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The Lived Experience of Black American Women Who Were Teen Mothers and their Pathway
to Achieve Master’s Degrees and Higher

A Dissertation by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Above all, I would like to give thanks and honor to GOD, the savior of my life and
director of my path. It is because of GOD’s mercy and grace I am able to turn my test into a
testimony of faith.

Sight beyond what I see
You know what's best for me
Prepare my mind, prepare my heart
For whatever comes, I'm gone' be ready
Strength to pass any test
I feel like I'm so blessed
With you in control, I can't go wrong
'Cause I always know
I'm gonna be ready
~Yolanda Adams

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ABSTRACT

The Lived Experience of Black American Women Who Were Teen Mothers and their Pathway to Achieve Master’s Degrees and Higher

by Shuante S. Bingham

Purpose: The purpose of this heuristic phenomenological study is to examine the lived experiences of Black American women who were teen mothers and achieved master’s degrees and higher. Furthermore, this study seeks to describe the economic barriers and support resources that hinder and/or influence educational achievement as perceived by Black American women who were teen mothers.

Methodology: This heuristic phenomenological study shares the personal experiences and commonalities of 16 Black American women who were teen mothers as the support resources perceived as impacting or encouraging their ability to achieve a master’s degree or higher.

Findings: There were four overarching themes identified from the data collected in this study process. The four themes are patience, persistence, passion, and people. The identified themes provided a detailed explanation for how Black American women who were former teen mothers navigated the challenges of teen motherhood and achieved educational success through accomplishing a master’s degree or higher.

Conclusions: There were several conclusions gained from the data collection of this qualitative study. The focus on background experiences, obstacles, support systems and resources outlined the framework used to identify a collection of themes and findings necessary to support future generations of teen mothers. The collection of Black American women who achieved academic
success through obtaining a master’s degree presented ideas on how to encourage and motivate the next generation of teen mothers towards economic stability.

**Recommendations:** Further research was recommended to boost the support of teen mothers seeking educational advancement. The recommendations focused on expanding the study to include a long-term, phenomenological case study of the pathway between teen motherhood and achieving master’s degrees, engaging in a phenomenological study that explores teen motherhood and the pathway to successful entrepreneurship, concentrating on research that identifies the pathways of teen fathers, exploring the cultural influences that limit communication about sexual intercourse, and examining a cross-sectional study on military service and the stability of former teen mothers.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Half a million teen girls between the ages of 15-19 become pregnant every year (Card, 1999; Finer & Zolna, 2016). The drastic effect parenting as an adolescent has on a young girl has caused researchers to dedicate years studying the cause and impact of the coined “epidemic” (Furstenburg, 2003; Geronimus, 1991; Hotz, McElroy, & Sanders, 1997; Kirby, 2001; Peter, 1990; Rumberger, 1987; Solomon-Fears, 2016). The term epidemic was used to define teen pregnancy as an emerging and unprecedented trend that could only be resolved through massive federal intervention (Vinovskis, 1981). Though early parenting has been a common occurrence for decades, society and politics deemed the challenges resulting from teen pregnancy an area for increased review. These impacts include challenges in completing educational requirements, barriers in social development, and reduced financial stability, among other life-altering changes (Furstenburg, 2003; Geronimus, 1991; Hotz, McElroy, & Sanders, 1997; Kirby, 2001; Maynard, 1997).

In 1960, tracking childbirths of adolescent females became common practice (Furstenburg, 2003). The significant increase in teen birth data became the obsession of society and topic of public discourse. However, the focus of concern for teenage parenting was directed towards unwed adolescents entering motherhood (Furstenburg, 2003). Arthur Campbell (1968) notably described the perception of society, with regards to the negative impact of unwed teen mothers, when he stated teen mothers were inclined to drop out of school and make life choices, such as marriage, based on necessity versus actual desire. Campbell (1968) went on to state that “[Teen mothers’] life choices are few, and most of them are bad” (p. 238).

The largest peak in teen births occurred in 1956 with data findings indicating an upwards of 900,000 teenaged females entered motherhood. Following this peak in birth rates and the
introduction of economic and educational resources, such as Planned Parenthood and school-based prevention programs, society noticed a significant decline in teen pregnancy (Mollborn, 2016; National Conference of State Legislature, 2019). The efficacy of school, community and social support programs are considered major contributors to the decline in teen pregnancies and growing resiliency of teen mothers (Manlove, Steward-Streng, Peterson, Scott, & Wildsmith, 2013; SmithBattle, 2006). Despite these programs’ success, statistical research indicates that the United States teen pregnancy epidemic still exceeds its peer nations ("Centers for Disease Control and Prevention", 2019).

Teen pregnancy rates vary greatly among minorities; however, Hispanic and non-Hispanic Black American teens account for the largest percentages ("Centers for Disease Control and Prevention", 2019). In 2016, these numbers were reported as 46.3 percent and 40.3 percent respectively (Ventura, Hamilton, & Matthews, 2016). These numbers; however, are a decline from the 63 percent for Hispanic teens and 64 percent for Black American teens reported from 1991 through 2012. Despite the decline, the statistics for minority teenagers are double the national average of their Caucasian peers, whose birth rates average 20.5 percent (Ventura, Hamilton, & Matthews, 2016; Wiltz, 2015). Rural counties, specifically those in the Southeastern region, are noted as having the largest percentage of teen pregnancies according to 2016 statistics (Hamilton, Rossen, & Branum, 2016; Hamilton, Matthews, & Ventura, 2013).

Geographical and racial backgrounds are noted as having a major impact on the projection of quality of life for teen mothers (Assini-Meyton & Green, 2015; Ladner, 1971; Summers, Y. Lee, H. Lee, 2017; Williamson, 2016; Winters & Winters, 2012). The negative outcome can be attributed to the racial disparities reflected in the access to social support services necessary to maintain a suitable living for adolescent mothers (Weed & Nicholson,
Society perceived Caucasian teen mothers as victims of their communities in need of rehabilitation while Black American teen mothers were considered products of their environment (Furstenburg, 2003; Geronimus, 1991). The racial tensions, evident in the 1960s, were influential in the limited support and resources available for Black American teen mothers. The adverse consequences of teen pregnancy were inaccurately described as a social phenomenon concentrated within minoritized groups. Minoritized groups are identifying population subsets that have been characterized and labeled as racially or ethnically different from the ‘norm’ (Benitez, 2010; Dafina-Lazarus, 2013). Comparative research practices associate the behaviors of minoritized groups, such as Black Americans, as “deficient or at-risk” based on preconceived “normal” behavioral practices of their White peers (Dafina-Lazarus, 2013). An example of comparative research is found in Pillow (2006) study that suggested “while white unwed mothers were capable and worthy of rehabilitation, black women were rendered untreatable because their problems of unwed pregnancy were inherent and instilled in their culture and community” (p.24).

Research confirms the negative stigmas associated with teen mothers, particularly of minority descent, impacts the self-perception and individual motivation teen mothers have for achieving a prosperous, educationally rich future (Duckett, 2009; Geronimus, 2003; SmithBattle, 2006, 2007; Summers, Y.Lee, H.Lee, 2017; Winters & Winters, 2012). Teen mothers are cited as “at-risk” for dropping out of school because of the significant barriers associated with teen pregnancy and education (Basch, 2011; National Conference of State Legislature, 2019; Turner 2007). The early departure from educational advancement often results in negative chances for employability (Basch, 2011; Summers, Y.Lee, H.Lee, 2017). The economic barriers caused by
lack of education results in future goals of teen mothers often being limited to the immediate opportunities for financial gain (Geronimus, 1991; Summers, Y.Lee, H.Lee, 2017).

There was a significant correlation found between social dislocation, reduced economic opportunities and low educational achievement among Black teen mothers (Winters & Winters, 2012). The timing of motherhood correlates specifically to the probability of a student finishing high school or pursuing postsecondary education (Luong, 2008). According to the statistics from the National Conference of State Legislature (2019) website, teen mothers are less likely to complete high school. Dropout numbers for teen mothers enrolled in high school exceed 30 percent, while Latin Americans and Black American teen mothers account for 40 percent of that data (National Conference of State Legislature, 2019). Teen mothers who continue to pursue an education have navigated significant barriers and have been substantially impaired by the challenges associated with the task of managing early motherhood and educational requirements (Basch, 2011). Despite the burden of managing teen motherhood, adolescent development and educational requirements, many teen mothers have defied the perceived odds of future success (Assini-Meytin & Green, 2015; SmithBattle, 2006; Watson, 2018). The resiliency factors associated with those success stories are cause for future research.

**Background**

The socioeconomic disruption caused by teen pregnancy and the socioeconomic burdens that contribute to teen pregnancy have been a notable areas of research for several years (Kirby, 2001). Low high school completion rates and minimal desire to pursue postsecondary education has been correlated to the low-economic status of teen mothers (Basch, 2011; Luong, 2008). The nuisances associated with teen development compounded with the pressures of becoming an adolescent mother create physical, emotional, and social challenges unique to the teen mother
subset. The result of these challenges predicates the need for a deeper dive into the personal, educational and societal effects of teen motherhood.

