Over (BTIO) computerized infant simulator. BTIO are life-sized computerized dolls that have been programmed to mimic the crying patterns and behaviors of newborns. BTIO units were individually assigned to students who were to spend time with the simulators and respond to the baby's needs as the mother or primary care giver would have (deAnda, 2006; Herman et al., 2011). One purpose of the infant simulators was to increase student knowledge and understanding of the responsibility and time commitment required to care for newborn and infant babies (Brinkman et al., 2010; Herman et al., 2011). Infant simulators were to be integrated into a pregnancy prevention curriculum with a second objective being to encourage teenagers to post-pone pregnancy (Brinkman et al., 2010; Herman et al., 011). The 2006 to 2010 data from the NSFG reported 91% of female teenagers between 15 to 17 years of age had been formally provided birth control education (Cox et al., 2014).

Unwed Mothers

The structure of the American family underwent changes in the 1940s (Basch, 2011; Gibson-Davis, 2011). World War II had ended and sparked the beginning of the shift in America's social, political and economic structures (Enoch, 2013). Women who had entered the workforce in support of the war effort remained employed, and the children continued to be cared for by someone other than the mother (Enoch, 2012). Teenagers continued to become pregnant, but marriage was not always the resolution, and the divorce rate rose (Bianchi, 2011; Dahl, 2010). Birth control, birth control centers and abortions were legalized (Toscano, & Reiter, 2013).

Gibson-Davis (2011) wrote the changing formation of the American family in the 1950s illuminated the age and marital status of unmarried mothers. Societies' altered point of view had created a need for social service agencies to assist in providing aid to these newly created single parent homes (Basch, 2011; Gibson-Davis, 2011). Between 1930 and the early 1970s, 50% of unmarried and pregnant women had gotten married (Bachu, 1999; Dahl, 2010; Knab, 2006). These *shotgun marriages* or forced weddings due to pregnancy (Baranowska-Rataj, 2014; Knab, 2006; Furstenberg, 2003), had been the societal expectation following an out-of-wedlock pregnancy (Akerlof et al., 1996; Baranowska-Rataj, 2014). As a married woman, teenage mothers had been protected from the harsh criticisms and negative stigma placed by society (Furstenberg, 2003; Roxas, 2008), and the disruptions of their relationships, the isolation and battles with low self-esteem, and the pressure to complete school (SmithBattle, 2006; Hobart, 1962; & Roxas, 2008). Marriage, the legalized commitment and bond between two people

(Gurman, 2008; Hayford et al., 2014), and the creation of a family were thought to be a guarantee the mother would not have to raise the baby alone as a single parent.

Marriage was not always a viable option for all pregnant and parenting teens in the late 20th century (Hayford et al., 2014; Patterson, 2015). Teen pregnancies that resulted in a marriage had placed the financial responsibility for the wife and child on the husband and remained a nonsocial issue (SmithBattle, 2012). Single teenage mothers began to look to various social agencies for assistance making the phenomena a societal concern (Bute & Russell, 2012; Furstenberg, 2003; Hayford et al., 2014; Patterson, 2015; SmithBattle, 2012). Marriage obscured the age of the mother and the illegitimacy of the conception (Furstenberg, 2003; Hayford et al., 2014). Single parenthood and the need for taxpayer dollars to subsidize the family forced social service agencies to become cognizant of the mothers' age (Bute & Russell, 2012).

Prior to World War II an illegitimate child had been viewed as the by-product of the unwed mothers' poverty and a lack of education (Heeb, & Gutjahr, 2012; Ozbeklik, 2014). As the number of teen pregnancies rose following the war, the attitude of the American public toward teenage mothers had shifted (Ozbeklik, 2014). Post WWII the number of unmarried and working-class women becoming pregnant and bearing children had continued to rise and the societal attitude had attributed the behaviors of the mothers on psychological, social and emotional factors in the lives of the teenage women (Bute & Russell, 2012; Feasey, 2012; SmithBattle, 2012). The new negative labels attached to the phenomena were unfit, delinquents, and troubled teens (Bute & Russell, 2012; Feasey, 2012).

Changing Family Dynamics

The appearance of the American family has been changing over the last 60 years (Bianchi, 2011). The traditional family unit was defined as married heterosexual adults who live in the same house and are raising biological children (Archard, 2012; Goldscheide, 2014). Traditional marriages were described as stable and married couples had stayed together, resulting in low divorce rates (Fasang, & Raab, 2014). Fathers were providing the family's financial support, and women maintained the home (Bianchi, 2011; Cherlin, 2012). Traditional families were still very much intact and the dominant household structure in the United States in the 1950s (Bianchi, 2011).

The traditional family configuration had positioned the father and husband as the head of the family (Archard, 2012; Goldscheide, 2014). The husband was the provider and usually worked outside of the home (Bianchi, 2011; Riley, 2003; Weitzman, 1975). The primary responsibility of the wife and mother was to take care of her husband, her children, to manage the home (Bianchi, 2011; Cherlin, 2102). Married woman usually did not work outside of the home (Bianchi, 2011; Diekman, Goodfriend, & Goodwin, 2004; Riley, 2003). The children in a traditional family were the biological children of the married couple (Archard, 2012; Goldscheide, 2014).

The 21st century definition of family has been expanded to include blended families (Archard, 2012), step families (Archard, 2012; Purswell & Dillman Taylor, 2013) same-sex parent families (Archard, 2012; Massey et al., 2013), and single parent families (Archard, 2012). The parents may or may not be married (Archard, 2012). Couples were defined as two people who agreed to enter a long term and committed

relationship that was not necessarily legally sanctioned but function as a married couple (Massey et al., 2013). Blended families combined two parents, each with at least one child from another relationship who lives at least part time with the couple (Shapiro, 2014). Step-families united two adults with one parent having at least one child or children living with them part time or full time (Purswell & Dillman Taylor, 2013). Same sex families were defined as both parents being the same-sex (Prickett, Martin-Storey, & Crosnoe, 2015). Single parent families were families with one parent, either the mother or the father of the child, and the child or children (Bianchi, 2011).

Teen parents who chose to remain single contributed to the changing look of the family (Bianchi, 2011). As the country entered the 1960's, teen pregnancy and parenting had entered the infant stages of being viewed as a societal issue (Bianchi, 2011; Furstenberg, 2003; Moynihan, 1965; Patterson, 2012; Usdansky, 2003). As the number of unmarried pregnant teens continued to rise, so did the number of females who were choosing to remain single parents (Patterson, 2012; Usdansky, 2008). In 1965 Moynihan released the controversial report "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action", in which was documented the plight of the Negro American family (Moynihan, 1965). Moynihan cited in the 48 pages of text (Patterson, 2015) that almost 25% of Negro families were being headed by females, 25% of Negro marriages were ending in divorce, and 25% of all Negro babies were being born illegitimately (McLanahan & Jencks, 2015; Moynihan, 1965; Patterson, 2015). The report, the first governmental commissioned report to evaluate the plight of the Negro family, had illuminated the problems and struggles in the African American community (Cove, 2010). The Moynihan Report

showed the discouraging numbers of pregnant and teen parents, and single parent homes (McLanahan & Jencks, 2015; Moynihan, 1965; Patterson 2015; Seigel & Cove, 2010). The report highlighted the inability of African American men to take care of families and had indicated the then current socio-economic and political climate of the country was to blame (Moynihan, 1965; Patterson, 2015; Seigel & Cove, 2010). Moynihan suggested the American slavery legacy and the discriminatory economic and hiring practices targeted toward the Negro male as the major contributing factors (Seigel & Cove, 2010; Moynihan, 1965).

The Moynihan Report had acknowledged the limitations of the accuracy of the data collection methods for certain numbers provided in the report (Moynihan, 1965; Patterson, 2012). The report had included data that claimed Negro teens became pregnant and parents at a much higher rate than any other ethnic group (Moynihan, 1965; Patterson, 2012). This data had been corroborated by the US Census Bureau Statistical Abstract, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (McLanahan & Jencks, 2015; Patterson 2015).

Education

Students in America have been socialized to believe education is the key to success (Rasul, Abd Rauf, Mansor, & Pvanasvaran, 2012). Students have been told college is the gateway into the American and global workforce (Davis, 2014; Rasul et al., 2012), self-reliance and the American Dream (Stout & Le, 2012). Without completing high school or attending college, students have found themselves unprepared to enter the job market (Rasul et al., 2012; SmithBattle, 2012). The 60% of parenting teens who have

not completed high school (Shuger, 2012) do not have the educational requirement to become successful employees in jobs and careers where enough money to support a family could be made, creating a dependency on government assistance (Bute & Russell, 2012; Lee, 2007; SmithBattle, 2012).

Teen pregnancy and parenting has been perceived and advertised as a social problem that is the result of poor decision making by the mothers and the babies are mistakes (Bissel, 2000; Stout & Le, 2012). The media and the literature have supported the ideology that underachieving teens chose parenting (Bute & Russell, 2012; Stevens-Simon and Lowry, 1995). A lifetime of poverty, low paying jobs and long periods of has been the predicted future for parenting teens (Heeb & Gutjahr, 2012; Lee, 2007; SmithBattle, 2012). Teen parenting has cost US taxpayers 9.1 billion dollars in medical expenses, housing, food and other assistive costs in 2004 (Hoffman, 2006; Pazol et al., 2011). America's concern with teen pregnancy and single parent households has increased as the number of mothers requiring benefits also increased the societal burden (Bute & Russell, 2012; Docksai, 2010: Roxas, 2008). The media has often depicted pregnant and parenting teens as poor, uneducated African Americas who come from single parent homes (Brown, 2010; Feasey, 2012; Roxas, 2008). This negative stigmatizing has been problematic for African American teen parents because the imagery has been deceptive, and has created additional shame and obstacles to be overcome (Brown, 2010; Feasey, 2012; Furstenberg, 2003; Roxas, 2008).

Separate but Equal

The decade between 1954 and 1964 began with the desegregation of America's schools and ended with the signing into law the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Akers, 2012; Moynihan, 2003; Patterson, 2012). Racial segregation and inequalities had existed in every facet of life for the American Negro, and education was not excluded (Moynihan, 1965; Patterson, 2012). 'Separate but equal' educational institutions and facilities were not only constitutional and legal (Akers, 2012; Laidlaw, 2013), but preferred. The 1896 landmark ruling of the US Supreme Court in the Plessy vs. Ferguson case (Hoffer, 2014; Holzman, 2008; Laidler, 2013; Ogletree, 2007) had been mandated to that effect. 'Separate but equal' had been legislated to assure facilities and services for Negros and Whites that were to be separate, but the same (Akers, 2012; Hoffer, 2014). Instead, environments such as the "Corridor of Shame" in South Carolina's rural schools were the results of the separate but unequal. The results, South Carolina's 21st century minority students have been attending dilapidated and inadequate facilities that lacked the technologically that exited in neighboring white schools (Mau, 2006; Weaver, 2011). The state's students had consistently scored poorly on statewide and national standardized tests (Mau, 2006; Weaver, 2011).). Historically, 'separate but equal' had always meant different, and that difference focused on perceived lowered ability levels of minorities, urban students, rural school districts, and Title 1 schools (Akers, 2012; Futrell & Gomez, 2008; Gold, 2007; Walters, Lambert & Robinson, 2007; Weaver, 2011).

As early as the 1950's, policies had been in place that would offset environments created by the 'separate but equal' opportunities for certain students through public

vouchers (Akers, 2012; Walters et al., 2007). Initially vouchers had been race neutral and had focused on the socio-economic status of the family, but by 1990, school vouchers became synonymous with school choice, which had expanded to accommodate poor and minority parents and offered parents equitable options for school choice (Akers, 2012; Walters et al., 2007). Education reforms mandated by law, including Title 1 funding and the No Child Left Behind Act (Fritzberg, 2003), had been regulated attempts to equalize the unequal in 'separate but equal' (Futrell & Gomez, 2008; Gold, 2007; Laidler, 2013; Walters et al., 2007).

Desegregation

The 1954 Supreme Court case of Brown vs. the Board of Education had over turned the earlier decision of Plessy vs. Ferguson (Akers, 2012; Laidler, 2013). The decision cited that separate was not equal and paved the way for the court's derailing of segregation (Holzman, 2008; Laidler, 2013; Ogletree, 2007). Although segregated schools were no longer legal, African American and Caucasians overwhelming attended separate schools (Condron, Tope, Steidl, & Freeman, 2013). In the aftermath of the court ordered school desegregation of the late 1950's, 57% of African Americans had attended schools that were majority African American at its' peak of compliance (Erickson, 2011). Even though the courts had stipulated desegregation of public schools, parents exercised their right to choose where their children attended through the voucher and school choice initiatives and enrolled students in private or charter schools (Erickson, 2011). Minority parents, poor parents, and parents living in rural communities did not have these same options, thus creating schools that were segregated or heavily minority populated by the

exodus of school choice and voucher students (Erickson, 2011; Gold, 2007). Socio-economic status and race had predetermined where families lived and the homogeneity of the community (Condron et al., 2013; Ericson, 2011; Fauman, 1957; Gold, 2007). Public school racial make-up became reflective of the same homogeneity or lack of diversity as the housing environments and communities where the schools were located (Erickson, 2011; Fauman, 1957; Gold, 2007).

Title 1

Ten years following Brown vs. the Board of Education, the Title 1 Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 had been drafted to close the disparity in educational attainment and academic standards between minority and majority students (Fritzberg, 2003; MacMahon, 2011). Title 1 schools had been identified as such when the facilities were less than adequate and at least 40% of the students enrolled qualified for reduced or free lunch (MacMahon, 2011). According to each states poverty guidelines, Title 1 schools were to provide additional opportunities for increased and enhanced educational experiences for underprivileged and disadvantaged youths through grants and other disbursements (MacMahon, 2011). Title 1 schools have become synonymous with being poor, urban, inner city schools with a high population of minority students, and stigmatized for the economic disadvantage and poor academic achievement of students (Fritzberg, 2003; MacMahon, 2011). The funding allocated to schools with demonstrated financial need has been based on student risk factors including race, economics, and academic proficiency (MacMahon, 2011). The allocated monies have benefitted

individual students within a school or the entire student body as programs delivered increased and enhanced educational experiences for students at the school (Elementary and Secondary Education, 2004).