**Teenage Pregnancy Rate**

The term “teen pregnancy” and “teen parenting” have induced concern in the United States for several decades (Card, 1999; Kirby & National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2001; Linares, Leadbeater, Jaffe, Kato, & Diaz, 1992; Maynard, 1997; Rickel, 1989; Solomon-Fears, 2016; Thomas & Rickel, 1995; Thomas, Rickel, Butler, & Montgomery, 1990). The phenomenon of teenage pregnancy in America has decreased in recent years but remains a significant “epidemic” (Finer, 2013). Though stabilized in growth, the consistent introduction of teen mothers in society every year has prompted research to inquire deeper into the cause and effect of the “epidemic.”

**Challenges of Teen Pregnancy**

The leading catalyst for teen pregnancy prevention among policymakers is the social and economic degradation common to adolescent motherhood (Teen Pregnancy Statistics, n.d.; Weed & Nicholson, 2012). There have been strong statistical association between teen childbearing and socioeconomic well-being. Limited or hindered accessibility to education is considered a significant factor contributing to teen mothers’ financial degradation (Basch, 2011). Research findings assessing the potential hardships of teen childbearing confirmed that teen mothers are more likely to drop out of school, fail to maintain adequate employment, and earn low wages (Hotz, Williams-McElroy, & Sanders, 1997). According to the Center for Disease and Control (2019), more than 50 percent of teen mothers will not complete their educational paths compared to 90 percent of their peers without children. The statistics also confirm that of those 50 percent there is an increased risk of unemployment, incarceration or subsequent teen
pregnancies (Perper, Peterson, & Manlove, 2010). Furthermore, researchers assert that teen mothers are more likely to depend on government subsidies, which ultimately imposes a social cost on taxpayers (Geronimus, 1991; Hotz, Williams-McElroy, & Sanders, 1997).

**Implications of Teen Motherhood**

Statistical averages show 30 percent of teen girls who drop out of high school cite teen pregnancy as the cause (Beutel, 2007). Black American females who become adolescent parents are 40 percent more unlikely to complete their high school education and become welfare recipients, according to national research (Teen Pregnancy Statistics, n.d.). This educational struggle is believed to be a result of managing normal teen transitions to adulthood which include puberty and social role changes, sexual maturity, and cognitive development, in conjunction with the physiological changes of teen motherhood (Eccles, Midgley, Wigfield, Buchanan, Reuman, Flanagan, & Mac Iver, 1993). Physiological changes such as morning sickness and fatigue often result in a decline in school attendance (SmithBattle, 2007). Teen mothers experiencing these transitions are noted for commonly having academic and behavioral issues in school (Eccles et al., 1993).

Changes in social interaction, including social isolation, were also contributors to the potential educational burdens experienced by teen mothers (Camarena, Minor, Melmer, & Ferrie, 1998; SmithBattle, 2007; Yardley, 2008). The social isolation is a result of low self-esteem, lack of personal goals, and reduced expectations common among teen mothers (Domenico & Jones, 2007). Mental health issues stemming from adolescent parenting, including post-partum depression, also contribute to the inconsistent academic achievement of teen mothers (Oxford, Gilchrist, Gillmore, & Lohr, 2006).
In addition to psychological barriers, socioeconomic status was also deemed a contributor to educational challenges for teen mothers (Beutel, 2000). Employing quality and consistent childcare can be a burden for adolescent parents in low-income households. Inconsistent childcare can contribute to a teen mother’s inability to maintain consistent school attendance (Beutel, 2000). The socioeconomic disparities common to Black Americans are considered a significant contributor to the misrepresentation of Black teen mother’s ability to achieve educational success (Carter & Newman, 1978; Winters, 2012).

Low-income associated with higher unemployment rates and a minimal education level is considered another socioeconomic barrier common to minorities with the highest teen pregnancy rates. Statistical studies indicate that 67 percent of teen mothers live below the poverty level after departing their family homes. As a result, 63 percent of teen mothers are enrolled into public assistance services (Benitz, 2017). Of that 63 percent, Black American teen mothers represented 25 percent (United States Census, 2018). The ability to balance motherhood with occupational requirements is considered a major factor contributing to the low-income and socioeconomic status of teen mothers (Camarena, Minor, Melmer, & Ferrie, 1998).

**Barriers Associated with Black American Teen Mothers**

Researchers such as Wilson (1978) and Leigh (2004) asserted that “the percentage of the Black population in poverty in selected cities to be related to the percentage of births to Blacks under the age of 20” (para. 4). Wilson (2003) correlated the inability for Black American males to obtain suitable employment and financial stability to the increase in unwed teen mothers in America, which ultimately resulted in an increase of dependency on welfare programs among minoritized groups. Supporting that theory, Assini-Meytin and Green (2015) asserted that by the age of 30, teen fathers were more likely “to use subsidized housing, receive government benefits,
and report poorer mental health compared to older fathers or childless men” (para. 8). The limited resources matched with the assumed unhealthy conditions of impoverished communities and the economic struggles of Black American men have created communities of single-parent households and welfare-dependent teen mothers (Assini-Meytin & Green, 2015; Ladner, 1995; Summers, Y. Lee, & H. Lee, 2017).

Figure 1. Chart of Households in Poverty

![Children in Poverty by Family Structure](image)

Figure 1. This chart represents the disparity of economic stability among household structures with and without a male or father-figure presence. Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; ASEP Issue Brief: Information on Poverty and Income Statistics. September 12, 2012 http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/12/PovertyAndIncomeEst/ib.shtml

Several researchers argue that the socioeconomic outcome of teen parenting among Black American females is not derivative of the early adolescent parenting, but rather a reflection of the conditions in which the teen pregnancy was initiated (Barr & Simons, 2012; Furstenburg, 2003, 2007; Mollborn & Morningstar, 2009; SmithBattle, 2007b, Williamson, 2017).

Contrary to historical and academic conceptions researchers, such as SmithBattle (2006, 2007a, b), argue that teen parenting actual increases academic aspirations. However, social
circumstances and structural constraints limiting resources common to many impoverished communities create barriers to achieving those educational goals (Barr & Simons, 2012; Kerkhoff, 1976). Specifically, research addresses how disparities in social class impact access to resources, counseling assistance, and financial capabilities when considering barriers to obtaining education such as childcare (Mollborn, 2016; SmithBattle, 2007a, b). These disparities are noted for triggering cultural stereotypes among teen mothers in minoritized groups, which ultimately affects positive attitudes towards accomplishing educational aspirations.

There are several theories of cultural impact that support the statistical, disproportionate rate of teen pregnancies among minorities, specifically Black American women. This study addressed the critical race and cumulative disadvantage theories which outline the systemic impacts experienced by individuals that live in socially disadvantaged societies. Systemic barriers include low educational aspirations and a higher average of minoritized students portrayed as in need of remedial education or less academically challenged (Dafina-Lazarus, 2013). The theories also describe how cultural racism against Black Americans impacts mental and physical abilities to seek opportunities considered uncommon to the Black American community based on social stereotypes (Watson, 2014).

In addition to educational challenges, societal pressure and negative connotations associated with teen pregnancy can create doubt in an individual’s economic sphere, which leads to doubt in other social and psychological areas of well-being. According to Winters (2012), “regardless of self-perceived abilities, teenagers who feel no control over their reproductive life are not likely to behave in ways to control it” (para.5). An environment that engages with teen mothers’ discriminatory, or with punitive intent contributes to the psychological confidence a
teen mother has on their ability to do or accomplish what is expected (Summers, Y. Lee & H. Lee, 2017; Wilson, 1991).

The ecological systems theory and stage-fit theories defined in the literature review of this study aligns how the environmental influences can impact the social and mental capacities of individuals. The theories describe how immediate community and familial influences can increase the development of resiliency characteristics. Positive childbearing attitudes and behaviors of the community and social circle (i.e. peers and family) of teens are believed to increase the strong educational and occupational goals of teen mothers (Ladner, 1971; Mollborn, 2016; SmithBattle, 2006; South & Baumer, 2000). This ideology aligns the effect of self-perception on the ability of a mother to sufficiently care for her children.

**Initiatives to Support Teen Mothers**

Teen mothers experience several emotional, sociological, financial, and physical challenges (Beutel, 2007; Hotz, Williams-McElroy, & Sanders, 1997). Although these challenges are prevalent among teen mothers, many have proven to adapt and overcome these barriers. The compilation of literature by researchers such as Letourneau, Stewart, and Barnfather (2004) and SmithBattle (2006, 2007, 2009, 2013) strongly concludes that the parenting, occupational, and educational success of teen mothers is directly related to their resilience.

Apfel and Sietz (1991) described four conceptual models of social support that enhance the resilient behaviors of Black American teen mothers: parental supplemental model, parental replacement model, support primary parent model, and parental apprentice model. The parental supplemental model is described as a support system in which the mother and/or grandmother of the teen parent assumes an equal amount of parenting responsibility for the newborn child.
Parents of teen mothers who assume full responsibility of the child engage in a parental replacement model. The parental apprentice model, as well as supportive parenting uplifts teen mothers through encouragement and education, oppose to, physical assistance.

Further research can continue to assess which support model has the greatest success rate for developing teen mothers through adolescence into adulthood. Specifically, the research can explore the familial background of successful Black American females and the support models used in their home during their teenage parenting years. The outcome of this research can enhance the education provided to families of Black American teen mothers on how to optimally support and encourage a resilient mindset through teen parenting challenges.

Community and family involvement in developing long-term planning approaches that encourage self-efficacy and personal aspirations are influential in teen mothers becoming self-sufficient and fully-functional adults (Schellenbach, Leadbeater, & Moore, 2004). Alternative education plans, intervention programs, and community public assistance are resources common throughout communities with positive transitions for teen mothers into adulthood (Pellegrino, 2015). Intervention programs are described as alternative support facilities whose main focus is to provide support services to pregnant and parenting teens through education on adolescent issues, as well as family and career planning (Key, Barbosa, & Owens, 2001). A qualitative study by Sadler, Schwartz, Ryan-Krause, Sietz, Meadows-Oliver, Grey, and Clemmens’ (2007) discovered that teen mothers experiencing depression and/or homelessness were able to have positive maternal and child outcomes because of the support gained from community parenting programs and access to quality childcare, despite lack of support within the home.
**Transformation**

Though often associated with negative outcomes, early teen parenting can create a sense of purpose triggering positive behavioral changes in teens (Leadbeater & Way, 2001). Masten, Obradović, and Burt (2006) describe the ability to overcome reasonable developmental challenges, regardless of impactful threats to ones being, as resilient behaviors. The positive adaption of challenges is believed to positively enhance the self-identity and future capabilities of teen mothers and their children (Breen & McLean, 2010). The resiliency theory presented in the literature review of this study highlights the long-term, positive and transformational social and educational impact on teen mothers who adapt to their challenges by establishing resilient behaviors (Breen & McLean, 2010; SmithBattle, 2005, 2006a, 2006b). Masters (2001) boasts about the positive trajectory of a teen mother who has engaged in resilient behavior, as well as the effect of a teen mother who has been afforded support in a manner that increases resiliency, which the author asserts as being different in its meaning.

**Statement of the Research Problem**

In 1950, the number of births to teen mothers under 20 years old was 438,000 (Kost & Henshaw, 2007). In the next several years, the rate of births to unmarried, teen mothers would increase, with the largest peak noted in 1956 at a rate of 963,000 births to women between ages 15-19 (Solomon-Fears, 2016). Congress’s dedication to developing social initiatives to prevent teen pregnancy would eventually lead to a reduction in 2017 where a total of 196,000 children were born to teen mothers within the ages of 15-19 years old ("Centers for Disease Control and Prevention", 2019). Despite the positive movement towards reducing teen pregnancy, the United States is still ranked highest across industrialized nations for teen pregnancies (“Teen birth rates,” 2016).
Though most racial groups have seen a significant reduction in births to teen mothers ("Centers for Disease Control and Prevention", 2019), Hispanic and non-Hispanic Black American teens teen birth statistics are two-times higher than the rate for Non-Hispanic White teens ("Centers for Disease Control and Prevention", 2019; Office of Adolescent Health, 2016). Socioeconomic disadvantages are identified as a major contributor to the unfavorable rate of Hispanic and Non-Hispanic Black American teen births in comparison to their minority peers (Furstenburg, 2003; Gaile, 2015; Geronimus, 2003). These socioeconomic disparities are described as lack of financial resources, failing educational systems, and minimal access to community resources (Hamilton, Rossen, & Branum, 2016; Ventura, Hamilton, & Matthews, 2016; Wiltz, 2015). It is also these factors that contribute to the need of some teen mothers to depend heavily on government subsidies for financial support, which creates a heavy financial weight in society (Geronimus, 2003).

Research has been dedicated to exploring the ability to overcome the obstacles and barriers perceived to be linked to the challenges of teen motherhood (Furstenburg, 2003; Geronimus, 1991; Hotz, McElroy, & Sanders, 1997; Kirby, 2001; Maynard, 1997; Peter, 1990; Rumberger, 1987; Solomon-Fears, 2016). The results of the studies highlighted the negative consequences of teen parenting, specifically bleak economic, educational and social future of teens who subjected themselves to adolescent pregnancy (Barr & Simons, 2012; Basch, 2010; Bissell, 2010; Bradley, Cupples, & Irvine, 2002; Oxford, 2010; Rickel, 1989). Despite these studies, some teen mothers have transcended public perception and achieved economical and educational success. The resiliency of these teen mothers was linked to their access to supportive communities, families, and programs (Breen & McLean, 2010; Schellenbach, Leadbeater, & Moore, 2004; SmithBattle, 2006, 2007). While the benefit and impact of these
community and family support programs are noted, the structural capability needed to engage or maintain these efforts are not always available in local communities, specifically urban communities (Winters & Winters, 2012).

There has been a significant increase in research dedicated to identifying factors that increase resiliency in teen mothers (SmithBattle, 2006a, 2006b, 2007). As an addition to the focus on resiliency, researchers focused on the resources used to overcome the challenges of adolescent parenting (Mollborn & Jacobs, 2012; Mollborn, 2017; SmithBattle, 2006a, 2006b, 2007). In alignment with the aforementioned literature, a very limited amount of research has been completed that focuses on the achievement paths of teen mothers that accomplish postsecondary education goals. More specifically, there is limited research exploring the postsecondary goals and achievements of Black American teen mothers while managing challenges associated with the Black American culture. An increased amount of research has been presented on the specific economic barriers of Black American teens to manage the challenges of teen motherhood (Geronimus, 1991, 2003; Winters & Winters, 2012). However, the lack of current research that explores the lived experience of Black American women who overcame the burdens of teen motherhood despite the societal challenges that plague minoritized groups indicates a gap in research. The problem exists in the lack of research available to define a path of resiliency for Black American teen mothers towards achieving postsecondary degrees. Research focused on the support resources adopted by Black American women, who were teen mothers, can assist with the educational and economic stability of future teen mothers.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this heuristic phenomenological study was to describe and identify the economic barriers and support resources Black American women who were teen mothers
perceived as impacting or encouraging their ability to achieve a master’s degree or higher. In addition, the purpose of this study is to describe the recommendations of teen mothers to assist current and future teen mothers in accomplishing educational goals.

Central Research Questions

a. What are the lived experiences of Black American women who were teen mothers and went on to achieve a master’s degree or higher, including the economic barriers and support resources that impacted their educational achievement?

b. What recommendations do Black American who were teen mothers, and have achieved a master’s degree or higher, have for teen mothers to accomplish educational goals?

Research Sub-Questions

1. What is the lived experience of Black American women leading up to the time before becoming a teen mother?

2. What economic barriers or impacts were encountered by Black American women who were teen mothers as they worked toward achieving a master’s degree or higher?

3. What support resources inspired Black American women who were teen mothers to pursue the achievement of obtaining a master’s degree or higher?

4. What specific person or people influenced Black American women who were teen mothers to achieve a master’s degree or higher?

5. What type of support was received by Black American women who were teen mothers from family members (parents, partners, siblings, relatives) or educational/personal mentors?

6. What societal or stereotypical barriers were encountered by Black American women who were teen mothers as they pursued a master’s degree or higher?
7. What advice do Black American women who were teen mothers offer teen mothers to pursue a master’s degree or higher?

**Significance of the Study**

The economic, social, and educational challenges common to teen mothers has a major impact on their ability to achieve autonomy and independence (Afpel & Sietz, 1991; Beutel, 2000; Bradley, Cupples & Irvine, 2002; Furstenberg, 2003; Hotz, McElroy, & Sanders, 1997; Mollborn & Jacobs, 2012). The disruption of the adolescent development process increases the teen mother’s risk of achieving a quality, if at all, educational experience – which ultimately leads to poor employment opportunities and minimal financial resources (Oxford, Gilchrist, Gillmore, & Lohr, 2006). Considered “At-risk” students in the educational community, school counselors have the innate responsibility of developing and/or providing access to support services for teen mothers to help redirect their perceived future degradation (Kiselica, M., Gorczynski, J., & Capps, 1998; Perper, Peterson, & Manlove, 2010; Pietrowski, 2006). This study is significant because identifying the resilient behaviors of teen mothers who have defied those negative expectations could be a step into bridging that supportive gap for counselors. Furthermore, when considering the emotional and mental burdens caused by a teen mother’s inability to complete their education, developing a study that focuses on the resources that assist in stabilizing teen mothers on their educational journey seems imperative.