Changing Expectations

Education beyond high school was not the societal expectation or necessity in the 1950's that it has become in the 21st century (Rasul et al., 2012). Advances in technology and local and global competition in the workplace have made secondary and technical education a minimum basic requirement for employment (Rasul et al., 2012). High school attendance for African American females has increased from the 1940's to the 21st century. In 1947, for teenage women 14-17 years of age, 72% attended school, and for 18-19 year olds, 23% attended (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015a). The number of teens registered for high school in 2009 has increased to 97.8% for 14-15 year olds; 94.1% for 16-17 year olds, and only 65.2% for 18-19 year olds (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015b). Less than 3% of all women between 20-24 years of age had remained in school in 1947 (Statistical Abstract, 2015a) in comparison to 44.7% of 20-21 year olds and 31.9% of women 22-24 years of age in 2009 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015b). Even with these increased numbers, teen pregnancy and parenting has remained the reason for one in three dropouts for all females, and 38% for African American teens (Shuger, 2012). Smyth and Anderson (2014), SmithBattle (2006), and Roxas (2008) wrote traditional high schools do not provide adequate support for pregnant and parenting teens to continue school.

Educational Disadvantage

Teen parents have experienced challenging times completing high school and attending college. As high school students, more than 60% of pregnant and parenting teens have dropped out, and fewer than 2% of the teens who become mothers before their 18th birthday have completed college (Shuger, 2012). Educational attainment has been effected by teen pregnancy and poverty (Bissell, 2000; Stevens-Simon& Lowry, 1995; Stout & Le, 2012), and traditional high school programs do not provide pregnant or parenting teens the support necessary for the successful completion of school (SmithBattle, 2006; Roxas, 2008; Schrag, and Schmidt-Tieszen, 2014). Smyth and Anderson (2014) have heightened the awareness of the relationship between the poor attendance of pregnant and parenting teens and the drop-out rate, school attendance and academic achievement.

Pregnancy prevention program resources have been accessible under the leadership of The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy with affiliate state offices in all 50 of the United States and the District of Columbia (National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2015b). Programs designed to assist pregnant and parenting teens after the pregnancy have not been readily available, but do exist (Roxas, 2008). SAFY (Specialized Alternatives for Families and Youth) was one such agency that has served Alabama, Ohio, and South Carolina residents. SAFY offers education, support and parent role modeling, foster care, and housing assistance (Specialized Alternatives for Families and Youth, 2015). Residential programs such as New Horizons Family Center located in Summerton, SC, offered housing, life skills

training, parenting education, vocational and academic education, childcare, and community transition assistance (Youth Leadership Institute, 2015). The services offered have been important for the success of the teen parents in the program, but the facility is limited in the number of teens it can assist (Youth Leadership Institute, 2015). New Horizons has been available to any pregnant or parenting teen residing within the state and in the custody of social services, but can only house eight teens and eight children (Youth Leadership Institute, 2015).

Traditional high schools have not offered an effective and quality education for pregnant and parenting teens (SmithBattle, 2006, 2012; Roxas, 2008, Smyth & Anderson, 2014). Nationally, school districts have offered a myriad of services ranging from no accommodations to a charter modeled facility complete with on-site day care and medical staff (Teen Parent Program, 2011). These gender specific and culturally responsive environments have focused on the diverse needs of pregnant and parenting teens. Students in the programs have received individualized academic plans, remediation, and any additional assistance and support required for educational and parenting success (Roxas, 2008; Schrag & Schmidt-Tieszen, 2014; Teen Parent Program, 2011). There has remained a limited number of programs available for pregnant and parenting teens, programs designed to provide holistic support (Roxas, 2008; Schrag & Schmidt-Tieszen, 2014).

Unmarried pregnant teens have relied on government assistance and the ability to qualify for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) benefits (Blau & van der Klauuw, 2013) which had been reauthorized under the Temporary Assistance for Needy

Families (TANF) Act in 1996 (Katz, 2013). Recipients were able to receive assistance

with food, medical care, and housing (Katz, 2013; Schrag & Schmidt-Tieszen, 2014).

TANF recipients were also able to apply and qualify for financial assistance for post

secondary school in the form of Pell and other grants, student loans, and work study

through the US Department of Education (US Department of Education, 2014).

Theoretical Frameworks

The traditional family has been defined as two married heterosexual adults who

lived in the same house and are raising biological children (Archard, 2012). Husbands

were to work outside of the home and provide for the family, while wives worked in the

home and cared for the children (Cherlin, 2012). In 2011, in America, 41% of all births

were born to unmarried women (Hayford et al., 2014), and teen mothers continued to

struggle to find a place in the family life cycle (Del Corso, & Lanz, 2013; O'Brien, 2005;

Schrag & Schmidt-Tieszen, 2014). The life cycles of the family have been defined as the

transitional stages a family must navigate (Bitter, Long & Young, 2010; Schrag &

Schmidt-Tieszen, 2014). The cycle begins with the creation of a new family when young

adults leave the childhood home, became independent, and start a family (Bitter et al.,

2010; O'Brien, 2005; Schrag & Schmidt-Tieszen, 2014). Teen pregnancy forces an

interruption in the natural progression through the stages of the family life cycle, and

catapults the parenting teen into new stages of development (McBride Murry, Berkel,

Gaylord-Harden, Copeland-Liner, & Nation, 2011). At a point in the life cycle of the

family when teenage young women should be preparing for independence and solving

identity issues, an unplanned teen pregnancy disrupts both the family life cycle and the

individual development of the teen mother (Del Corso, & Lanz, 2013; O'Brien, 2005;Waites, 2009).

Adolescent and teenage developmental stages have been characterized by the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional challenges young people navigate on the way to adulthood (McBride Murry et al., 2011). As adolescents age, the growth and developmental stages presented challenges that have to be resolved on the journey to becoming adults (McBride-Murry et al., 2011). An unplanned pregnancy alters the natural trajectory and the individual development of the teen mothers (Bauer & Reyes, 2010; Pagani, Japel, & Vaillancourt, 2008); Schrag & Schmidt-Tieszen, 2014). Poverty, limited resources and experiences, and inadequate educational opportunities have increased the probability of poor developmental outcomes (McBride Murry, et al., 2011). Searching for ways to fulfill and satisfy individual needs and resolve developmental challenges for some teens, pregnancy has been misconceived as a viable solution (Capps, 2011; Lee, 2007).

Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development

Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development has been founded in the belief that there are eight stages throughout the human lifespan that range from infancy to late adulthood (Capps, 2012; Erikson, 1963; Pittman, Keiley, Kerpelman, & Vaughn, 2011). Each stage has a challenge or crisis that must be resolved before the individual can make a healthy transition to the next stage (Erikson, 1963; Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2011; Pittman et al., 2011). Resolution of any stages' conflict has not been required for the individual to enter the next stage (Capps, 2012; Erikson, 1963). Each succeeding

stage has been built on the preceding stage, and unresolved issues continue to surface

until resolved (Capps, 2012; Erikson, 1963; Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2011; Sneed,

Whitbourne, Schwartz, & Huang, 2012).

The first developmental stage, trust vs. mistrust, is to be resolved in infancy,

between birth and 2 years of age (Capps, 2012; Jones, Vaterlaus, Jackson, & Morrill,

2014). Infants learned whether or not the world will be a safe and friendly place and

establish trust if their needs are met in the development of social relationships (Erikson,

1963; Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2011; Jones et al., 2014). The second stage, autonomy vs.

shame and doubt, is settled as a 2-4 year old toddlers (Jones et al., 2014). Relationships

are now extended beyond the primary caregiver, and toddlers are learning confidence in

themselves and their abilities, or to be ashamed and doubt themselves (Erikson, 1963;

Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2011; Jones et al., 2014). Early childhood, ages 4-5, resolvesd the

issue of initiative vs. guilt (Capps, 2012; Jones et al., 2014). Children learn to fit into

their environment and function independently, or feel guilty about what it is they want

and need (Jones et al., 2014). During ages 5-12, the middle childhood years, the child

focuses on industry vs. inferiority (Jones et al., 2014; Zhang, & He, 2011). The issue to

be resolved is the development of self-interest, strengths, talents, acceptable social norms

and behaviors, or becoming unmotivated with no to low self esteem (Erikson, 1963;

Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2011; Jones et al., 2014; Zhang, & He, 2011).

Identity vs. role confusion is the stage associated with adolescence, ages 13-19

(Jones et al., 2014; Zhang, & He, 2011. The resolution of the previous stages have been

instrumental in the formulation of individual identity (Jones et al., 2014; Zhang, & He,

2011). Every teenager has to resolve the struggle of self-identity and determine what social roles to adopt (Capps, 2012). Pregnant and parenting teens are faced with simultaneously resolving the identity challenges of becoming a parent and deciding their intimacy issues (Erikson, 1963; Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2011). Teen parenting interrupts the natural trajectory of individuals in this psychosocial stage, and has complicated resolving its crisis (Bauer & Reyes, 2010; Jones et al., 2014 Pagani et al., 2008). Erikson's stages resolves and answers the questions can I love, how will I love, and who will I love in the intimacy vs. isolation stage, usually between 20-24 years of age (Capps, 2012; Erikson, 1963). Pregnancy alters the normal sequencing of stage resolution and forces the teen mothers to resolve conflicts before the teen may have been prepared (Jones et al., 2014; Schrag & Schmidt-Tieszen, 2014).

Teen pregnancy and parenting interrupts each of the stages of Erikson's psychosocial development theory (Jones et al., 2014; Zhang, & He, 2011). Pregnancy and motherhood shifts the focus of development from the teen to that of the developing baby (Bauer & Reyes, 2010; Erikson, 1963; Pagani, et al., 2008; Smyth & Anderson (2014). Parenting teens have been faced with answering the 'can I love' question for personal development (Erikson, 1963; Zhang, & He, 2011) while at the same time resolving assumptions and expectations about the relationship with the child and the child's father (Herman & Nandakumar, 2012). While the issue of self may not have been resolved (Erickson, 1963; Jones et al., 2014; Zhang, & He, 2011), parenting teens are faced with resolving motherhood, relationships, friendships, and social skills, (Herman & Nandakumar, 2012) and single or co-parenting (Bianchi, 2012; Cherlin, 2012).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Where Erikson's stages of psychosocial development have been focused on the psychological and social environments of human development, Maslow's hierarchy of needs are focused on physiological and motivational needs (Harrigan & Commons, 2012; Maslow, 1943). Mans' never ending needs are not isolated nor hierarchal in nature, a new need appears as the current one has been satisfied (Harrigan & Commons, 2012; Maslow, 1943). Maslow's hierarchy of needs suggested there may be an innate desire toward self-actualization and greatness present in humans along with the motivation to achieve that greatness and the need to be loved (Datta, 2010; Maslow, 1943). The lower levels of the hierarchy address the most basic human physiological needs which include food, air, water, and sleep (Harrigan & Commons, 2012; Maslow, 1943). Once these needs have been met, humans look to secure safety and health (Harrigan & Commons, 2012; Maslow, 1943). The need to belong is satisfied through developing friendships, family, love, and intimacy, and when these needs have been met, individuals can began working on the next level which fulfillself-esteem, confidence, and personal achievement (Harrigan & Commons, 2012; Maslow, 1943). The highest level need, self-actualization or happiness, occurr when a person has determined what is their full potential and are living out that potential, having met and mastered all of the lower levels (Datta, 2010; Maslow, 1943).

According to Maslow's list of needs, pregnant and parenting teens still need to meet the lower level needs of food, shelter, and clothing, and the second level, which includs health and safety (Harrigan & Commons, 2012; Maslow, 1943). Resolving these

needs nay not have been a given for parenting teens living in impoverished environments (Dahl, 2010; SmithBattle, 2012; Smyth & Anderson, 2014). Life events have created challenges and altered the ability to master a level and move upward, forcing a person to remain on the current level, or catapults a person back to a lower level (Datta, 2010). Teen pregnancy and parenting creates a new need that must be resolved as these teens are having to satisfy the needs for belonging through friendships, family love, and intimacy (Datta, 2010; Maslow, 1943). Teen pregnancy has been a disruptive event in the life of the teen (Basch, 2011; Furstenberg, 2003; SmithBattle, 2012), yet the struggle for resolving the needs for belonging and intimacy remains, and is often unresolved (Harrigan & Commons, 2012; Lee, 2007).

Media Representation

Who ever has control of the imagery allowed to be seen also has control of the minds of those looking at those images (Bennett, 1972; Maxian, 2014). The media has hadcontrol of the imagery of teen parenting released to the public (Maxian, 2014) through campaigns, ads, pictures and print (Villenas & Angeles, 2013). The media intent has been was to influence thoughts and invoke feelings of the listening and viewing audience (Maxian, 2014). The face of teen pregnancy and parenting has been misrepresented as poverty stricken and uneducated African America females, with no future and destined to a life of struggle and single parenthood (Akella & Jordan, 2015; Carpenter, 2012; Smyth & Anderson, 2014). This imagery has created problems for African American teen parents to be able to see past those negative images (Dahl, 2010; Lee, 2007; Roxas, 2008). The negative descriptions of welfare queens (Carpenter, 2012; Smyth &

Anderson, 2014), and unwed and unmarried mothers (McLanahan & Jencks, 2015) has

stigmatized impoverished minorities who are depicted as the face of teen pregnancy and

parenting (Carpenter, 2012; McLanahan & Jencks, 2015; Roxas, 2008; Tapia, 2005). The

powerful and harmful portrayal has affected parenting teens ability to see themselves as

capable of successfully accomplishing the tasks of completing an education and parenting

(Lee, 2007: Roxas, 2008; Thompson & Graham, 2015).