An additional benefit of this study is centered on the ability to encourage financial stability among teen mothers, which could have a major impact on stabilizing the financial effects of teen parenting on the economy. The economic and social costs associated with teen parenting on society has been a major factor for policymakers’ commitment to develop local, state, and federal teen parent prevention programs (Solomon-Fears, 2016). Discovering the
community and social support programs credited to the successful maturation of teen mothers to accomplish master’s degrees or higher through this study could have a significant influence on how policymakers proceed with their prevention and support programs and the methods used to market the programs to teens. Specifically, the ability to market programs that encourage resources that support a teen mother’s ability to seek a pathway with favorable self-sufficiency outcomes.

A lack of technical training, the inability to maintain parental and student obligations, and reduced educational motivation are identified as common causes for poor occupational outcomes for teen mothers (Camerena, Minor, Melmer, & Ferris, 1998; Penman-Aguilar, Carter, Snead, & Kourtis, 2013). Teen mothers are thrust into a life of juggling parenting duties such as managing childcare and the needs of their children, while most are simultaneously adjusting the normal nuisances associated with developing into a teenager (Pellegrino, 2015). These factors are believed to disrupt the stamina teen mothers have for completing educational goals, which ultimately increases the chances of financial stability (Barr & Simon, 2012; Camerena, Minor, Melmer, & Ferris, 1998; SmithBattle, 2007). This research study explored the path of postsecondary educational achievement which can be an inspiration to current teen mothers’ uncertainty of how to manage parenting and educational goals.

In addition to educational and financial success, social success can also be enhanced from this study. According to a study by Lowenthal and Lowenthal (1997), post-partum teen mothers find it difficult to relate to their non-parenting peers. The widely marketed negative stigma and perceived bleak future opportunities associated with teen parenting also have a negative impact on the self-esteem of teen mothers. Social networks, such as families, friends, and communities are believed to be a major contributor to the psychosocial development of teen mothers.
Psychosocial is described as the self-view in which a teen defines their self as socially and mentally competent (Devito, 2007). Spears (2001) suggests that teen mothers who are presented with positive options and encouragement for achieving future goals were more likely to strive for higher educational goals. Through examination, this study describes the motivational factors which contributed to the resiliency of a teen mother through the vantage point of women who have overcome similar obstacles which are expected to enhance the self-perception of teen mothers and their personal ideals of future opportunities.

**Operational Definitions**

The terms presented are critical to maintaining a consistent definition of participants throughout the study.

**Barriers.** Described as financial, cultural, social, or academic limitations, preconceived perceptions hindering the positive progression of teen mothers

**Black American/African American.** The description Black American, or African American, is defined as any citizen or resident of the United States whose ancestors were of African heritage/origin of non-Hispanic descent or identifies as such.

**Educational Support.** The term education support refers to the instructional resources, methods, and services provided to teen mothers to help accelerate or maintain their learning in comparison to their non-parenting peers.

**External motivator.** External motivators as the external factors, influences or experiences that enhance teen mothers’ abilities to achieve academic success (Benitez, 2017).

**Family Support.** Familial support is defined as the emotional, financial or physical support within the family construct to positively progress the teen mother towards personally defined goals.
**Internal motivator.** The term internal motivator describes the individual factors, influences, or experiences that encourage teen mothers to achieve academic success (Benitez, 2017).

**Minority/Minority Groups.** A culturally, ethnically, or racially distinct group that coexists with but is subordinate to a more dominant group.

**Minoritized Groups.** The terminology represents a population of individuals that have been characterized or labeled as racially or ethnically different from the norm.

**Parental Apprentice Model.** Teen mother fulfills the role as primary caregiver for child. Parents of teen mothers provide only emotional assistance, not financial or physical.

**Support Primary Parent Model.** Collaborative support

**Parental Replacement Model.** Parents or guardians of teen mother assumes all roles and responsibilities as caregiver of child.

**Parental Supplemental Model.** Support system in which the mother and/or grandmother of the teen parent assumes an equal amount of parenting responsibility for the newborn child.

**Social Support.** The reference to social support describes the community resources provided to increase the quality and quantity of awareness to resources available to assist in teen pregnancy and parenting.

**Systemic barriers.** Policies, practices, or procedures that result in a specific population of individuals being hindered, excluded, or given unequal treatment knowingly or unknowingly

**Teen mother/Adolescent mother.** The term teen mother in this study is used to describe female youths that were pregnant or parenting between the ages of 15-19 (Center for Disease and Control. 2019).
Teen pregnancy/Adolescent pregnancy. These terms refer to females pregnant between the ages of 15-19.

Delimitations

The delimitations in this study are:

- Delimited to the United States South/Southeastern Region with the largest population of teen pregnancies as identified by the Center of Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) (i.e., Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Texas).
- Delimited to Black American women who were teen mothers and have earned a master’s degree or higher.
- Delimited to Black American women who were teen mothers who were actively parenting between the ages of 15-19 years old

Organization of the Study

The purpose of Chapter I of this dissertation was to investigate the contributing factors that led to the educational success of Black American teen mothers. Furthermore, Chapter I introduced the background, research problem, purpose, and questions of this study. Chapter II of this study provides the framework for the research conducted including an in-depth review of the literature. Chapter III outlines the methodology of the study, which focuses on research design, data collection, population, sampling and analysis procedures. Chapter IV is a presentation of findings collected from the data of the study. Lastly, Chapter V concludes the study with a summary discussing the implications of the findings and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The sexual behaviors of teens resulting in adolescent childbearing has been a major global health concern for decades (Danawi, Bryant, Hasbini, 2016; Maynard, 1997, Rickel, 1989). The result of these concerns was an influx of literature studies focused on identifying the potential triggers of teen pregnancy, as well as its personal and societal impact. In order to address the personal and societal challenges of teen pregnancy, it was important to review the relevant studies that explored the history, societal pressures, and educational and individual impacts of teen pregnancy. The progression through this literature review also explores how socioeconomic and cultural background challenges through ideologies such as the critical race theory and cumulative disadvantage can impact Black American teen mothers’ educational success. To provide a foundation for future studies, it was necessary to include a comprehensive literature review of Black American cultural sensitivities and perceptions relating to teen pregnancy.

**Historical Review on Teen Pregnancy**

The stigma associated with teen pregnancy have been prevalent in society and research for many years (Rumberger, 1987; Solomon-Fears, 2016). Specifically, suitable ages for childbearing have been a topic of contention. The definition of appropriate age for childbearing has wavered across cultures, religions, ethnicity, age, class, gender, and time. Early formations of family were common in the colonial era in the United States and thus considered socially acceptable. In fact, the rise in social hostility and sensitivity associated with teen childbearing was introduced in 1960 (Furstenburg, 2003).

It was in 1960, that tracking childbirths of adolescent females became common practice (Furstenburg, 2003). The significant increase in teen birth data became the obsession of society
and topic of public discourse. The increased concern for teenage parenting was directed towards unwed adolescents entering motherhood (Furstenburg, 2003). This outrage was despite several years of researchers’ identifying the hysteria over teenage pregnancy as misdirected and excessive (Hotz, Williams McElroy, and Sanders 1996; Luker 1996; Williamson, 2016). In fact, researchers such as Furstenberg (2007) outlined an attempt to redirect the public opinion by asserting that the increase in unwed mothers was more a result of a declining desire to get married among women versus deviant teen behavior (pp.17). These efforts did little to change the momentum of concern within society for teen pregnancies. Arthur Campbell (1968) most accurately described the perception of society, in regard to the negative impact of unwed teen mothers, when he stated:

The girl who has an illegitimate child at the age of 16 suddenly has 90 percent of her life’s script written for her. She will probably drop out of school; even if someone else in her family helps to take care of the baby, she will probably not be able to find a steady job that pays enough to provide for herself and her child; she may feel impelled to marry someone she might not otherwise have chosen. Her life choices are few, and most of them are bad. (p. 238)

However, even in the public outcry and discontent for unwed teen mothers the response was disjointed when considering racial background.

Society perceptions viewed Caucasian teen mothers as victims of society in need of rehabilitation, while Black American teen mothers were demonized as irresponsible, hypersexual, and uncivilized women (Solinger, 1997). Racial disparities were reflected in the access to social support services necessary to maintain a suitable living for adolescent mothers. The racial tensions evident in the 1960s were influential in the limited support and resources
available for Black American teen mothers (Furstenburg, 2003, 2010). The adverse consequences of teen pregnancy were inaccurately described as a social phenomenon concentrated within minorities. According to Pillow (2004), “while white unwed mothers were capable and worthy of rehabilitation, black women were rendered untreatable because their problems of unwed pregnancy were inherent and instilled in their culture and community” (p.24). The social mentality relating Black American teen mothers to juvenile delinquency with maladjustment issues was a common theme spewed in political agendas despite America’s growth in research on the topic of teen pregnancy (Cobliner, 1970; Furstenburg, 2003; Geronimus, 2003; Williamson, 2016).

The moral crisis associated with teen pregnancy would eventually capture the full attention, support and resources of the federal government in the early 1980s (Furstenburg, 2003; “Teen Pregnancy Statistics, n.d.”; Weed & Nicholson, 2012). The negative social and economic stigmas connected to teen pregnancy prompted the federal government to introduce programs educating teens on abstinence. The introduction of “abstinence-only education” was implemented in a manner that solicited public peer pressure as a tool to encourage teens to withhold engaging in sexual activity as adolescents (Solomon-Fears, 2006).

Statistics on Teen Pregnancy

Globally, around 16 million teenage women give birth each year, accounting for around 11 percent of all births; 95 percent of these occur in low- and middle-income countries (Cook & Cameron, 2017). Leading teen births among western industrialized civilizations, the United States accounted for approximately 200,000 of the represented statistic ("American Academy of Pediatrics", 2018; "Centers for Disease Control and Prevention", 2019). The following figure
Figure 2. Teen Pregnancy and Other Outcomes Among Developed Nations

![Adolescent Pregnancy Outcomes Across Countries](image)

Figure 2. Adolescent pregnancy outcomes across countries. * = All estimates are for 2011 except the Netherlands (2008), Belgium and Slovenia (2009), and Sweden and the United States (2010). No. per 1,000 women aged 15-19. Adapted from “Adolescent Pregnancy and Its Outcomes Across Countries” by Guttmacher Institute, 2011, [website]. Retrieved from www.guttmacher.org

Though the United States has led its peer nations in teen births for decades, the country has experienced a significant decline in teen pregnancy stats. In 2017, approximately five percent of all births were attributed to teens between the ages of 15-19 years old. This statistic was a significant seven percent decline from the 2016 average and 70 percent decline from averages noted in 1991 (“Office of Adolescent Health”, 2019). This information is reflected in Figure 3 which shows the birth rate for teens age 15-19 from 1950 to 2016.
The decrease in teen births also contributed to a decrease in births to unwed women. Statistics gathered by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confirmed that only 13 percent of births to unmarried women were attributed to teen mothers, a drastic decline from the 50 percent confirmed in 1970 and 20 percent in 2010 (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2018). Despite the significant decline in teen births in the United States, certain racial and ethnic groups still maintain relatively high teen birth numbers.

Black American Women Statistics on Teen Pregnancy

Teen pregnancy rates vary greatly among minorities; however, Hispanic and non-Hispanic Black American teens account for the largest percentages. In 2016, these numbers were reported as 46.3 percent and 40.3 percent respectively (Ventura, Hamilton, & Matthews, 2016).
These numbers; however, are a decline from the 63 percent for Hispanic teens and 64 percent for Black American teens reported from 1991-2012. The statistics for minority teenagers are double the national average of their Caucasian peers, whose birth rates average 20.5 percent (Ventura, Hamilton, & Matthews, 2016; Wiltz, 2015). The below data reflects the downward trend of teen births for minorities, though still significantly high in relation to their Caucasian peers.

Figure 4. Birth rates for Females Ages 15-19, by Race and Hispanic Origin

![Figure 4](https://example.com/figure4.png)


Despite the decline of Black American teen pregnancies, statistics still estimate 45 percent of Black American teens will become pregnant before the age of 20 (Summers, Y. Lee, & H. Lee, 2017). In addition to this statistic, 38 percent of this subgroup are expected to drop out of school because of barriers associated with teen parenting (Summers, Y. Lee, & H. Lee,
The influx of teen pregnancies within the Black American culture is largely attributed to living in economically-disadvantaged communities (Furstenburg, 2003, 2010; Geronimus, 2003; Summers, Y. Lee, & H. Lee, 2017; Williamson, 2018; Winters & Winters, 2012).

Economically-disadvantaged communities are characterized by the social determinants that create barriers such as access to education, income, and community-level financial and material resources (Penman-Aguilar, Carter, Snead & Kourtis, 2013). Rural and urban geographical locations are most commonly categorized as economically-disadvantaged communities. According to 2016 statistics, ten states located in the rural South and Southeast region had the highest rate of teen pregnancies (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2018). The chart shown in Figure 5 outlines the Southern region states most commonly noted as having an increase in teen pregnancies compared to U.S. statistical averages. Connectively, the South and Southeast region statistically houses a large percentage of the Black American population (see Figure 6). Economic conditions stemming from lack of income equality was cited by Fernandes-Alcantara (2018) as a potential cause for this geographical disparity.

Figure 5. U.S. Teen Birth Rates by State
Figure 5. The figure displays the 2016 statistical births to teenagers between the ages of 15-19. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/teenpregnancy/about/reduced-disparities-birth-rates.htm

Figure 6. Geographical population of U.S

Figure 6. This map represents the regional differences in racial make-up across the United States. The information was retrieved from Census 2000 analyzed by the Social Science Data Analysis Network (SSDAN) via http://www.censusscope.org/us/map_common_race.html.

In addition to demographic disparities, community change has been noted for impacting teen pregnancy, specifically when referencing Black American teens. Although most socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial groups experience change, the Black American community has undergone a significant demographic transformation ((Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Duckett, 2009; Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 2005; McAdoo, 1998; Sudarkasa, 1997). As an example, the 2003 census revealed that the Black American population “increased faster than the total United States population” from 1990-2000 (Duckett, 2009). Subsequently, Black American families were forced to contend with an increase in oppressive social structures. Inadequate healthcare, teen
pregnancy, and homelessness are among some of the challenges experienced in these social structures (Duckett, 2009). Parental involvement, peer influence and lack of communication on sexual education topics were also noted as major risk factors in the Black American communities that increased the chances of teen pregnancy (Assini-Meytin & Green, 2015).

**Implications of Teen Pregnancy**

Teen pregnancy can have a negative impact on girls, families, and communities. There have been strong statistical associations between teen childbearing and socioeconomic well-being. Data findings assessing the potential hardships of teen childbearing confirmed that teen mothers are more likely to drop out of school, fail to maintain adequate employment, and earn low wages (Hotz, Williams-McElroy, & Sanders, 1997; “World Health Organization”, 2018). Furthermore, researchers asserted that teen mothers were more likely to depend on government subsidies, which ultimately impeded social cost on taxpayers (Wiltz, 2015; Geronimus, 1991; Hotz, Williams-McElroy, & Sanders, 1997; Brandon, 1999).

Community structural problems that result in weak labor forces, minimal economic resources, and low academic achievement rates are believed to correlate to the fluctuation of teen pregnancies (Wilson, 1991; Wilson, 2010; Winters & Winters, 2012). Access to economic boosting employment and quality education has been a struggle in the Black American community for centuries (Carter, 1978; Geronimus, 2003; Harvey, 1988; Wilson, 1978, 1991, 2010; Winters & Winters, 2012). Economic studies suggest that the lack of resources in the home or available within the community will create negative perceptions of self-worth and future economic stability among teen mothers (Ladner, 1971, 1995). The inaccessibility of basic resources, such as educational tools, stable in-home incomes, and consistent nourishment, leads to irrational ideas when goal-setting and planning for a professional future (Ladner, 1971, 1995;
Winters & Winters, 2012). Yet, there are many Black American teen mothers that have achieved economic and educational success despite these barriers and societal perceptions.

Educational Challenges

The educational advancement of teen mothers has been a topic of interest for both psychological and educational literature. The educational success of teen mothers is believed to not only enhance the future occupational and financial outcomes of teen parent households but also minimize psychological distress that affects their mental and emotional well-being (Pietrowski, 2006). However, statistical averages state 30 percent of teen girls who drop out of high school cite teen pregnancy as the cause (Benitz, 2017). Black American females who become adolescent parents are 40 percent more unlikely to complete their high school education and become welfare recipients according to national research (Teen Pregnancy Statistics, n.d.).

There were three major barriers identified in the educational achievement rates of teen mothers: stigmas, segregation, and support. Teen mothers in educational settings are likely to receive unwanted negative attention. “Young women who do find themselves pregnant (and 40 percent of all young women in the United States become pregnant before they turn 20) are likely to feel blamed and shamed” (Pregnant and Parenting, 2007, para. 13). This negative self-reflection often stems from the poor expectation and outcomes society, as well as educators correlate with teen parenting. Pillow (2006) describes the four impacts found within the educational system that severely influence the quality and longevity of educational experience for a teen parent:

1. Contamination Discourse – which places blame on teen mothers for their sexuality and tries to force segregation into different classrooms or buildings.
2) Discourse of Education and Responsibility – this viewpoint teaches that education is not a right, but a responsibility of teen mothers to better themselves and not be a burden to society.

3) Pregnancy as a Cold – this viewpoint views pregnancy as a cold; a limited issue, which requires no special services or provisions.

4) Pregnancy as a Disease – this viewpoint sees teen pregnancy as a life-long condition that portrays the teen mother as deficient. (pp. 67-68)

The educational mindset that correlates degradation and teen parenting is also responsible for the decision to segregate teen mothers from their educational peers. Segregating teen mothers from the mainstream educational setting to minimize the likelihood of contaminating their peers with sexual behaviors has been a common practice since the early twentieth century (Watson, 2016). Though the mandated removal of teen mothers from their educational setting was outlawed in the 1970s, school systems have navigated around the legal system by providing alternative school settings for the pregnant mother (Watson, 2016). The alternative programs are noted to provide specialized parenting courses that assist in the caretaking of teen mother’s offspring but are also recognized to be lacking in rigorous educational curriculum (SmithBattle, 2006; Usher & Kober, 2012; Watson, 2016).