Self-efficacy, the belief in oneself to be able to successfully complete a particular

task or accomplish a specific goal (Bandura, 1977; Thompson & Graham, 2015), has

been integral to the motivation, cognition, affect, and decision making of student and

teen mothers (Bandura & Locke, 2003; Thompson & Graham, 2015). Motivation and

ambition have been enhanced through self-efficacy and goal attainment (Thompson &

Graham, 2015). With a constant barrage of negative imagery and misleading information,

government programs have been designed to provide assistance however were often

ineffective in service provisioning (Bissell, 2000; Dreier, 2005; Stout & Le, 2012). Social

service agencies and the media have represented teens becoming pregnant as an

unwanted event, although not all pregnant and parenting teens agree (Dreier, 2005;

Feasey, 2012; Roxas, 2008). Acting in the capacity as gatekeepers of the needed services,

social service employees have responded authoritatively and with the misperception that

pregnant and parenting teens have been poor decision makers headed toward a life of

poverty (Brodkin, 2010; Bute & Russell, 2012; Dreier, 2005) and therefore must be

rescued (Brodkin, 2010). Teens have viewed parenting as a positive choice (Bissell,

2000; Stout & Le, 2012), without the negativity the media may have portrayed (Feasey, 2012) and the societal disdain (Bute & Russell, 2012; Dreier, 2005; Roxas, 2008).

Summary of the Research

Teenagers in the 21st century have been becoming pregnant and parenting at epidemic rates (Dash, 2003; Shuger, 2012). The number of births has been reduced from the highest recorded year of 1957 (Farber, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Teen pregnancy and parenting has been the reason for one in three teens dropping out of high school (Shuger, 2012). Fewer than 2% of teens who have become pregnant and parents before their 18th birthday complete college (Shuger, 2012). The number of African American teens who have become pregnant and parents is disproportionate to European America teens the same age (Akella & Jordan, 2015; Furstenberg, 2003; Moynihan, 1965; Seigel & Cove, 2010). The majority of African American parenting teens have come from impoverished environments, single parent homes, and receive poor educations (Bissel, 2000; Lee, 2007; Stout & Le, 2012).

A review of the literature indicates traditional high school programs have often been limited in the effectiveness of providing the support necessary for pregnant and parenting teens toremain in school and graduate (SmithBattle, 2006, 2012; Roxas, 2008; Schrag & Schmidt-Tieszen, 2014). Inadequate school facilities (Mau, 2006; Weaver, 2011), Title 1 schools, and the stereotypical belief that minority students are not able to achieve at the same level as their European American counterparts (Butler-Barnes, Chavous, Hurd, & Varner, 2013; Futrell & Gomez, 2008; Gold, 2007; Walters et al., 2007) presente challenges for African American students (SmithBattle, 2006, 2012;

Smyth & Anderson, 2014). The research has pointed to a relationship between school attendance and teen pregnancy and parenting (SmithBattle 2006, 2012; Smyth & Anderson, 2014), and teen pregnancy and academic failure (SmithBattle, 2006, 2012; Pytel, 2006; Shuger, 2012; Smyth & Anderson, 2014). Career and employment options have been limited as parenting teens find themselves unprepared to enter the local and global job markets (Rasul et al., 2012) and have been relegated to low-paying jobs with limited or no benefits, no room for vertical growth, and extended periods of unemployment (Lee, 2007; Rasul et al., 2012).

The current body of research has been replete with studies that support society's ideology and perception that teens getting pregnant are making a mistake and are a societal ail (Lee, 2007; Smyth & Anderson, 2014). Society's concern has been rooted in the consideration of the illegitimacy of the births, the mothers age, and a dependency on government assistance (Cherlin, 2012; Furstenberg, 2003; Patterson, 2015). The media representation of pregnant and parenting teens has reinforced this negative imagery, and depicts the face of teen pregnancy as poor, uneducated, bad decision making African Americans (Lee, 2007; Roxas, 2008; Schrag & Schmidt-Tieszen, 2014; SmithBattle, 2006, 2012). Teenage parents have not all seen themselves in the same light as the media has portrayed (Feasey, 2012), and more often than not view the choice to parent as positive (Dash, 2003; Lee, 2007; Schrag & Schmidt-Tieszen, 2014).

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe factors that impacted post-secondary school attendance academically talented African American women who became pregnant and parents as teenagers still in high school. In this study, I provided the point of view of women who had experienced the phenomena and shared descriptions of high school experiences as pregnant and parenting teens. I invited the participants of the study to offer insights into the decision making process in regards to teen parenting and the completion of high school. I attempted to increase the understanding of the factors that impacted high school completion and college attendance of teen mothers who were academically talented high school students; explanations that could only be provided by those who had experienced the events.

In 2012, 305,420 babies were to American teen mothers (Akella & Jodan, 2015). African American and Hispanic youths made up 57% of those births (Akella & Jordan, 2015). Basch (2011) and Shuger (2012) reported teen pregnancy and parenting as the reason one in three teens dropped out of high school. In 2012, only 40% of pregnant teens received a high school diploma, and less than 2% of teens who parented before age 18 completed college before age 30 (Shuger, 2012). Without a minimum high school diploma, parenting teens found themselves unprepared to enter the local and global workforce (Davis, 2014; Rasul et al., 2012) and were forced to accept employment in low-paying, unskilled positions that were not adequate for self-reliance and financial independence (Bissell, 2000; Lee, 2007; Rasul et al., 2012; Stout & Le, 2012).

Qualitative Research

When researchers need to know more about a phenomenon than the demographic information and the number of occurrences of an event, qualitative research is the correct methodology. Qualitative case study research is used to do more than quantify occurrences, order research results, or determine causality (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2013). As a data collection methodology, case study research is employed to uncover the essence of the research phenomena, answer the whys and how's and express the voice of the participants (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Onwuegbuzie, & Leech, 2011; Yin, 2013). The philosophical assumption of qualitative research is that there are multiple realities of being that can surface from the research participants (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012, Yin, 2013).

Qualitative case study research, often conducted through interviews, is used for an in depth analysis into the emotion and lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2007; Onwuegbuzie, & Leech, 2011; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2013). In this study, I was the key collection instrument for the rich descriptions provided by the participants (see Creswell, 2007; Onwuegbuzie, & Leech, 2011; Yin, 2013). I executed data collection and analysis following protocols researchers use to discover emerging and reoccurring themes, (see Burkholder, 2012, Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2013), and uncovered meaningful related responses (see Onwuegbuzie, & Leech, 2011; Patton, 2007; Yin, 2013).

I found statistical data through agencies such as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (Akella & Johnson, 2015), the Guttmacher Report, and the Statistical Abstract

of the United States. Data included who was getting pregnant, at what age the pregnancy occurred, and demographic information. The purpose of this qualitative study was to obtain descriptions and details of factors that contributed to decisions to remain in school and attend college for African American women who became pregnant and parents while teenagers and still in high school. The shared accounts experiences of the participants were from the participant's perspectives and included thoughts on challenges and successes of the pregnancies, single parenting, and education.

Research Questions

The primary research question in this study was: What were factors that influenced post-secondary school attendance for academically talented African American women who became parents as high school teenagers?

Participants were asked to describe the following:

1. Describe perceived barriers academically talented African-American pregnant and parenting high school teens overcome to continue their post-secondary education?

2. Describe influences that contribute to the decision to attend post-secondary institutes for academically talented African-American women who became pregnant and mother as high school teenagers.

Research Design

Qualitative methodologies are descriptive in nature, telling the stories of those who have experienced and were affected by the phenomena (Baškarada, 2014; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009; Yin, 2013). I conducted a qualitative case study to obtain rich

descriptions of the phenomena that provided the perspective of women who had became parents as teenagers while still in high school. Case studies are instrumental and effective in increasing the knowledge of a situation, circumstance or event in the social sciences (Dybicz, 2013; Yin, 2013). Researchers use case studies when attempting to answer the why and how questions of a phenomena (Yin, 2013) and to answer the need to hear first hand descriptions of the incident (Baškarada, 2014; Yin, 2013). To be qualified to participate in a qualitative case study, the participants need only to have experienced the event (Cronin, 2014). The researcher in this type of study focuses on describing the phenomena in the words of the participants following a protocol with additional criteria (Creswell, 2007; Cronin, 2014; Patton, 2002).

I selected participants using the purposeful convenience snowball sampling method for the association to the teen pregnancy and parenting phenomena each participant had. I used this sampling method to extract participants from the affected population that met the representativeness of the event or the comparability association necessary for inclusion. The sample size of eight women between 21-30 years of age was selected to participate; they were African American women; they became pregnant and parents while teenage high school students; they were academically talented in high school (Volwerk & Tindal, 2012). Additionally, participants met the academic requirements for college admission.

Case Study

Case study researchers capture the descriptions and explanations of events experienced by participants (Baškarada, 2014; Dybicz, 2013; Yin, 2013). Qualitative case

studies are used so that the voices of the participants of the phenomena to be heard (Creswell, 2009; Cronin, 2014). As each participant shares experiences of the phenomena, they are empowered to describe and explain thoughts and perceptions as an active participant and not merely as a third party (Dybicz, 2013). Research readers gain knowledge and expand what they understand through the discovery of the new shared meaning of the culture, history, and illustrations of the event (Flood, 2010). The illustrations were provided through the participant interviews (Burkolder, 2012; Creswell, 2007; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

Following the data collection, I analyzed the data to discover the recurrent themes. The focus of qualitative research is to hear the expressions of singular experiences of the participants and organize those responses based on any commonality (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011; Yin, 2013).

Informed Consent and Institutional Review Board (IRB)

I followed the guidelines established by Walden University's Center for Research Quality Office of Research Ethics and Compliance Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. I completed the application and submitted it for approval having satisfactorily provided an explanation and description of the research. I received permissions from the participants only because there were no additional community stakeholders or partners who needed to supply permission. The benefits and risks associated with the research were explained along with the plan to maintain the integrity, confidentiality, and the security of the collected data.

I provided the IRB with disclosures of potential conflicts of interest in the research, a description of all the collection tools, a description of the population to be included in the research along with their informed consent, and proof of faculty approval. I agreed to the protection of participants in the research conducted as demonstrated in the IRB application. The IRB approved the submitted level of consideration, necessary accommodations and allowances I established to conduct the study as part of the monitoring responsibilities.

I contacted potential participants and explained the purpose and the process of the research, and established a time and location for each face to face meeting. During this meeting I provided participants with a detailed explanation and overview of the research, answered questions, and reiterated the voluntary nature of participation. I discussed the benefits and associated risks and advised that participation in project could be terminated at any time without penalty or prejudice. Participants were informed of the plan in place to keep the collected data secure, the confidentiality of the project, and that copies of the data transcripts would be available after the data was analyzed. I reminded participants that there was no gratuity associated with the project and of the requirement for each to provide written permission.

Interviews

Preparation for the interview in qualitative research beings long before the interviewees report for any session (Burkholder, 2012; Crawford, 2010; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Janesick, 2004). Preparation begins as early as the decision making process when determining the type of research to be conducted, the methodology to use,

and the question(s) to be answered (Burkholder, 2012; Crawford, 2010; Yin, 2013). As part of the IRB approval process, I submitted the intended questions I planned to ask for review. After receiving approval, I conducted a trial run of the interview session and became familiarized with the cohesiveness of the questions and the interview protocol. I verified the questions were understandable and would retrieve the desired information.

When the interviewees arrived I provided an overview of the session and explained what would take place, and reinforced the collected and electronically recorded data would be treated as confidential. I reminded each participant of the voluntary nature of the project, how the data would be used, that transcripts of the sessions would be available later upon request, and the session could be ended at any time without repercussion.

Data Collection

The primary data collection method in qualitative research is through interviews, and the interviewer is the key collection instrument Observations, historical documentation and audio-visual materials lack the ability to provide in depth perceptions or the voice of the participants (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2013). I asked the participants open-ended questions designed to motivate descriptions of share knowledge about teen pregnancy, teen parenting, and college options. I developed thought-provoking and reflective questions.

Participants were asked to express individual thoughts, perceptions and experiences surrounding completing high school and attending college (Creswell, 2009; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The unbiased questions were written within ethical boundaries

without any perception of intrusion or insensitivity toward the participants (Baškarada, 2014). I gained written and oral permission to conduct the interview and collected the data (Burkholder, 2012; Crawford, 2010; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). I took notes and made an audio recording during the interviews to capture the explanations and descriptions of the participant responses (Burkholder, 2012; Janesick, 2004; & Patton, 2002; Yin, 2013). Participants provided open and honest accountings of experiences and perceptions for readers to consider (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012) which formed the foundation of qualitative analysis and reporting, and took readers into the setting they are describing (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2013).

As the interviewer, I remained unbiased and objective during the data collection process. When interacting with the participants, whether asking the questions and recording the answers, I remained free of judgment and committed to recording only the information provided by the participants (Creswell, 2007; & Patton, 2002; Yin, 2013). Respect for participants and the stories told must be apparent in how the interviewer interacts with the participants. Retelling the events of being a pregnant and parenting teen could unleash unexpected emotions from the participants, and the researcher must be sensitive to this possibility and be conscious of and cautious about any verbal or non-verbal responses they may have to what they hear (Morrison, Gregory & Thibodeau, 2012).

Data Analysis

The theoretical application for this research project was to look for similarities in the descriptions and explanations of the experienced phenomena (Creswell, 2007; &

Creswell, 2009; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011; Yin, 2013). Analyzing the data offered

meaning of events from the perspective of the participants, and allowed me to make sense

of and categorize the experiences (Burkholder, 2012; Creswell, 2009; Leech &

Onwuegbuzie 2011). I analyzed the data for emerging and recurring themes that validated

the personal descriptions and explanations of the participants (Creswell, 2007; Leech &

Onwuegbuzie, 2011; Patton, 2002). These themes were coded into nodes, which were

groups of similar references (Bergin, 2011; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). The

references were analyzed, and then chronologically and historically categorized resulting

in individual participant detailed recanting of the events (Bergin, 2011). The data was

manually coded using the NVivo qualitative data analysis (QDA) software, which

simplified organizing the data analysis process (Bergin, 2011; Leech & Onwuegbuzie,

2011). Coding the data illuminated recurrent themes, an integral step in the analysis

process (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). After determining the themes in the data, I

interpreted them to discover meanings through inductive or specific example scrutiny and

then located the categories within the data (Bergin, 2011; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011).