While many alternative programs provide a form of support for teen mothers to access care for their child and achieve an education, the challenges of motherhood and personal development can create additional barriers hindering educational success. Social role changes such as social isolation, cognitive development, and physical maturation can cause teen mothers to retreat from educational settings (Pellegrino, 2015). Health-related issues associated with pregnancy and childrearing are also noted for created inconsistencies in teen mothers’ stable
attendance in school, which ultimately leads to early drop-out rates (Camarena, Minor, Melmer, & Ferrie, 1998; Pellegrino, 2015; SmithBattle, 2007; Yardley, 2008). Health-related issues can spawn from pregnancy symptoms such as morning sickness to post-partum mental health care (i.e. depression and substance abuse), as well as potential health impacts associated with the developmental disabilities of newborns (Middleton-Hinton, 2017).

Economic Challenges

Low economic viability is also considered a likely outcome for teen mothers. Teen mothers are 10–12 percent less likely to complete high school and have 14–29 percent lower odds of attending college (Basch, 2011). Despite the fact teen mothers often drop out of school to seek stable employment, most high school dropouts earn a low-income of $6,500 annually for a significant amount of years following childbirth, often restricting them to the lowest income bracket (Bloom, 2010; Pellegrino, 2015; “United States Census Bureau”, 2017).

Lack of educational attainment matched with reduced labor markets increased the need for teen mothers to seek assistance from the U.S. welfare system (Hoffman, 2015). However, some researcher’s assert that the reliance on public welfare systems is most common among teen mothers who originated in a disadvantaged socioeconomic community thus perpetuating the community mindset and structural realities in which the teen mother is familiar (Assini-Meytin & Green, 2015). This fact is common among minorities, particularly since Black, Hispanic, and Native American youth live in communities whose income averages 200 percent below federal poverty levels (“ChildTrends”, 2019). Alternately, teen mothers that lived within a middle-class community were more likely to achieve educational goals and economic stability by their mid-30s (Assini-Meytin & Green, 2015; SmithBattle, 2006). The result of this information suggests the importance of teen mothers’ access to social resources in their transition to adulthood. The
result also prompts the need to review the influence of racial groups, customs, and economic background on teen pregnancy.

**Support Initiatives**

Support resources are considered an essential component of a teen mother’s ability to be successful in their goals (Mangino, 2008). Specifically, school-based programs that provide counseling, health care, health teaching, and education about child development to teenage parents help to alleviate many of the problems associated with teen pregnancy and parenting and lead to higher outcomes of successful educational attainment (SEDL, 2016). Teen mothers have also attributed their educational success to specialty support services such as the availability of childcare services on school campuses (Watson & Vogel, 2017). The positive outcome is believed to be a result of aligning school resources, curriculum and strategies with the specific needs and challenges of a teen mother (Benitez, 2017).

In addition to school-based programs, personal support or relationships were also considered influential to a teen mother’s ability to have successful educational outcomes (SmithBattle, 2006). Teachers, counselors, mentors, parents, guardians are stated to have a major impact on the motivation and engagement levels of teen mothers (Magiano, 2008). The presence of an in-school supportive system, or lack thereof, could have a major impact on how teen mothers manage their educational challenges. According to the SEDL (2017), The invisibility of teenage parents [on school campuses] often produces negative results: inappropriate interventions to address their unique developmental needs, lack of advocacy for teenage parents, and insensitivity on the part of the educational system to help parenting teens balance their education and their responsibilities as parents (para.16).
However, the presence of adult mentors within the school system is believed to provide hope, encouragement, nurturance and increase resiliency in teen mothers (Koller, Larsen, Thornell-Sandfor, Rummell, Engles, & Elms, 2013).

Several researchers have produced studies that recommend the importance of in-school support systems developing cultural sensitivity trainings to meet the needs of minority teen mothers (Etowa, 2012; Harrison & Franklin, 2009; Lewin, Hodgkinson, Waters, Premph, Beers, & Feinberg, 2015; Mistry, Jacobs, & Jacobs, 2009). The disproportionate rate of births to Black American teen mothers compared to their White American peers led researchers to consider the cultural challenges associated with the peer group. Some of these challenges included low socioeconomic communities and a lack of resources to support programs for teen mothers. Recommendations of research suggest that support systems must understand the cultural values, beliefs, and challenges specific to the aforementioned disproportionate peer group to effectively engage teen mothers to complete educational goals (Ricks, 2016).

**Theoretical Framework**

Teenage mothers increased risk of poverty and barriers to pursuing education have been a prevalent topic in the United States (Bouchard, 2015). However, modern research has focused on the growing number of teen mothers that have persevered through the perceived challenges and expected outcomes of teen parents (Watson & Vogel, 2017). Among the 50 percent of teen mothers that have defied the negative expectations of teen parenting, motivation and support were identified to be key factors contributing to their personal success (Watson & Vogel, 2017; Pellegrino, 2014; SmithBattle, 2006, 2007). Payne (2018) also suggests that “high-adversity environments produce resilience in the process of problem-solving, minimizing danger and oppression, and developing and maintaining optimism” (p.28). Recognizing the positive
outcome that can be attributed to self-efficacy and external support, this study defines theoretical frameworks such as the Social Learning and Resiliency to help build a social support model necessary to encourage educational growth.

Social Learning Theory

Bandura’s social learning theory provides a construct to examine how cognitive, social and environmental determinants affect behaviors. The theory suggests that individuals absorb the behaviors of those in their environment and ultimately emulates them (Bandura, 1971). Using the four fundamental models of the social learning theory, it is assumed that a researcher can gain insight on the behavior and/or thought process that influenced a teen to become pregnant and circumvent any future behaviors of the same (Akella & Jordan, 2015).

The four models of social learning theory consist of differential association, definitions, differential reinforcements and imitation (Akella & Jordan, 2015; Akers & Sellers, 2004). The differential association suggests that an individual’s social circle will dictate or influence their behavior and decision-making capabilities. In this retrospect, the social circle is often defined as family members, friends, and community groups. The acceptable mode of behavior is determined by the social circle through the dictation of values and views considered to be appropriate modes of conduct (Bandura, 1971).

The designation of acceptable behaviors within a culture is the second fundamental model of the social learning theory coined the definition premise. The definition’s premise asserts that individuals will interpret behaviors as acceptable based on the cultural attitude and norms reflected in their community (Akella & Jordan, 2015). In conjunction with community ideas of normative behavior, the definition’s premise also states that individuals might also deem a behavior as appropriate based on their own mental or emotional connection to an action (Akers
& Sellers, 2004). As an example, if a teen perceives a teen parenting experience - such as witnessing their own parents’ journey or sibling- to be positive, then consequently, there might be less concern associated with early parenting.

Differential association is based on the outcomes of an individual associate with potential behaviors. Under the premise of the theory, an individual’s decision to engage in repetitive behavior is based on positive or negative consequences in which the person relates to their action (Akella & Jordan, 2015). Emotional responses are developed by simply observing the “affective reactions of others undergoing a painful or pleasurable experience” (Bandura, 1971, pp. 2). The conceptual theory is often used to explain the physical and emotional decisions to engage in repetitive births among teen mothers.

Imitation is the final element of the social learning theory. The imitation premise, similar to differential association, correlates positive and negative outcomes to behaviors as a determinant for emulating. Individuals are believed to imitate the behaviors of those closest to them in which the shadowed performance is likely to produce an outcome considered rewardable or valued (Bandura, 1971). Akella et al. (2015) described imitation as the social theory most evident between teen mothers and their social circles. The theorists suggested that statements such as “following in my…footsteps” to be the most notable representation of imitation found in their study.

Several researchers have linked Bandura’s social learning theory as a premise for repetitive, intergenerational cycles of teen pregnancy (Assini-Meytin & Green, 2015; Christoffersen & Laustern, 2009; East, Reyes, & Horn, 2007; Floreescu, Temneanu & Mindru., 2016; Parker, 2018). Applying this theory to the historical statistics of teen pregnancy, researchers were able to correlate an imitation of behaviors against the behaviors of influential
models, such as parents and siblings (Florescu, Temneanu & Mindru., 2016). Alternatively, researchers were also able to use the social learning model to discuss the impact sufficient support and encouragement can have on helping a teen mother form a positive self-image (Parker, 2018).

Resiliency Theory

There has been an increase in qualitative studies on the resiliency of women, post-teen parenting, that connect the positive outcomes of teen motherhood with the availability of a supportive, engaged social community (Breen & McLean, 2010; SmithBattle, 2005, 2006a, 2006b). The term resiliency is “the process that disrupts the negative trajectory form risk to psychopathology and thereby results in adaptive outcomes even in the presence of adversity” (Weed, Keogh, & Borkowski, 2000, p. 208). Though the struggle of teen motherhood is highly acknowledged and publicized, the personal transformations associated with positive, uplifting social and environmental dynamics are not as evident. The resiliency theory analyzes and values the impact of human-environment connection and the ability to be socially resilient as reflected in the Resiliency model pictured in figure 7.