  I utilized the NVivo data analysis software and capitalized on the word processing

capabilities to locate similar and specific words and themes (Bergin, 2011). NVivo also

supported case and file management capacity and offered coding efficiency (Leech &

Onwuegbuzie, 2011). QDA computer software programs performed statistical

calculations and functions faster and more accurately than compiling by hand (Leech &

Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Using NVivo, I keyed the participant responses into the software

program and categorized the information according to the themes retrieved from the data

(Patton, 2002: QSR website, 2011) prior to converting the data into narratives (Patton, 2002). NVivo simplified the compiling, storing, and retrieving of the data, and categorized the coded data as the descriptions and verbal sketches were compared and clarified (Bergin, 2011; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009).

Qualitative research allowed me to collect illustrative and explanatory data from participants through the description of events in the participants' lives (Baškarada, 2014; Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2013). Specifically, case studies were designed to collect evidence of the phenomena, not just perceptions offered by third party observers (Baškarada, 2014). There was an assumption that the information provided by participants would be accurate and honest, and that I completed all that was required to select credible and reliable participants to provide valid data of a quality standard (Baškarada, 2014; Burkholder, 2012; Creswell, 2007). The validity of the data was verified by evaluating the credibility of the participant and the descriptions provided and through the developed trust with participants (Baškarada, 2014; Creswell, 2007). Peer review and debriefing, the clarification of researcher bias, and the degree of participant persuasiveness aided in the establishment of data validity (Baškarada, 2014; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2009). Reliability was enhanced through the collection of detailed field notes, use of good quality audio recordings, and the data transcription process (Baškarada, 2014; Creswell, 2007).

Ethical Considerations

The researcher in any project has agrees to evaluate the level of prejudice and bias about the research issue and settle those concerns prior to publishing the findings

(Baškarada, 2014; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2013). I consented to keep in mind the purpose of the research throughout the study, and look for meaning in the collected data as it related to the purpose (Patton, Yin, 2013). I wrote with a scholarly voice, and kept in focus the audience the end product was written for, and remained as impartial as possible (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2013). I was certified through the National Institutes of Health Office of Extramural Research and understood and agreed to abide by the ethical standards involved in health science research (National Institutes of Health, 2015). The standards and protocols were followed to protect the human participants who agreed to the research (National Institutes of Health, 2015). The Walden University's Internal Review Board for Ethical Standards (IRB), in the capacity of the supervising agency, granted approval of the research plan in which the researcher provided plans for ethically conducting the research, and obtained Informed Consent from the participants (Endicott, 2010).

Research participants agreed to provide honest responses to the questions asked, with the understanding of only sharing what they were comfortable with (Burkholder, 2012; Robinson, 2012). Participants had an expectation to be treated with respect and without judgment, and this was ethically correct behavior (Baškarada, 2014; Burkholder, 2012; & Janesick, 2002). The researcher agreed to record to the best of the researchers' ability what was answered and heard, without bias and without reservation (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 2008; Robinson, 2012). I considered what biases and prejudices might exist and made accommodations for those thoughts and feelings (Creswell, 2007; Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 2008; Patton, 2002; Robinson, 2012).

Limitations

Limitations existed in the research because it was never feasible or possible to interview every participant of the phenomenon (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 2008; Trafbimow, 2014). Teen pregnancy and teen parenting was an event that affected millions of teens each year and one where though experiences between pregnant and parenting teens may be similar, no two were identical (The National Campaign, 2015a; Shuger, 2011; Statistical Abstract, n.d.). Qualitative research aimed to uncover individual experiences sanctioning the limited number of participant responses (Robinson, 2012). One limitation was the literature could never produce all of the descriptions of all of the pregnant and parenting teens however, the sampled population did provide insight (Robinson, 2012; Yin, 2013). This study interviewed eight women affected by the phenomenon. The women were between the ages of 21-30 at the time of the study, African American, and became moms while teenagers and still in high school. As high school students, the women lived in the same community, which made it difficult to generalize the results to the larger population. Although particularity was generally considered as strength, there was residual concern of the ability case studies to be generalized to broader theory (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2013).

Limitations also existed in the data collection process and the methodological skill of the researcher (Patton, 2002; Trafimow, 2014). I conducted an ethical research project, reported the findings without bias, and maintained sensitive to the process (Cox, 2012). I was aware of the affects of preconceived notions of what participant responses might or should be, and how the misinterpretation of those cues could alter the

perceptions of what was actually stated (Cox, 2012). Researchers reflected on every step of the research process and minimized the limiting effects of data collection bias and error (Cox, 2012). Sharing experiences for participants required a recanting of memories and emotions, and some were painful. I encouraged the mothers to only share what they were comfortable with and reminded them they could stop. (Cox, 2012; Crawford, 2010; Creswell, 2007; Jacob & Furgerson). he desire to provide answers the participants believed the researcher is looking for may make it difficult to be completely honest during the interviews (Cox, 2012; Creswell, 2007).

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The original premise for this research project was to investigate the intersection of teen pregnancy, teen parenting, and education in African-American teens. I planned to conduct a qualitative case study that would provide descriptions of their shared experiences of the participants. My goal was to reflect the knowledge and understanding of members of the phenomena.Those selected represented African American women preparing to attend 4-year colleges, universities, or certificate programs prior to their pregnancies. My intent was to document whether their point of view about themselves, their situations, and options. I used the literature review as a reflective tool to complete the data analysis.

At the root of any qualitative research project is the need to hear the human story (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). I conducted a qualitative based research study to provide rich and detailed descriptions of the experiences of academically talented African American women who had become pregnant and parents while still in high school (Yin, 2013). In phenomenological studies, researchers focus on how members of the phenomena make sense of their experiences by expressing their understanding the shared event (Creswell, 2003; Cronin, 2014). Case studies are conducted to capture the explanations of selected members of a phenomenon at specific points in time and provide a comprehensive perspective of the event in question (Baškarada, 2014). Qualitative case-based studies are used so that interviewees can describe the phenomena of concern while explaining personal reactions and interactions by offering their perspectives (Baškarada, 2014).

In-depth interviews are used to focus on the topic and the need to understand the description the participants provide (Baškarada, 2014; Creswell, 2003). Dash (2003) stated that the time spent interviewing study participants and the time invested talking with the teen mothers and when appropriate, their family members. Dash (2003) and Yin (2013) chronicled the time commitment required to create the relationship that allowed them to share more than a surface honesty in response to the questions (Dash 2003; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Yin (2013) stated that qualitative case study research involves a time commitment. Thoughtful planning and selection of the research design and clearly defining the research questions are first steps in the research process (Baškarada, 2014; Yin, 2013). The next steps include deciding whether a singular strategy or combining multiple strategies would answer the research questions (Yin, 2013). Dash (2003) fulfilled the phenomenological requirement of providing multiple rich descriptions of the event through the perspective of the contributor. Yin (2013) stated that those characteristics are more suited to ethnography.

The data I collected can be used to understand the complexities teen parenting present. As the investigator, I extracted meaningful descriptions of the phenomena. Researchers capture multidimensional accounts of moments experienced in the lives of the interviewees through organizing and classifying themes as they emerged (Creswell, 2003; Yin, 2013). After I transcribed and analyzed the data, the themes identified revealed the foci on the effects of teen pregnancy, parenting, and the affects of how post-secondary education choices.

This chapter includes a review of the research questions, demographic information of the participants and a description of the field of study. I included an overview of the interview and data collection process and explained how I analyzed the data and identified themes. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings of the data.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research study was to describe what influences the decisions to attend post-secondary schools for academically talented African American women who became pregnant and were parents while teenagers still in high school. I interviewed the participants, now between 21 and 30 years of age, to consider decisions made and the influences that drove those decisions as parenting high school students. Members of the research project detailed barriers to completing high school and attending a 2 or 4-year institution of higher learning. Participants explained what factors influenced decisions made concerning the pursuit and completion of a post-secondary education. I used the following questions to guide the research the research:

The primary research question was: What factors influence post-secondary school attendance for academically talented African American women who became parents as high school teenagers?

Participants were asked to describe the following:

1. Describe perceived barriers academically talented African-American pregnant and parenting high school teens overcome to continue their post-secondary education.

2. Describe influences that contribute to the decision to attend post-secondary institutes for academically talented African-American women who became pregnant and mother as high school teenagers?

Setting

The research setting was a small urban high school located in the Southeastern United States. District enrollment is almost 23,000 students, with approximately 74% of the population being African American. The high school had an enrollment of approximately 700 students, 99% of which are African American. The majority of students live at or below the poverty level and receive free or reduced lunch. The school qualifies as a Title I School (U.S. Department of Education, 2014d) and has a graduation rate of 65.8%.

Demographics

The eight participants interviewed for this study were all academically talented African-American women who became pregnant and were parents while teenagers and still in high school. Data collected included the age, grade, and GPA at the time of the baby's birth (Table 1). Additionally, the table included the ages at the time of the interview, the current marital status of each participant and the current number of children.

Table 1

High School Pregnancy Data

	Age at Pregnancy	Age when Interview	Grade	GPA	Marital Status	Number of Children
P1	18	24	12th	3.0	Single	2
P2	18	22	12th	3.0	Single	1
P3	16	22	10th	3.2	Single	2
P4	16	23	10th	3.4	Divorced	2
P5	18	24	12th	3.6	Married	3
P6	17	29	12th	3.0	Separated	4
P7	15	21	10th	3.81	Single	1
P8	15	24	10th	3.4	Single	1

Table 6 captures post-secondary school data. The table displays whether or not each participant completed any post-secondary institutional course-work and the type of institute attended; college, university, or technical school. Also included is the major each mother attempted.

Table 2

Post-Secondary School

	One semester	Type of School First Year	Major
P1	Yes	College	Nursing
P2	Yes	Technical College	Early Childhood Ed
P3	Yes	College	Nursing
P4	Yes	University	Nursing
P5	Yes	University	Biology
P6	Yes	Technical College	Business
P7	Yes	College	Business
P8	Yes	College	Political Science

Table 7 summarizes the demographic data for each participant. The following section includes the current age of each participant, the age, and grade when they confirmed the pregnancy, their high school GPA, and employment data at the time of the interview.

Data Collection

Qualitative research is used to focus on understanding the whys, how's, and the nature of a phenomena (Jackson, 2008 as cited by Baškarada, 2014). Case studies, according to Yin (2013), are best suited to answer those questions and to evaluate the impact of the phenomena over time, verses the incidence of the occurrence. Qualitative

case based research describes, explains, evaluates, and attempts to understand the research problem (Baškarada, 2014). Phenomenological case studies aim to generalize participant descriptions to theories (Baškarada, 2014). Qualitative case studies illuminate the validity and reliability of collected data through saturation, while focusing on understanding the phenomena (Glaser & Strauss, 1967 as cited by Mason, 2010; Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). The goal of qualitative research is to guide the study and deliver an unbiased well-constructed product (Yin, 2013). Marshall et al., (2013) suggests citing similar studies to substantiate small sample pools. I chose four studies focusing on African-American teachers, racially discriminate practices, and educational institutions to justify the small sampling size for this project. Phenomenological case study projects using a sampling size of six to ten participants is consistent with Marshall et al. (2013)'s findings. Mason (2010), citing Morse (1994), noted phenomenological studies should include no less than six candidates in the sample.

Using the snowballing method, I created a contact list of possible participants from social media outlets. Snowball sampling is employed in qualitative research projects when the population in question is difficult to reach or stigmatized by the phenomena being researched (Heckathorn, 2011). I identified participants for the research from a convenience sampling not generalizable to larger populations (Costanza, Blacksmith, & Coats, 2015). This process provided names of others who qualified as participants for the particular project and enlarged the sampling pool (Heckathorn, 2011). I was able to obtain 20 names of African-American women, currently between the ages of 21-30, who became parents while teenagers still in a specific high school. Interested participants

needed to have been academically talented while in high school, having a GPA of 3.0 or higher on a 4.0 scale (Volwerk & Tindal, 2012). I also needed women in that same age group and similar circumstances to conduct a pilot study. I did not specifically exclude European students; however, the selected high school site was predominately black.

I created two documents, a one-page flyer that introduced, and explained the study with an invitation to become a participant. I sent an emailed invitation to all of the women I obtained contact information for from the convenience and snowball sampling. I received responses of interest from 25 women from the email contact. I considered the five women who did not qualify for the pilot study (Burkholder, 2012, Baškarada, 2014). A total of 16 women responded and agreed to be included. Research participants I provided the group with an overview flyer and advised them of the necessity to complete a consent form (Appendix C). The consent form, previously approved by the Walden Internal Review Board (IRB), explained the nature of the research, provided background information on the study, and the procedures the study would follow.

Pilot studies assess the validity of the interview protocol (Baškarada, 2014; Burkholder, 2012). Conducted as if it were the official interview, pilot studies provide researchers the opportunity to analyze the protocol they have prepared (Anderson, Leahy, DelValle, Sherman & Tansley, 2014). Researchers emulate the skills they later use in the structured interviews (Anderson et al., 2014). Researchers evaluate the readability of the questions and verify the questions asked which clarifies how to best ascertain descriptions, details, and expected reactions to the phenomena under investigation (Burkholder, 2012; Anderson et al., 2014).

The email packet sent to the future participants included sample questions and a reminder of the research's voluntary nature. I provided instructions and options on any associated risks and benefits of completing the study. I reminded each participant of the confidentiality of the research, and the ability to terminate the interview at any point if there was any level of discomfort or for any reason. Each participant agreed to sign and return the consent form, however only 12 returned completed agreements. I attempted to contact those who women who had initially agreed, but was unsuccessful. I arranged to collect the data and conduct the interviews of the eight women. Scheduling conflicts, loss of interest, and unanswered email and phone calls accounts for the final number of participants being eight.

The selection process for this study required that participants were African America women, were between 21-30 years of age, became mothers while still high school teenagers, and previously identified as academically talented in high school. Post-secondary school attendance was not a requirement for participation. The sampling pool was a convenience random sample, and of the eight women who agreed to participate, all of them had accomplished at least one semester of a post-secondary program. This fact was not consistent with the literature as to the number of parenting teens who attend post-secondary programs, as all of the participants had accomplished at least one semester.