Figure 7. Resiliency Model
Figure 7. The model describes the adaptational outcomes of positive social behavior and support leading to resiliency among teen mothers.

Several themes emerged from this form of social theory which defined principles used to cope with stressors in life and enhance behaviors that support resiliency (Cote & Nightingale, 2011; Greene, Galambos, & Lee, 2004). These stressors are deemed to be triggered from two major occurrences: (1) exposure to significant threat or severe adversity; and (2) the achievement of positive adaptation despite major assaults on the developmental process (Garmezy, 1990; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990). Early works of research regarding resiliency focused on the individual qualities of people to overcome adversity such as high self-esteem and autonomy (Masten & Garmezy, 1985). However, as the research on resiliency grew, it became more evident that external aspects could have a major impact on the resiliency mindset of an individual. The three factors implicated as contributors to resiliency were (1) attributes of the [individuals] themselves, (2) aspects of their families, and (3) characteristics of [the individual’s] wider social environments (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten & Garmezy, 1985; Parker, 2018; Werner & Smith, 1982, 1992).

The application of the resiliency enables an individual to persevere through adversity despite challenges (Cheavens, Cukrowicz, Hansen & Mitchell, 2015; Parker, 2018). Specifically, researchers have applied the resiliency theory to describe how individuals can set personal goals and develop an internal drive that supports their ability to achieve success despite the well-known challenges associated with teen parenting (Cheavens et al., 2015; Rodriguez-Chalfant, 2018; Parker, 2018). Failing grades, disenchantment from school, childcare, transportation, and lack of social support are some of these many challenges that affect teen parents (Pelligrino, 2014). Motivation is considered to be a primary cause that contributes to the
challenges of teen parents, specifically when considering the educational success and drop-out rates (Pellegrino, 2016). Subsequently, teen mothers that

Wildsmith, Manlove, Jekielek, Moore, and Mincieli’s (2012) quantitative study asserted that the resiliency theory was attributed to protective factors that supported teen mothers achieving positive outcomes in pregnancy and motherhood.

Stage-Environment Fit Theory

Stage-environment fit theory was proposed by theorists, Eccles and Midgely, in 1990. The theory asserts that motivational levels and self-image of adolescents as they develop directly relates to their needs and how it fits in their environment (Eccles & Midgely, 1990). Similarly, this theoretical framework can be employed to discover how the environments of developing teen mothers, such as home and school, aligns with the resiliency characteristics needed to attain educational success.

The stage-environment fit theory explores how opportunities and resources within an environment supports the needs of an adolescent to achieve success (Gutman & Eccles, 2007; Kennedy-Lewis, 2013). Pellegrino (2017) provided an example of the alignment between stage-fit theory and success teen motherhood in the statement,

increased support and communication between parents and adolescents in the home environment may result in the teen mother remaining in the home and completing high school, illustrating the match between the developmental needs of teenage mothers and their environment resulting in a positive outcome, and resiliency (p. 13).

Results indicate the relationships, specifically familial and peer connections, have a major within the stage-environment fit theory and its correlation to successful outcomes (Gutman & Eccles, 2007). Loss of friendships and strained family relationships caused by early pregnancy and teen
parenting responsibilities can create barriers in the psychological development from adolescence to adulthood for teen mothers (Gutman & Eccles, 2007). Teen mothers that exert willingness to establish autonomy and decision-making control over their livelihood, and that of their child, are more likely to achieve personal success. This developmental transition is particularly successful when families provide an environment that supports the teen mother’s autonomous development (Gutman & Eccles, 2007).

Critical Race Theory

The critical race theory was created in the mid-1970s as a response to the reactionary attacks Black Americans experience in relation to the successful introduction of several civil rights acts (Simba, 2019). The theory argues that white racism has historically been used as a cultural force in America to achieve ideological, cultural, and political domination (Simba, 2019). This expression of racism is accomplished by developing alternative realities of the Black American culture through “written myths, stories, legal rules, and the institutional disposition of prestige and power via the concept of whiteness” (Simba, 2019, para. 2).

The impact of the critical race theory is evident in the social degradation of the Black family when addressing teen pregnancy issues. The radicalization of the term “culture of poverty” became synonymous with the teen pregnancy “epidemic” thus associating minorities with poverty (Watson, 2014). Political agendas used the racial discrepancy as an opportunity to characterize the Black American teen mother as “welfare queen” contributing to the epidemic of “poverty, immorality, and promiscuity” (Pillow, 2004, p.34). The term would be popularized in society by President Ronald Reagan and ultimately lead to a false outrage condemning the assumed decline of the Black family (Pillow, 2004; Watson, 2014). Surdarkasa (1997) confirmed the inconsistent description of Black American families as being “in crisis” compared
their non-minority description as “in transition” when assessing the change in teen pregnancy populations. Surdarkasa (1997) continued to describe the racial discrepancy in the statement of Black American families as:

Moral failures that signal the breakdown in the fabric of our society. Thus, instead of seeking to understand and assess these emerging forms of the family in order to influence their development, the public is warned against (a) the "alarming disintegration" of the nuclear family and the "loss of traditional family values" (p.10).

Cumulative Disadvantage Theory

Dannefer (2003) aptly describes the cumulative disadvantage theory as “the systemic tendency for interindividual divergence in a given characteristic (e.g., money, health, or status) with the passage of time” (para. 3). Cumulative disadvantage theory suggests that individuals’ lives align with their structural and environmental realities ultimately shaping their trajectory of time (Assini-Meytin & Green, 2015). In simple, the motto often used to describe the contextual parameters of the cumulative disadvantage theory was “success breeds success”, as well as “the rich get rich, while the poor get poorer” (Dannefer, 2003; Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2001; Huber, 1998). In line with this perspective, it could be assumed that teenage parents from disadvantaged backgrounds will have fewer opportunities and greater barriers in achieving a successful, socioeconomic future (Assini-Meytin & Green, 2015).

Specifically, urban and rural areas have been noted as contributing to this socioeconomic inequality among teen mothers (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). Urban areas have an increased poverty rate which leads to inadequate or no prenatal care due to the lack of insurance (Tanner, Ma, Roof, Rodgers, Brooks, and Paluzzi, 2015). Furthermore, urban areas are
noted as generally well-developed and often overcrowded, which suggests a shortage of resources and support services might be available (Ricks, 2016). Teen mothers located in rural areas have access to community resources; however, the large and diverse teenage pregnancy rates in urban areas overshadows the available resources that can be directed to rural areas (Tanner et al., 2015; Fuxman, De Los Santos, Finklestein, Landon, & O’Donnell, 2015).

Self-Determination Theory

Self Determination theory is a broad framework that studies the human motivation, both cognitive and social developments, that enhances performance (“Center for Self-Determination Theory”, 2019). Under the premise of this theory, autonomy, competence and relatedness are believed to foster the highest quality of motivation and engagement to enhance performance, persistence, and creativity (“Center for Self-Determination Theory”, 2019). The theory suggests there are six mini theories that address each individual facet of motivation:

1. Cognitive Evaluation Theory is rooted in the concept of intrinsic motivation.
   Intrinsic motivation is based on the satisfaction of behaving “for its own sake.” Specifically, the theory addresses rewards, interpersonal controls, and ego-involved impacts.

2. Organismic Integration Theory is the second mini-theory. This theory addresses extrinsic motivations. Extrinsic motivation is considered an instrument in the form of external regulations, introjection, and identification, and integration.

3. Causality Orientations Theory describes individual difference in people’s tendencies to orient toward environments and regulate behavior in various ways.

4. The fourth mini theory is the Basic Psychological Needs Theory. The concept describes psychological needs and their relations to psychological health and well-
being. The mini-theory focuses on the optimal functioning predicated on autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

5. The Goal Contents Theory is an extension of the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theories based on goal achievement. The theory suggests that goals provide a basic need for satisfaction that is achieved through behaviors such as financial success, appearance, popularity, and personal growth.

6. The sixth mini-theory is the Relationships Motivation Theory. This theory posits that the development and maintenance of personal relationships is essential to the adjustment and well-being of people, strengthening the concept of the importance of relatedness.

Ecological Systems Theory

The ecological systems theory was developed in 1979 by Urie Bronfenbrenner. The theory states that humans are affected by their surrounding environment and that changing the environment, or their perception of the environment, could assist in overcoming hardships (“Ecological Systems Theory”, 2018). The core of the theory suggests that the success of a child’s development does not solely rely on their biology or parental involvement, but also outside influences such as poverty and their social environment, whether negative or positive (“Ecological Systems Theory”, 2018). The theory further explains that an individual’s environments are comprised of five parts that affect development. The five parts of the environmental systems are microsystems, meosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and chronosystems.