Two of the eight participants married the father of their child and had more children after the marriage. One participant had one child before marriage, married, and had children with the father of the first child. Only one mother remains married, another separated, and one currently divorced. Martens et al. (2014) wrote 25% of teen parents

have a second child before their 20th birthday. Five of the participants have more than one child, and three of that five had their second child as a teenager.

Focus interviews are conversational in nature and utilize probing questions from a prewritten script (Yin, 2011). I began each interview following a script I had written which included an overview of the research project and an outline of the interview process (Burkholder, 2012; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). I created a script that included reminders of information for reiteration to the participants. The script included reminders of the rights of the participants, the voluntary nature of the project, and they could stop the interview process at any time if there were any discomfort in continuing. I thanked participants for participating and provided the option to ask questions or share any concerns before I began collecting the consent forms and gathering background information (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). I conducted the interviews at locations mutually agreed upon, easily accessible for the interviewer and the interviewees, and able to provide an environment conducive for conducting an in-depth conversation. I used open-ended questions and phrases to encourage descriptions and explanations, rather than direct or closed-ended questions that lead to yes and no answers (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Examples of open-ended phrases and questions include 'tell me about', or 'how would you describe?". Open-ended questions allowed the interviewees to evaluate decisions made, and consider barriers that may have affected those decisions about completing high school and attending a post-secondary institution (Appendix A).

Before the questioning began, I collected the consent forms and asked the participants for permission to make an audio recording of the interview (Burkholder,

2012; Crawford, 2010; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). In addition to electronically recording the session, (Burkholder, 2012; Yin, 2013), I advised that I might take hand-written notes. I reminded the interviewees of the confidential nature of the research, and the precautions taken to protect the anonymity of the project (Endicott, 2010). I reiterated the interview could be stopped at any moment without repercussion (Crawford, 2010; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012), and advised the interviewees transcripts of the sessions would be made available later if desired (Crawford, 2010; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

Each participant completed the demographic survey (Appendix A), transitioning from the preliminaries, overview, and permissions. I made audio recordings of the interviews to assure accuracy and to minimize researcher bias (Burkholder, 2012; Crawford, 2010; Yin, 2013). Hand-written notes documented highlighted portions of the participants' descriptions. I expected the questions would yield subjective answers based on the individual expressions of the interviewees (Valandra, 2012).

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research focuses on identifying and organizing the recurring themes of the respondents (Baškarada, 2014; Yin, 2013). Analysis involves generalizing participant responses to theoretical framework of the research (Baškarada, 2014). I designed the questions to ask participants about the barriers academically talented African-American teen mothers had to overcome to continue pursuing a post-secondary education and what influences contributed to those decisions. I uncovered theme and organized the participant descriptions. Additionally I checked explanations and the similarities and like responses became and confirmed using the NVivo software

program. NVivo is designed to assist qualitative researchers in categorizing and classifying data (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011), and allows researchers to organize, store, record, index, sort, categorize and analyze qualitative data (Bergin, 2011; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011).

Interview analysis is more than just decoding the collected data and summarizing the descriptions of the participants (Robinson, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I chose to become skilled at using the NVivo software as the research progressed (Bergin, 2011). I transcribed the audio and written responses into a spreadsheet (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011) when each was completed in the order in which the interviews were conducted. Transcribed data are summaries of written responses, and verbatim of recorded answers (Bergin, 2011). Following the guidance of Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2011) and Bergin (2011), I imported the data from the spreadsheet of the interviews into the NVivo software. NVivo groups the data and creates nodes, the grouping of similar words, phrases, and references with shared meanings (Bergin, 2011). Constant comparison analysis (Baškarada, 2014) looks for identified codes located in the expressions of each case under review and then compares each code to each of the other codes present in the data; which is the equivalent of nodes in NVivo (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). I coded the data and grouped into nodes. I then grouped the nodes into word trees, a broader categorizing of the themes (Bergin, 2011). Word trees are graphic representations of the incidences of a words' use and the context in which it was used (Bergin, 2010; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011).

The responses of the participants during the interviews often used the word support. I ran a query for the word 'support' and the result was 18 occurrences in three different contexts.

Figure 1

Text Query Results
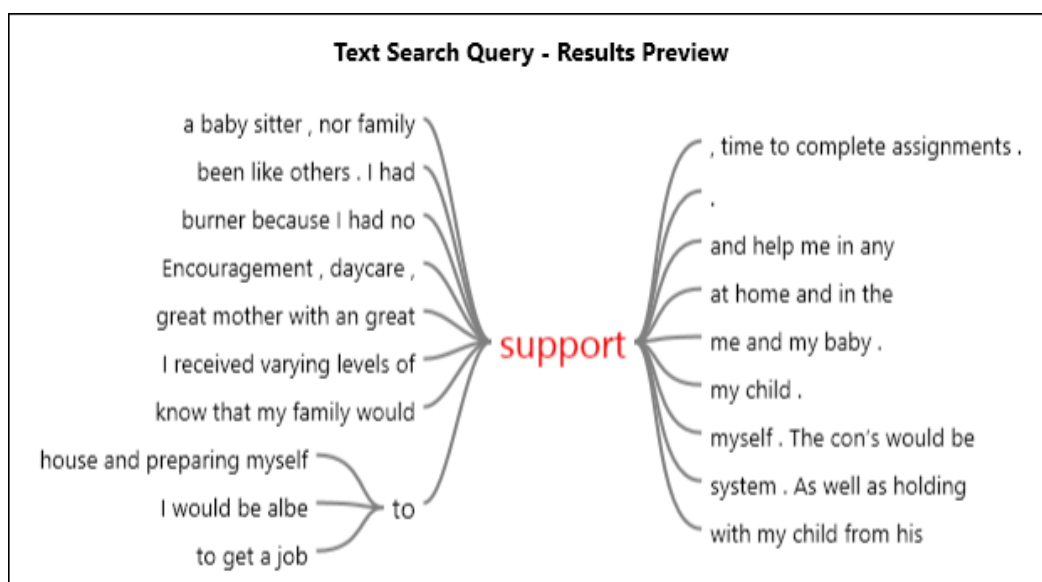
NVivo assisted in simplified the coding, classifying and categorizing of the data through its' application process, and helps isolate and uncover emergent themes (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). I was able to manipulate and verify the data through the programming functions of NVivo, engineered to simplify this process (Bergin, 2011; Leech & Onwuegbuzie 2011). Key words and words of interest are easily located with the sort and matching features and allow researchers to manipulate and relate to each other emergent themes (Bergin, 2011; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Using NVivo provides increased speed and ease in locating like and or similar data with the click of the keys (Leech & Onwuegbuzie 2011). Identifying the frequency of commonly used phrases

and terminology is another benefit and function of NVivo (Bergin, 2011; Leech & Onwuegbuzie 2011). Common responses become visible through reviewing the audio tapes, hand-written notes, and transcribed data (Bergin, 2011; Carlson, 2010). These common phrases and repeated ideologies become the categories or nodes (Bergin, 2011; Leech & Onwuegbuzie 2011). I grouped the data, creating new nodes or cells of information by searching for key phrases and frequently used words (Bergin, 2010). The searched word function of NVivo collects all of the incidences of the search criteria of the respondents (Bergin, 2011; Leech & Onwuegbuzie 2011).

During the interviews, the focus is on the data collection and descriptions from the interviewees (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). There is no attempt to attach meaning or understanding to the responses at that time (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I looked for recurring themes and common elements in the responses while analyzing the transcribed data (Bergin, 2011; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Listening to the audio recordings reinforced by the hand written strengthens the analysis of the collected data (Bergin, 2011). Saturation has occurred at the point in the analysis where no new ideas or themes emerge (Creswell, 2007; Cronin, 2014; Mason, 2010). I selected the qualitative research because of its ability to conform or contradict the theory associated with the research (Yin, 2013). Each case, when being added to the database, confirms or contradicts a theory (Baškarada, 2014). If multiple cases are contradictory, researchers should revise and retest the theory with new cases (Baškarada, 2014). For this research, I indentified all of the themes during the first six keyed case interviews. The seventh through eighth cases

echoed those themes and produced similar results to what was already present (Mason, 2010), replicating and confirming the theories (Baškarada, 2014; Yin, 2013).

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Through remaining committed to neutrality and unbiased thinking, I was able to establish validity, trustworthiness, and creditability (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Additionally, I established clear and concise protocols for the participant selection, the interviews, and the collection and management of the data (Burkholder, 2012; Crawford, 2010; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Participant use of rich and detailed descriptions in the answers provided and the detailed diversity in contributors' demographic selection influenced the transferability (Carlson, 2010; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). I individually interviewed members who had mutually experienced the phenomena under investigation, and noted similar responses to the questions. The use of the same phrases and parallel answers lends itself to data dependability and the likelihood of another researcher reproducing the research (Carlson, 2010; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). I recorded, reported, and analyzed the results throughout the process. Member checking and the informal feedback of the participants verified the data (Carlson, 2010). Through coding, categories were established and I grouped the data according to emerging categories. NVivo's speed, efficiency, and accuracy enhance the intra and inter-coding of the data (Baškarada, 2014).

Results

The primary research question was: What factors influence post-secondary school attendance for academically talented African-American women who became parents as high school teenagers?

I asked participants to describe the following:

1. Describe perceived barriers academically talented African-American pregnant and parenting high school teens overcome to continue their post-secondary education.

2. Describe influences that contribute to the decision to attend post-secondary institutes for academically talented African-American women who became pregnant and mothers as high school teenagers.

I asked participants to consider barriers that had to be overcome to complete high school and continue pursuits of education at a two or four-year college or university. The second question asked participants what factors contributed to their decisions. Additionally, the questionnaire asked the interviewees questions about education plans and personal where they saw themselves in 5 years and how they planned to accomplish those goals. I asked questions retrospectively to consider answers before their pregnancies, during their pregnancies and after the baby was born. Questions included asking the participants to provide perceptions of their high school in comparison to other schools in the area, and if they thought their school prepared them for success in education at the next level.

Table 7 lists of all the themes developed through the analysis as participant responses. The table also includes whether or not a participant mentioned each particular theme.

Table 3

Themes

Themes	Participant listed							
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8
Support System/Help	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Daycare/Childcare	x	x	x		x	x	x	x
Expectations of a Post-secondary Education	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Positive Self-Image	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
Balancing parenthood and school					x	x		x
Enrollment in successive semesters	x	x		x		x		
Maintain grades			x		x			x
Work	x			x		x	x	
Marriage				x		x		
Transportation		x			x		x	

Respondents replied to additional questions including their plans for a post-secondary education prior to the pregnancy, where they saw themselves in five years, and how they planned to accomplish those goals. I used the NVivo data analysis software for assistance in coding and categorizing the collected data. I analyzed and transcribed the interviews

utilizing the data from surveys, the audio tapes, and the hand-written notes. Common repetitive responses and descriptions emerged as themes and allowed me to formulate a basis for further interpretation of the data (Baškarada, 2014).

The participants revealed their perceptions through their answers based on individual experiences (Baškarada, 2014; Carlson, 2010). Keying and coding the data exposed a familiarity of answers (Baškarada, 2014). As high school students, this group of women predominately live in the same community, attend the same school, and were influenced by the same educational staff of teachers and administrators. There was no weighted value assigned to any of the themes and no prioritization. The order of their appearance corresponds with the order of the questions, and all themes are included whether mentioned by all of the participants or just one.

Support Systems

All of the participants mentioned and discussed their level of support in being a teen mother and student, and mentioned how important that support was to their success. For the purposes of this study, the interviewees defined a support system as those who helped in caring and providing for the baby's physical and financial needs, and the physical, financial, and emotional needs of the mother. In analyzing and coding the data, and summarizing the findings, it appears that the more support the teen mothers received, the more capable of accomplishing their school goals they were. All had attempted and completed at least one semester at a post-secondary institute.

Each had an expectation of the help they would and should receive from their child's father, their family, friends, and the family members of their child's father. Two

of the participants, P1 and P6, had no expectation of any help from the father of their child, and did not receive any help. The other six interviewees believed they would receive help from their child's father; three of the fathers met those expectations, two fathers helped limitedly, and one father expected to help, did not. All of the participants except one expected their immediate family to help. P6 had no expectation of family help, however, received assistance from their biological father and stepmother, but not the maternal grandmother and aunts. P1 expected family support but did not receive it. Only three of the father's family members aided the parenting mom, and friends of one mother and two other mother's friends provided minimal assistance. Table 8 summarizes this information.

Table 4

Participant Expectation of Help

	Expected Help			Received Help From				
	Childs Father	Mother's Family	Friends	Father's Family	Child's Father	Mother's Family	Friends	Father's Family
P1	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
P2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Limited	Limited	Yes	No	No
P3	Yes	Yes	Yes	Limited	No	Limited	No	No
P4	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Some	Yes
P6	No	No	No	No	No	Limited	No	No
P7	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Limited	Yes
P8	Some	Some	No	Some	Limited	Limited	No	Limited

P1 had no immediate familial support to attend a post-secondary institute following high school, and delayed attending a post-secondary institute. "When I found out I was pregnant, I knew I wanted to go to college, but I knew I probably wasn't going to get to go. Who was gonna help me? I knew I would need help", P1 mentioned relying on an older grandmother for assistance. P1 attempted a post-secondary education, only to have to the plans thwarted. The child's father and the paternal family did little to assist P1 in attempts to attend a post-secondary institute, and had very little to do with the child. A second pregnancy two years later further pushed back P1's timetable for school. The father of the second child offers more support to P1 than does the father of the first child.

P1 did not see how to raise two children and attend school as a single working mom of two young children.

The family kicked P6 out of the house when they became aware of the pregnancy. P6 discussed living amongst friends in order to complete high school. P6 moved out of state to live with an estranged biological father with whom there existed only an alienated relationship. P6 went to work shortly after arriving at the father's residence. Though there was an offer to help while P6 worked and attended school, having a job changed P6's attitude about the necessity of a post-secondary education. "I thought since I had a job making just a little money, why did I need school? Wrong, so wrong!!" Returning to SC, P6 married, and had three more children. The family continued to be remiss in assisting to sustain the accomplishment of their educational goals.

P4 had an excellent and effective support system. P4 married the father of the child, who gave up an offered athletic scholarship to an in-state university, and enlisted in the military to sustain the family financially. P4's family and the family of the child's father supported P4's desire to accomplish the goal of completing a post-secondary education. P4 received assistance wherever and whenever help was needed, especially after the child's father was deployed mid school semester. The marriage did not survive, and P4 is now a divorced mother of two children. P4 is close to completing the coursework for a BS in nursing and nearing the ability to pursue the goal of becoming a nurse practitioner. P4 continues to enjoy a strong support system that includes the children's father, and both sets of grandparents, aunts, and uncles.

The mother and sisters of P7 provided all the support and encouragement needed. P7 was a 15-year old 10th grader at the time of the first conception. P7 received the assistance caring for the child and was able to graduate from high school with honors. The only adjustment P7 made to the plans to attend a post-secondary institute was the location of the school. The confirmed pregnancy meant P7 would have to attend a local institute instead of an out of town school so that assistance with the baby would be available. At the time of the interview, P7 had received a state licensure in cosmetology and enrolled in a bachelors program in business for entrepreneurship.

P5 received a tremendous amount of support from family members, the child's father and members of the child's father's and her baby's family. The child's father offered to take full responsibility for their child so P5 could experience college life and live on campus freshman year. P5 did not accept that offer but was able to complete two semesters at a 4-year institution. The aide provided by the child's father was not enough because both parents were then in school. P5 and the child's father made the decision together that P5 would postpone plans to obtain a post-secondary education and instead care for the children. The father would complete a baccalaureate degree and enlist in the military to support the family, which had grown to married parents and three children. With the father on active duty in the military and away from the family, P5 received limited support from either family. For P5, school remains a future goal.

P2 had a support system that allowed for the completion of a 2-year certification program in early childhood education. The mother and sisters of P2 provided the major additional assistance while P2 attended classes and completed school assignments.

Although P2 received limited support from the family and father of the child, the paternal grandmother provided daycare while P2 attended classes.

The mother of P3 provided support for P3 to attend classes at a post-secondary institute, but a second pregnancy interrupted educational plans. The second child of P3 was born extremely premature, and the child's health became the focus once the baby was born. Caring for two children, one of whom remained in the hospital several additional months, a demanding job did not allow time for P3 to continue classes on the post-secondary level. There was no time for classes and studying, even with the limited additional support provided by the father and family of the baby.

P8 is the mother of a now teenage child. P8 explained the support that one would think the families of the mother and father of the child would provide was not provided P8 also stated the assistance one wouldn't think would be provided, was. P8 attended an out of town 4-year institution, and both grandparents shared in the responsibility of caring for the child. P8 took that opportunity but did not return for the second year thereby diminishing the families desire to continue daily involvement with the baby. The father of the child was limited in the support offered to the baby, however, the maternal grandmother filled in any gaps left by the father's inability to provide. For the second year of school, P8 lived with the child's maternal grandmother while the mother attended school. Beyond providing care for the baby for P8 to attend class, assistance with caring for the baby dwindled because P8 was living at home. Additionally, the father's family reduced the amount of assistance they offered. However, P8 is currently completing an undergraduate degree in political science on the way to entering law school.

Daycare/Childcare

The young mothers expressed daycare and general childcare to be an issue (Mollborn & Blalock, 2012), including those who had an active support system. These systems included guaranteed housing, assistance with providing physical and financial care of the baby, and time away from the baby (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011; McMichael, 2013). Daycare and childcare also included supervision of the children while the mothers attended class, studied, and completed assignments. Care for the children could come from family members or friends of either the child's mother or father, or from an established childcare provider. Not to confuse the function of the support system and help, help extends assistance to the mothers; daycare and childcare focuses on care for the child. The participants used the term babysitter interchangeably with the meaning of daycare and childcare, however, babysitters were more often family and friends who would provide care for the baby. Childcare and daycare usually meant the child went to a facility where social services paid for the care. All of the participants, except P4, included the terms child care, day care, or baby sitters as one of the challenges they faced in attempting to complete high school or accomplish the secondary level.

All of the mothers believed they had childcare concerns addressed and viable plans in place, enough to allow each mother to attempt at least one semester of school following high school, or to complete high school. Last minute changes too often altered those plans, and promises to care for the baby fell through at the final and critical moments. As a former high school teacher, I agree with Smyth and Anderson (2014) that teenage mothers still in high school have poor attendance. Explanations for those

absences include the baby being sick, the baby not sleeping the night before, the mother not sleeping because the baby wasn't sleep (SmithBattle, 2006; Roxas, 2008; Smyth & Anderson, (2014). Students also stated there was no time to complete assignments while caring for the baby, and no one to provide care for the baby for the mother to attend class (Smyth & Anderson, 2014).

P1 had graduated from high school before the baby was born. P6 had limited assistance when it came to childcare or babysitters. P1 received no help at all from the child's father or any of the father's family members. The limited support P1 received was from an aging grandmother. P1 did not allow or expect the aged grandmother to keep the baby, allowing P1 time to work and attend post-secondary school. P1 attempted one semester when the child was still an infant, and it proved to be too much for P1 and the aged grandmother. P1 struggled with deciding whether to continue education after high school or continuing to work. "I had to decide if I should go to school and continue my education or work. I felt I had to choose my career or to care for my child."
P5 had assistance in childcare from the child's father, the maternal grandmother, sisters, and the father's family. Even with all of the volunteer sitters and care providers, there were still challenges with supervision for the baby for P5 to attend classes. The baby was still an infant when P5 attended a small private historically black college or university (HBCU). P5 commented on days when babysitting and daycare fell through; it was permissible for the infant child to come to class. The professors allowed the baby in the classroom as long as the baby was quiet and did not disturb the other students. P5 expressed gratitude for those occasions when the baby attended class with her, rather than

miss the class. P5 admitted it was hard to pay attention in class and concentrate on the lecture or lesson with the baby present.

P4 initially choose an online program to start the post-secondary educational experience to avoid any issues with childcare while attending classes. Online classes gave P4 flexibility to accomplish schoolwork at a time convenient to the differing day-to-day needs of the baby. Because P4 did not have a specific time needed to attend class, P4 did not experience the last minute cancelation of babysitters and childcare providers, as did the other participants. Additionally, P8 had ample assistance to care for the baby and accomplish whatever tasks that needed to completed.

P8 was in 10th grade when the baby was born. Childcare and babysitting provided by P8's family and the father of the child's family allowed her to complete high school. Additionally, P8 participated in extra- curricular school activities. However, P8 stated upon walking in the house from school; there was no assistance with caring for the baby, or accomplishing school assignments. P8 mentioned, "All of the help just went away."

P1, P2, P3, P6, P7, and P8 all responded that an onsite campus daycare/childcare facility, with extended hours, would have made continuing their education easier. P6 expounded that 'poor' institutions sometimes have child and day care facilities, but those were not the schools P6 was interested in attending. P6 wanted the premier, hard to gain admission to, Division I school with rigorous admission standards to offer the daycare/childcare also.

Expectations of a Post-Secondary Education

Each contributor understood and stated the awareness of the need for education beyond high school. Prior to becoming pregnant, all of the participants had plans for and a vision of attending a post-secondary school or institution of higher learning to study and prepare for careers. Pre-pregnancy, those careers included music production, nursing, law, pediatrics, education, and special education. Pregnancy only changed those expectations for two of the participants, P1, and P6.

After confirming the pregnancy, P1 no longer expected that accomplishing post-secondary educational goals was realistic. Even before the baby was born, P1 had doubts of any additional support would be available from family members, and was confident no help would come from the family of the father of the child. P6 believed life was over and though there was an understanding of the need for a post-secondary education, P6 knew having a baby was going to complicate that effort. P6 believed the negative media representation of teen parents as an accurate description of the life now available. As a teen mother, P6 looked forward to living life doomed as an uneducated mother of multiple children with a total dependence on government assistance.

P2 and P7 both expected that they would still obtain a post-secondary education and did not believe the pregnancy and birth of their child would stop them from this goal. Prior to their pregnancies, P2 and P7 had plans to complete their post-secondary education at institutions away from home. Becoming pregnant, however, did not change their expectations that they could and would complete their post-secondary education; it only changed their options of where they could and would attend. Both women chose to

attend local institutions close to home, where they could continue living at home and attend classes, and utilize the help of their families.

Hiding the pregnancy, P8 was unsure of how becoming a mother was going to affect the ability to obtain an education beyond high school. Because P8 did not know whom to trust and who would help, there was no expectation of how to accomplish a post-secondary education. At the same time, P8 knew it was necessary to have an education beyond high school. P8 attended three different schools in various environments. P8 attended on semester away from home, leaving the child in the care of the both the maternal and paternal grandmothers. P8 attended a local technical college, lived with the maternal grandmother, and received little to no help from the child's father and family. P8 attended a local 4-year institution after the child was old enough to need adult supervision.

P3 attended a local technical college, entering the fall semester following the high school graduation. P3 completed at least 3 semesters as a part-time student before the birth of the second child. The child's prematurity forced P3 to withdraw from classes. P4's expectation always was to complete a degree and enter the profession of that major. P4 married the child's father right after high school and relocated with the father to a military base nowhere near the university with the planned program of study. P4 overcame this obstacle by enrolling in an online program. After a second child, the marriage dissolved and P4 returned home and to complete the program of study.

Self-Image

The media often negatively represents the pregnant and parenting teens as impoverished, uneducated and disadvantaged (Docksai, 2010; Feasey, 2012; Roxas, 2008). Residents of the African American community (Dash, 2003; Feasey, 2012; Roxas, 2008) often represent the dilemma of teen pregnancy. Society and the media preach the negative consequences of teen pregnancy and parenting include low-paying entry level positions with limited benefits and opportunities for advancement, extended and multiple periods of unemployment, and single parenting (Bissell, 2000; Docksai, 2010; Lee, 2007; Stout & Le, 2012). They also perpetuate the idea that teenagers becoming parents is a mistake (Bissell, 2000, Docksai, 2010; Smyth & Anderson, 2014; Stout & Le, 2012). Each of the research participants acknowledged the negative imagery portrayed by the media of pregnant and parenting teens, but not all believed it. When asked if they the media portrayal of teen mothers affected them, Table 9 provides their responses:

These mothers were all aware of the negativity associated with the media portrayal of teen pregnancy and parenting (Docksai, 2010; Roxas, 2008; Smyth & Anderson, 2014). Frustration, disappointment in oneself and the feeling of now being statistics are three emotions expressed by the cohort of participants. Overall, the women in this study viewed their pregnancy and parenting positively and did not believe their child was a mistake. The majority held healthy self-image about themselves, and a sense of pride. Contrary to public opinion, the mothers had all graduated from high school and completed at least one semester toward a post-secondary education.

Self-efficacy, the belief in ones' ability to accomplish goals and complete tasks (Bandura, 1977; Thompson & Graham, 2015), became a cornerstone of motivation for the majority of the parenting teens. The mothers' believed in the ability of self to complete post-secondary educations. Two participants struggled with self-perceptions but had enough self-efficacy to complete high school and attempted the next level of education. Each of the participants wanted to become good parents and be able to provide for their children and believed good parenting and school was possible. The cohort of teen mothers believed in more than just being a statistic. The belief was to be a successful parent.

Balancing Parenthood and School

Effective parenting requires a significant time commitment, along with school, and small children require a lot of care. They need time to care for the baby, prepare for its needs, attend class, study, sleep, maybe work, and care for oneself. Learning to balance the responsibilities of parenting, school, and life is something parenting students

must determine for them, and the road to that balance is different for everyone. They must still discover and maintain the need for the equilibrium of student and parenting responsibilities. P8 admitted the struggle of "finding time to study and do homework while caring for a young child." P8 shared how almost impossible it was to get the family to assist and allow time to be able to accomplish schoolwork, home responsibilities and care for the baby. P8 needed help, however, once home P8 said, "It was like when I was home, I had to do everything for my child myself."

P6 explained,

Trying to balance parenthood and school, I kept having babies. I was unmarried and then unhappily married. I did not have the energy to do school and care for an infant. Even when I was married, I was doing it alone, and trying to study with a crying baby. And then when the kids got older, I couldn't do both my homework and theirs.

P2 explained, "I didn't know newborns and toddlers required so much care. All I seemed to do was take care of the baby. There was never time to study, and little time for going to class." Finding a balance was more of a concern for those participants who did not have a strong support system or received little to no help. The participants who had help and support acknowledged their need for time to study; however, they were able to receive assistance from family and friends. Without assistance, finding time to accomplish the tasks necessary for academic success is challenging at best.

Enrollment In Successive Semesters

The challenge of remaining enrolled and able to attend classes was another area of concern mentioned in the data. All of the participants completed high school and at least one semester of a post-secondary education, however they all did not began their post-secondary education the first semester following their high school graduation. The breaks in attendance ranged from one semester, to one semester here and there, to not returning. P1 was only able to complete one semester when the first child was an infant. The desire to continue remained, however, when the first child was of a manageable age where P1 believed returning to school was possible, they confirmed a second pregnancy. P1 extended her return date, believing not having reliable help to care for the two children while work and school were attempted would eventually force the school termination. P4 was well on the way to completing a competitive 4-year degree program. Daycare and childcare were never an issue. P4 married the father of the child who offered great support along with both of their families. Other life issues and circumstances caused P4 to decide to take time off along the way, totaling a two-year hiatus. P4 mentioned taking care of two children, maintaining a marriage and a job as reasons for the school furloughs.

Maintaining Grades

The participants were all academically talented in high school, each having at least a 3.0 GPA on a 4.0 grading scale. High school pregnancy did not force any of these mothers' grade point averages to fall below 3.0. Five of the eight women still saw post-secondary school attendance as accomplishable and in their futures so good grades were

still important and of value them. Even though P1 questioned the ability to balance motherhood and school, the final high school transcript reflected a 3.0 GPA. SP6's expectation of continuing school after high school changed and the focus shifted to working and taking care of the child, though completing high school with a 3.0.

P4 said, "I continued to push and make the grades and thought I would be okay because I had my child's father, and my family for help." The plans for the post-secondary education included maintaining good grades and the Dean's list. P4 had the support and assistance necessary to make and maintain good grades. Good grades were the family and personal expectation. P8 conveyed a commitment to "working hard, getting good grades, and keeping myself eligible to go to the next level." Family expectations were to continue school after high school, and good grades were an integral part of living up to that expectation, therefore maintaining good grades was mandatory self-expectation.

P7 compared the challenges of maintaining grades in high school to expectations to complete a post-secondary education. The plan for accomplishing that was to be the same as it was in high school, to stay focused and to make sure to complete every assignment. P7 was willing and committed to doing whatever it took to continue being successful.

Marriage

Marriage is not always a viable option for teenage pregnancies in the 21st century. Prior to the mid-1950's teenage out of wedlock pregnancy resulted in marriage. The change in marital status of the mother and the creation of a family shifted the focus from

the age of the mother to marital status. Three of the participants in this study had gotten married by the time of the study; two married the father's of the children, the third marrying someone other than the child's father. P4 married the child's father who forfeited a college football scholarship, getting married and creating a family right after graduation. The father supported the efforts of the mother to remain in school and when the second child was born, the father enlisted in the military to provide for the family. P4 is divorced now.

P5 married the father of the child before the second birthday of the baby. P5 was pregnant with their second child at the wedding. The third child was born within two years of the marriage. P5 struggled in the marriage, struggled in school and struggled with parenting. The children's father provided assistance with the children. The father's immediate family members also were involved with helping with the first child. After the wedding and two more children, assistance from the paternal family members waned. With two children, a husband, and then a third child, post-secondary school became more a dream and less of a possible reality. P5 is currently still married.

P6 is married, and three children have been born to that union. The fourth child, the one born while P6 was in high school, is not a biological child of the husband. P6 did not say much about the marriage or the marital partner, except that there were periods of unhappiness, and then unhappiness while being married while trying to balance parenthood, school, and parenthood. There was no mention of the husbands' involvement in the educational aspirations P6 had, P6's life, or the lives of the children.

Transportation

Transportation was a concern for P5 and P7. Neither family owned a vehicle, which made getting back and forth to campus challenging. The inability to drive, and the family not having a vehicle or access to a car made the dependency on others a necessity and a burden. P7 had to secure transportation to get to a fulltime job, as well as to school. Being unemployed, P5 only had to work out transportation to and from class. P5 and P7 cited transportation as reasons for lapses in post- secondary school attendance. Because school buses picked up the mothers for school, the lack of a family vehicle for high school students is minimal. The school buses would not transport the children, but they did provide a means for the mothers to get to and from school. Post-secondary schools do not offer off-campus busing, so for P5 and P7 finding rides to and from campus was stressful.

<center>**Summary**</center>

I interviewed eight African-American women, currently between the ages of 21-30, identified as academically talented in high school and became pregnant and a parent while still in high school. The women shared their thoughts and perceptions on the challenges they faced and factors that affected their decisions to complete high school. The study members provided details of what influenced their starting and continuing their post-secondary education, breaks in attendance, and completing their programs of study. Areas of concern articulated included the levels of support, encouragement, and help the parenting teen mothers received from their families, the child's father, and his family and friends. It appears the more support the mothers had from family and friends, the more

each participant was able to display confidence in the ability to complete school regardless of the level. Support levels offered to the participants ranged from very limited support, to someone other than the mother or father accepting full responsibility for the child.

Challenges include daycare, childcare, and someone to watch the baby while the mom attended school or studied. , also ran the gamut from constant challenges to find someone to care for the child, to more than enough family members and friends to provide whatever assistance was needed. All of the mothers discussed childcare whether it was to share what practices were in place or to discuss any the need for additional assistance. Providing care for their child was still a concern for each mother, even with adequate provision of child and daycare.

The expectation and understanding of the need for post-secondary education motivated the participants to complete at least one semester of school following high school graduation. All of the participants had plans to continue their education after high school prior to their pregnancy, and the majority still believed this to be a realistic goal once they become pregnant. How positively the teen mothers saw themselves, their decisions to parent while in high school affected their decision-making and choices as it pertained to their continuing their post high school education (Bandura, 1993; Thompson & Graham, 2015).

Although the media often negatively portrayed teen parents as poverty stricken, illiterate, poor decision makers (Bissel, 2000; Stout & Le, 2012), except for one participant, these mothers did not believe the negativity. In fact, they felt the images were

not reflective of their lives. P4, however, believed the negativity and that life was over, however, P4 still eventually enrolled in a post-secondary program and completed four semesters. P1 completed only one semester due to lack of adequate support and childcare and not ability.

Balancing school and parenting, and in three cases also a marriage, was challenging at worse for each parenting student. For each of the mother's, it was just a matter of figuring and working it out. Each semester brought new challenges, and the ability to resolve those challenges was a determining factor in whether the mother was to continue with a post-high school education for the next semester. There were breaks in enrollment for all of the mothers, and one mother completed only one semester. Balancing school, parenting, and life also included resolving transportation concerns, and the desire to make and maintain grades and a GPA classified as academically talented. The research reports teen pregnancy and parenting as the reason one in three teens drop out of high school (Shuger, 2012). Fewer than 50% have received a high school diploma by age 22 (About Teen Pregnancy, n.d.). I interviewed eight African-American women who were between the ages of 21-30, who became pregnant in high school. According to the statistics, 2.33 of them should have dropped out of high school, and fewer than four should have graduated. Not only did all of the women graduate high school with academic honors, all of the mothers entered a post-secondary institute at least for one semester.

Teen parents and parenting students continue to be concerned about their grades. In high school, the desire and need for obtaining and maintaining good grades

represented possible acceptance into the post-secondary institute of choice. While in post-high school programs, the concern shifted to be being able to remain in the programs and eligible for continued enrollment. Two of the teen mothers chose teen marriage, teen parenting, and then parenting students as the chosen path. Although a third mom from this cohort also chose marriage, the husband was not the biological father of the child. This third mom, however, was no longer a teen when the marriage took place. Marriage was not an option for the other teen parents. The incarcerated father of the child of P6 was unable and unwilling to assist P6. P1 remained on 'bad terms' with the child's father; a condition that existed before the baby was born. P2 and P3 had less than functional relationships with the fathers of their children, and there were limited expectations of these fathers, so marriage was never a consideration. P4 and P5 married their child's father. P7 and P8 received support from their child's father; however, they did not consider marriage.

Chapter 5: Summary

Introduction

The purpose of this research project was to describe influences that affected

decisions to complete high school and attend post-secondary schools for academically

talented African American women who were between the ages of 21 to 30 years old, who

became pregnant, and parents as high school teenagers. In this qualitative case study, I

explained and described the perceptions of the study participants who provided narrative

stories and descriptive anecdotes of the teen pregnancy phenomenon and educational

pursuits.

In this chapter, I summarize the key findings of the research, and either confirms,

disconfirms, or extends the knowledge of the already existing literature. I provide a

review of the collected and analyzed data. After coding and categorizing the participant

responses and uncovering themes, I aligned the responses to theoretical frameworks

postulated in the literature and formatted the information for presentation. The limitations

of the study will be discussed, followed by recommendations for future research. I share

suggestions for implications this research could have for social change and the chapter

ends with a project conclusion.

Interpretation of the Findings

Teenagers in the 21st century are becoming pregnant and parents at a rate that is

much lower than they did in the 1950s. Teen pregnancy hurts the mother's ability to

complete high school and attend a post-secondary education institution to accomplish an

undergraduate degree. Fewer than 2% of all teens who become mothers before their 18th

birthday complete college (American SPCC, 2024). Without a high school diploma or college education teen parents are not prepared to enter the global job market except in low-paying positions, with minimal if any benefits, and no potential for growth (Goodreau et al., 2020; Schmidt et al., 2023). Teen parents often raise their children as single parents (Kroese et al., 2021b; Wood, 2021) and continue the cycle of poverty (Silva-Laya et al., 2020: Williams, 2023).

The eight women that I interviewed did not fit the teen pregnancy and parenting model described in the literature. Motherhood did not prevent any of them from achieving their goals of graduating high school and continuing their education after graduating. Only one participant viewed life as over after discovering the pregnancy. This participant completed high school and gained admission to a post-secondary institute, completing six semesters. These young women did not see themselves as society described them, which was as uneducated, poverty-stricken victims who are bad decision makers (Hancock et al 2021; Small & Calarco, 2022).

I used the following question to guide the research:

What factors influence post-secondary school attendance for academically talented African American women who became parents as high school teenagers? Participants were asked to describe the following:

1. Describe perceived barriers academically talented African-American pregnant and parenting high school teens overcome to continue their post-secondary education.

2. Describe influences that contribute to the decision to attend post-secondary institutes for academically talented African-American women who became pregnant and mother as high school teenagers?

The participants cited the need to overcome the lack of a support system as a barrier. The ones that lacked a support system achieved a modicum of success in attending and completing their post-secondary education, while their counterparts were able to accomplish or continue working toward their established goals. Responsible adults to care for their child so the mother could attend class and complete assignments were other stated obstacles. Balancing motherhood and being a student presented difficulties. Two participants expressed low self-image and lack of confidence as hindrances, while the other six women had healthy self-esteem.

Other factors contributing to the decision to attend a post-secondary institute included the advantages it presented in a competitive global market. The desire to be able to provide for their child and offer them an improved lifestyle encouraged their decisions to continue education beyond high school. Believing in one's ability is integral to success (Etherton et al., 2022; Harding et al., 2020). The mothers who believed they would and could accomplish their post-secondary education accomplished their goals. The duality of their roles challenged those who struggled with the belief they could handle motherhood and being a student. Support and supplemental assistance presented a significant influence on the decision of whether or not to attend a post-secondary program.

The research participants acknowledged the negative way in which the media portrayed teen parents. Overall, they had different attitudes about motherhood than media

portrayals. Feasey (2023) spoke about the power and influence the media imagery has on those who watch and consider their reports. Only one mother believed the media misrepresentation and thought life was over when they received confirmation of the pregnancy. Two of the mothers reported the adverse effects on their self-image based on negative media imagery and questioned their ability to become successful and accomplish a post-secondary education. The remaining five did not believe the negativity applied to them and were determined that being a mother would not stop them from completing their education at the next level.

Gaining admission to a post-secondary institution was not problematic for any of the mothers. Being academically talented in high school with GPAs ranging from 3.0 to 3.81, each member of the research group gained admission to at least one post-secondary institute. However, attending classes in consecutive semesters was an ongoing challenge. All but one withdrew from at least one semester. Similarly, only one had not returned after the initial semester of the support systems stopped. The challenges that impeded registration included health issues with the children, a second or third pregnancy, and changes in caretakers' schedules. Evolving circumstances required a rethinking of the decision to continue with educational pursuits. Only one mother was able to complete the program of study without any interruptions. Two of the mothers have indefinitely suspended their attempts at their post-secondary education until their children are older and have cited their lack of a dependable support system as their reason.

The Results in Respect to the Literature

Upon initiating data collection, I was aware of conflicting information in existing literature. The numbers and statistics or quantitative data, were the same regardless of who was reporting them, however, the qualitative data varied depending on who conducted the study. Goodreau et al. (2020) and Schmidt et al. (2023) stated impoverished environments, including schools, are foundations for cyclic poverty. The high school attended by the participants is a Title I school (*FAST Facts:* (2019; Mikesell, 2020) with 100% of students receiving reduced or free lunches (Eau Claire High School, 2024).

The participants included in this report did not view their pregnancies as a mistake and did not feel that they were making poor contributions to society as a whole, contradicting the notion that teen pregnancy and parenting is representative of societal failures (Balanda-Baldyga et al., 2020; Morris 2023; Nimato, 2022). The negative imagery depicted by the media (Feasey, 2023) intimates that teen mothers are not only poor and uneducated but also poor decision-makers (Feasy, 2023; Harding et al., 2020). African-American teens often perceive the decision to parent as positive life choices and major accomplishment (Sniekers, 2020, Menefee, 2024), even if the consequence is forfeiting high school and college educations (Bogan, 2020; Macchia et al., 2021; Nkhoma et al., 2020). The eight women in this study perceived their decision as a positive life choice that motivated them to become successful. These mothers chose parenting and education, not parenting over education, and all of them continued their

educational pursuits after the births of their children completing high school and at least one semester of post-secondary education.

Theoretical Alignment

Teenage pregnancy and parenting are not new phenomena in the United States (Blake, 2023; Brindis et al. 2020). Until the mid-1950s, unwed teenage pregnancy resulted in a marriage and the creation of a family (Chambers & Gracia, 2021). The traditional 1950s families were married heterosexual couples and the biological children that resulted from the marriage (Chambers & Gracia, 2021; Schmidt et al., 2023). Researchers defined family as a group of people related by blood, marriage, or adoption. 21st-century families include same-sex partners as parents, blended families, stepfamilies, and single-parent families (Smocked & Schwartz, 2020; Ulferts, 2020). When an unmarried teenager becomes pregnant and remains unmarried, the mother and the child become a single-parent family, and the mother is now referred to as a parenting teen (Kroese et al., 2021a; Wood, 2021) Fewer teens are becoming pregnant and parents in the 21st century than the 1950s, but more pregnant teens are choosing single parenthood rather than marrying their child's father.

Teen pregnancy interrupts the natural progression through Erikson's stages of psychosocial development and needs in Maslow's hierarchy of needs go unmet (McLesky & Ruddell, 2020; Pincus, 2024). Erikson's developmental stages focus on the psychological and social environments of human development, theorizing eight stages exist from infancy to late adulthood that individuals must navigate (Butterbaugh & Wood; 2020; Erickson, 1963; Paul, 2023). Each stage has a crisis or conflicting force that

must be resolved before moving on to the next stage (Butterbaugh & Wood; 2020; Erikson, 1963; McLesky &Ruddell, 2020; Paul, 2023; Pincus, 2024). Teenagers ages 13 to19 are in the identity vs. role confusion stage where resolution is discovering who one is and is going to be (Butterbaugh & Wood; 2020; Erikson, 1963; Paul, 2023). Teenagers are struggling to establish identities, where and how to fit into families, communities, and society, and figure out issues of intimacy (Branje, 2022; Erikson, 1963; Shiraev & Levy, 2020). Pregnant and parenting teens are thrown from this trajectory to resolve issues of parenthood (Branje, 2022; Butterbaugh &Wood, 2020. Teenagers are not prepared to resolve the parenting crisis and still have not resolved the identity vs. role confusion issues, which complicates the resolution of either crisis (Branje, 2022; Branje et al., 2021).

After interviewing the participants and analyzing the data, it was evident which of the interviewees had resolved their identity vs. role confusion crisis and the role of parent (Branje, 2022; Branje et al., 2021; Eriksen, 1963; Handa & Umemura, 2023). Erikson's theory states stage resolution usually occurs in the mid to late 20s through the 40s (Branje, 2022; Butterbaugh & Wood, 2020; Paul, 2023). The desire to be a good parent is not always enough, especially when one has not had the life experiences to draw from to make those decisions (Anastas et al., 2021; SmithBattle et al. 2020). Living through the cycles of life out of order can complicate the resolution of each stage (Branje, 2022; Branje et al., 2021; Eriksen; Handa & Umemura, 2023), and evidence of these complications showed up in the lives, thoughts, and conversations of the participants.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs focuses on the physiological and motivational needs of humans as they develop throughout their life span (Bland & DeRobertis, 2020; Yurdakul & Arar, 2023). Maslow believed development was a continuous process, and that needs were hierarchal rather than isolated, and meeting these needs is what motivates (Handa & Umemura, 2023). Lower-level needs of food, air, water, shelter, safety, and healthcare are attended to by adults for the children. The intermediate-level needs include friendships, family, love, and intimacy and exist for the rest of their lives (Maslow, 1943; Navy, 2020). Individuals can begin to work on the highest-level need, once needs concerning self-esteem, confidence, and personal achievements are self-actualization (Bland & DeRobertis, 2020; Handa & Umemura, (2023). In teen parenting, pregnancy occurs as the mothers figure out their friendship, love, family, and intimacy needs (Maslow, 1943; Rojas et al., 2023). Before individuals can move to the next level of needs, parenting teens whose friendship, love, family, and intimacy needs remain unmet, struggle with self-esteem, confidence, and personal achievement (Bowen, 2021; Maslow, 1943; Rojas et al., 2023).

The research participants who shared strained familial relationships and had no support system exhibited low self-esteem, lack of confidence, and the personal achievement concerns discussed in Maslow's theory (Bland & DeRobertis, 2020; Rojas et al., 2023). Those participants who had a friendship, love, family, and intimacy needs met were confident that a post-secondary education was something that could and would be accomplished and there was a confidence that anything could be achieved (Maslow, 1943; Saether, 2023; Harding et al., 2020). However, not all or any needs on a particular

level need to be met for an individual to move to the next level; however, the more needs met before moving to the next level, the easier the transition to that level and meeting its' needs appeared (Yurdakul & Arar, 2023; Bland & DeRoberts, 2020).

Limitations of the Study

Limitations exist in any research study because researchers cannot reach all who experience the phenomena (Harding et al., 2020; Morin et al., 2021). Research can never reproduce the experiences of all the pregnant and parenting teens in America. This project produced a sampling of the descriptions of the women in the school district where I conducted the research. For a myriad of reasons, this project was not able to introduce data from the 20 women invited to participate and was limited to the final eight interviewees. From the collected data, 100% of the teen mothers completed high school, and 100% attempted and completed at least one semester of post-secondary learning. These numbers are not in keeping with the current body of literature which stated for the school year 2009-2010 that one in three pregnant teens dropped out of high school (Love, 2023; Blake, 2023; Kindu et al., 2023).

The eight project participants all graduated from high school. Each one applied to at least one post-secondary educational institute and attended at least one semester. The participants all provided factors they considered in making their decisions to continue their education beyond high school. A second limitation of this study was that the study did not produce a list of barriers or negative influences that prohibited enrollment and acceptance into post-secondary institutes for any of the participants. Although there were barriers, for this group, none of those them was insurmountable.

This cohort of participants lived in the same community and attended the same high school. The age range of the teen mothers at the time of the research signals that they were not all in school at the same time. For these participants there was limited exposure of influences on the teen mothers, having shared a commonality of culture. The participants interacted with the same community of teachers, administrators, social service workers, community leaders, and lived in the same socio-economic status. The research outcomes may indicate the support provided was a positive influence on the teen parents, as they were all motivated to graduate. This study had limited diversity in external supports and the teen mothers did not have to deal with negative influences expressing lack of accomplishments.

Not every academically talented African-American teenager plans for an education beyond high school. All of the participants in this project had plans to continue their education beyond high school before their pregnancies. Each participant had the necessary grades to obtain admission to two and four-year colleges, universities, and technical schools. The body of literature on teen pregnancy and parenting and post-secondary education attendance reports low numbers (Love, 2023; Blake, 2023; Kindu et al., 2023; Harding et al., 2023), however, this study reports a 100% high school graduation and post-secondary attendance rate. This study did not uncover any obstacles that influenced the decision to pursue post-secondary education to the point of impeding attendance.

Recommendations

My focus in this study was to uncover factors that influence college attendance and completion amongst academically talented African-American women who became pregnant while in high school. All of the participants gained acceptance into at least one institute of higher learning and attempted and completed at least one semester. Future research could include women from this demographic who graduated high school and gained admission however, they did not attempt or complete a semester. Researchers must decide whether to include or exclude academically talented teens who were parents in high school, who did not even apply for post-secondary admission, in the research. This research would provide researchers with an alternate perspective of teen pregnancy and parenting phenomena, specifically as it relates to post-secondary education and what hinders this population from attempting and/ or completing secondary education.

Researchers could conduct studies that include women who attended other high schools, in different communities, inter and intra-state. This could garner a wider range of answers and offer a more diverse set of data. All of the participants in the study lived in the same community, and all but one attended the same high school. Additional research questions should uncover what the parenting teens' attitudes and plans for a secondary education were before the pregnancy, and what their attitudes about teen parenting were.

Future research questions could include asking the thoughts and opinions of the phenomenon group: a-what would have helped them to make different decisions, b-what were factors that made them choose to deliver and then raise their babies, c-what alternatives did they know about? The research could include student mothers in a variety

of settings, who have different community cultures and experiences, and receive varying levels of support, producing a diversity of responses and options. There was no accounting for social status and economic resource differences as all but one participant attended the same Title 1 high school.   Additional research focusing on the recommendations should provide new and challenging data for addition to the current body of literature. It is also necessary to conduct an additional investigation of African-American women who were academically talented in high school and became pregnant as college students in other economic and social statuses. For teen parents who started a post-secondary education, the research would continue to focus on completing the degree or certificate program while asking similar questions to uncover what factors impact their attendance.

Implications for Social Change

Parents, teachers, and administrators tell students to go to school, get good grades, and get into a good college or post-secondary institute on their way to landing a dream job. Education is a must and the key to success in life. Teen pregnancy and parenting interrupt those plans and create a situation of struggle to complete high school and attend institutions offering post-secondary education. Teen parents are three times more likely to drop out of school than their non-parenting counterparts (Love, 2023; Blake, 2023; Kindu et al., 2023; Harding et al., 2023). If teen parents, parents, and educators can provide teen mothers and parenting students the support they need to overcome the barriers to completing high school, there could be an increase in post-secondary school attendance., a reduction in the number of high school dropouts, and an increase in post-secondary

attendance. Parents, teachers, administrators, social services providers, and community members must know and understand what influences and barriers are affecting the decision to complete high school and to continue to college. Knowing what is needed will allow the creation and delivery of the tangible support needed for parenting teens to be successful. By understanding a phenomenon, society can develop the intangible supports necessary.

Teen parents do not always see the lifestyle of a parenting teen and student parent the way society, social service providers, the media, and other social agents view them. All of the research participants viewed parenting and the induction into motherhood positively. Only one participant believed life was over, and none reported adverse effects because of the negative imagery and portrayal of teen parenting. The women described the barriers they faced and explained what influenced their decisions about school. Listening to the descriptions and understanding the barriers and influences will be instrumental in accommodating the needs of young mothers. The data is from the perspective of persons who are detailing personal experiences; not retelling third-party events. The perspective of teen mothers is integral in educating the social service providers, the medical community, educators, and families on the needs of this community of young parenting students.

My investigation highlighted how important understanding the effect of education sits at the foundation of social change. When society can look at this population and see their potential and not just their problems, see their passion and not just their pain, and

encourage and motivate them instead of belittling and demoralizing them, we will have moved one step closer.

Conclusion

In this study, I provided a forum for eight African-American women to share their thoughts, experiences, and perceptions on the barriers academically talented teenagers who became pregnant as high school students must overcome to attend post-secondary institutions. The participants also discussed factors that contributed to their decisions for post-high school attendance. The primary findings of the study stated support systems, daycare and childcare, the expectation of a post-secondary education, and participant self-image were barriers that once addressed, would allow teen and student parents to be able to attend a post-secondary program. The participants also shared an understanding of a need for an education beyond high school, the desire to be able to provide for their children, and the belief that a post-secondary was accomplishable influenced their decisions.

Teenagers having babies, with or without the benefit of marriage, is not a new phenomenon. Research documents that the number of teen pregnancies has dropped in the last 60 years, as has the number of marriages resulting from pregnancy. When pregnancy sparked the creation of a new family, the number of teen pregnancies caused miscalculations to occur because pregnant and married teenagers no longer represented teenagers. The larger society historically has been very vocal and demonstrative with their displeasure with unwed women and teens, and time has not changed that. Time may have changed the availability of services, thus providing a false sense of acceptance.

Societies' opinions of them or their capabilities appeared not to affect those who responded to this inquiry. The women in this study believed choosing to parent was a positive choice. One or two stated they felt they expectations to become a teen mom; however, they knew they still had to accomplish school beyond high school.

I also found that for these women, more than 75% of the participants did not agree with the negative portrayal of teen parenting and did not feel those stereotypes included them. The majority saw themselves as capable parents and viewed their decisions to parent as positive. These women all defied the odds and the stereotype associated with being a teen parent and rose about what the literature often says about them. The research produced factors that affect post-secondary school attendance. There were negative and positive factors; challenges to overcome and others to be celebrated. This study illustrates teen mothers who are confident and have a support system are able to accomplish educational and other goals.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Pre- pregnancy:

PeQ1: Tell me about the plans you had to further your education beyond high school.

PeRQ2: When you thought about continuing school beyond high school, describe what you considered as the pros? As cons?

PeRQ3: Describe where did you see yourself 5 years after your high school graduation?

PeRQ4: Tell me about how you planned to accomplish these goals?

PeRQ5: Tell me about your family's expectation for you to continue your education beyond high school?

PeRQ6: Share how you think teen parents were perceived and treated by school mates, teachers, administrators?

PeRQ7: When you were making decisions about school after high school, who did you talk to and what did they tell you?

Post pregnancy:

PoQ1: Tell me how your plans to continue your education after high school changed.

PoRQ2: How did your list of pros and cons change once you found out you were pregnant?

PoRQ3: Where did you see yourself in 5 years from graduation?

PoRQ4: How did you plan to accomplish these goals?

PoRQ5: Tell me about your family's expectation for you to continue your education beyond high school?

PoRQ6: How were you perceived and treated by school mates, teachers and administrators when they found out you were pregnant?

PoRQ7: How far had you gotten in the college application process when you found out you were pregnant?

PoRQ8: When you were making decisions about school after high school, who did you talk to and what did they tell you?

After the birth of the baby:

AbQ1: Tell me about the perceptions you had about completing school and parenting when you first found out you were pregnant? How realistic were those perceptions?

AbRQ2: Describe where did you see yourself in 5 years?

AbRQ3: What plans did you have to accomplish these goals?

AbRQ4: What expectations did you have of your family/friends to help you with the baby and school?

AbRQ5: Describe the help you received from your family? Friends?

AbRQ6: Tell me what expectations did you have of your baby's father to help you with the baby and school?

AbRQ7: Tell me who was to be the primary caregiver for your baby while you attended classes? If you had a job, who was the primary care-giver while you worked?

AbRQ8: Describe the help you received from the baby's father and his family.

General questions:

GeQ1: Explain what opinions did you have about the media portrayal of pregnant teenagers?

GeRQ2: List a few of the biggest challenges you faced in continuing school?

GeRQ3: Tell me what did you need from the school/college that would have made your attending easier?

GeRQ4: Share your perceptions of your high school in relation to other high schools in the district and state.

GeRQ5: Explain why do you think your high school prepared you or did not prepare you for school at the next level?

GeRQ6: How were you affected by the media portrayal of pregnant teens?

Appendix B: Demographic Survey

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

This is the first step to select participants for this study. In all, 6-10 participants will be selected to continue and participate with the second step of interviewing. Please complete the following questions regarding the above study. All questionnaires are to be completed in their entirety and submitted directly to Adrienne D. Butler, the researcher at (Adrienne.butler@waldenu.edu). There are no right or wrong responses. Please be as honest as possible, and feel free to ask for clarity on any question you are not clear about. Thank you for your valuable time and participation!

Demographics

1. How old are you as of today's date? _____

2. What is your race (nation of origin)? _____

3. What is your gender (male, female, or other)? _____

4. What is your current marital status? _____

High School

5. How old were you when you became a parent for the first time? _____

6. What grade in high school were you in when you became a parent? _____

7. What was your GPA in high school? _____

Postsecondary Institution

8. Have you completed at least one semester at a post-secondary institute? _____

8a. If yes, at what school? _____

8b. If no, are you planning to attend ? _____

9. Are you currently enrolled in a post-secondary institute? _____

9b. What program of study/degree are you working toward? _____

10. Where are you employed? _____