Bronfenbrenner defines the five systems as the following: Mircosystems are comprised of the social system in which an individual interacts the most such as family and friends.
Meosystems are a nested circle that relies on communication between two entities in close relation to the individual such as a parent and teacher. Exosystems are social dynamics that might not have an immediate impact, but more residual impact on the individual such as community, health, and social regulations. The exosystem suggests that the community, to a capacity, has a shared amount of responsibility maintaining the welfare of its community members (“Ecological Systems Theory”, 2018). Systemic barriers such as characterizing the educational abilities of a minoritized group based on skewed historical data of that population could be considered an aspect of a negative exosystem social dynamic.

The fourth system is the macrosystem. The macrosystem consists of the “culture, subculture, social class, ethnic group, and religious traditions” in which the individual mimics their behavior and assesses individual values. The final, and deemed largest, layer of environmental impact is the chronosystem. The chronosystem was introduced to the theory in 1986 and is based on the concept that patterns of social interaction (friendships, responsibilities, and conflicts) accumulated throughout growth affect the development of individuals. (“Ecological Systems Theory”, 2018).

Gaps in Research

The ability of teen mothers to transition from adolescent parents into fully-functioning, successful adults relies on access to community and family support services. Community programs that encourage the educational and psychological development of teen mothers are more likely to increase the resilient behavioral patterns researchers believe to be a major component of adolescent motherhood success. Theorists, such as Assini-Meytin and Green (2015), SmithBattle (2006) and Breen and McLean (2010), have conducted studies that confirm
the positive correlation and influence of supportive environments and successful maternal and child outcomes among teen mothers.

Many Black American teen mothers experience an additional social burden caused by inconsistent access to some social services stemmed from living in economically-deprived communities with minimal resources. Alternative educational programs which are noted for increasing teen mother stability through long-term educational, family and career planning supports the ability to limit adverse outcomes on teen mothers in the aforementioned poverty communities; however there is a limited availability of these programs given that increased teen pregnancies are found in high-poverty areas (Assini-Meytin & Green, 2015; Parker, 2018). Studies confirm that teen mothers are more likely to be resilient in these communities when they have the mental support and confidence to achieve their aspirations. These communities are noted for having a major influence on achieving personal growth, self-efficacy, and educational aspirations.

Though graduation rates for teen mothers have continued to increase, they still pale in comparison to their non-maternal peers (Watson, 2014). To further that data, statistics reflect that only 2 percent of teen mothers continue forward to achieve postsecondary degrees (Power to Decide, 2018). Low-income students specifically are confronted with a plethora of barriers when navigating the pathways to achieving postsecondary education (Costello, 2014). Feliciano and Ashtiani (2012) concluded that

In order to understand the influence of socioeconomic background on higher education attainment, we need to continue to focus attention on the process of schooling, but we also need to recognize how competing obligations and life experiences outside of school can influence educational opportunities (pp. 26).
The review of this literature confirms a need to address the postsecondary, educational achievements of women who were teen mothers through the cultural lens of Black Americans. Additional research is needed to understand the cultural barriers associated with the specific ethnic group and how external factors can compound the challenges already associated with teen parenting. Deprived socioeconomic communities and inconsistent, negative racial perceptions in society are among the unique minority challenges Black Americans are described as enduring in conjunction with the common teen parenting challenges (Assini-Meytin and Green, 2016; Parker, 2018; Summers, Y.Lee, H.Lee, 2017). Benitez (2007) addresses the need to contribute to the research on teen mothers achieving master’s degrees and higher from the perspective of a cultural subgroup to assist with defining a pathway or mechanism for educational achievement. This study seeks to begin exploring the perspective of cultural sub-groups by uncovering the experiences of Black American women who were teen mothers and their specific experiences as teen mothers in their communities. The results of this study can be used to compare the specific challenges of Hispanic American women who were teen mothers as identified in Rodriguez-Chalfant’s (2019) study. Additionally, the study will reveal specific recommendations from Black American women who were teen mothers that can be used to motivate and support teen mothers in their journeys to educational achievement.

**Summary**

This researcher seeks to explore how Black American women who were mothers perceive their socioeconomic conditions both prior, during and post teen pregnancy. The researcher also seeks to describe the impact of external, cultural and social influences on the women who were mother’s ability to achieve autonomy through self-motivation measures. The goal of the research is to inspire and develop a pathway to assist Black American women who
were mothers in their quest to achieve postsecondary degrees from a common, subculture mindset.

The review of this literature explored the challenges and potential degradation in life associated with teen pregnancy. Specifically, research posits that teen mothers are bound to experience low-socioeconomic viability and reduced education backgrounds stemmed from the high potential to drop-out of school (Assini-Meytin & Green, 2015; Furstenberg, 2010; Mollborn & Jacobs, 2012; SmithBattle, 2007; Watson, 2018). However, literature produced by Furstenberg (2003), Hotz, McElroy, and Sanders (1997), and SmithBattle (2007) all agree that teen mothers can be resilient and thus can adapt to the developmental tasks associated with transitioning from an adolescent to adulthood while managing motherhood. The result is a higher educational achievement, reduced dependence on social welfare programs, and financial stable employment (Benitez, 2007; Oxford, Lee, & Lohr, 2010; Rodriguez-Chalfant, 2017, Summers, Y.Lee, H.Lee, 2017; Watson, 2018). The literature review also explored additional research concepts and an overview of themes related to the literature that can be located in the Synthesis Literature Matrix (Appendix A).
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

Chapter II reviewed the literature works that build a solid outline on how to motivate teen mothers towards educational advancements. The chapter sought to understand the struggles teen mothers experience on their path to achieve stability during and post-teen parenting. This chapter describes the basis for initiating a heuristic, phenomenological study. Specifically, the chapter outlines the population, target population and sample used to gain insight according to the research questions highlighted in Chapter I. Furthermore, Chapter III explicitly discusses the parameters for instrumentation, reliability, validity, and relevance of the field study. The chapter also addressed the data collection process and methods in which the data was accrued. Concluding the chapter is a discussion on the limitations of the study and summarizing information.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this heuristic phenomenological study was to describe and identify the economic barriers and support resources Black American women who were teen mothers perceived as impacting or encouraging their ability to achieve a master’s degree or higher. In addition, the purpose of this study is to describe the recommendations of teen mothers to assist current and future teen mothers in accomplishing educational goals.

Central Research Questions

a) What are the lived experiences of Black American women who were teen mothers and went on to achieve a master’s degree and higher, including the economic barriers and support resources that impacted their educational achievement?
b) What recommendations do Black American women who were teen mothers, and have achieved a master’s degree or higher, have for teen mothers to accomplish educational goals?

Research Sub-Questions

1. What is the lived experience of Black American women leading up to the time before becoming a teen mother?

2. What economic barriers or impacts were encountered by Black American women who were teen mothers as they worked toward achieving a master’s degree or higher?

3. What support resources inspired Black American women who were teen mothers to pursue the achievement of obtaining a master’s degree or higher?

4. What specific person or people influenced Black American women who were teen mothers to achieve a master’s degree or higher?

5. What type of support was received by Black American women who were teen mothers from family members (parents, partners, siblings, relatives) or educational/personal mentors?

6. What societal or stereotypical barriers were encountered by Black American women who were teen mothers as they pursued a master’s degree or higher?

7. What advice do Black American women who were teen mothers offer teen mothers to pursue a master’s degree or higher?

Research Design

The research was conducted using a qualitative methodology. The qualitative research method is designed to learn more about specific behaviors through the exploration of individual experiences (Patten & Newhart, 2018). Developing a qualitative methodology supports the researcher’s ability to engage with the study while being “flexible and sensitive to the social context” (Astalin, 2013, p. 118). Historically, research focused on teen pregnancy has used a
qualitative methodology for soliciting information from study participants to share their personal experiences (Rumberger, 1987; Weed, Keogh & Borkowski, 2000; Breen & McLean, 2010; Benitz, 2016). There is a broad knowledge involving the factors that lead to teen pregnancy and factors that contribute to the successful post-partum maturation for teens. The vastness of research specifying these factors aligns with the interpretive, broad approach of a qualitative study (Patten & Newhart, 2018).

A phenomenological approach was used to conduct the qualitative assessment of this research study. The phenomenological research approach was considered for this study because of the method’s compatibility with fluid data gathering. According to Ungvarsky (2019), “Phenomenology looks at an event through a lens of how that event is viewed by a person, not how the event actually took place. In other words, the person's perception and interpretation of the event is given priority in understanding how the event unfolded” (para.1). Using a phenomenological approach, the researcher is more likely provide to obtain thought-provoking reflections on personal experiences of individuals that could be used to inspire a change in behavior or actions for current and future teen mothers.

As an additional layer of implementing a phenomenological approach, heuristic inquiry is implemented as a systematic form of observation. Heuristic inquiry is described as the process of gaining a “human understanding [of] what we know but cannot articulate” (Patton, 2015). Heuristic inquiry also signifies that the researcher has personal experience with the phenomenon being studied (Hiles, 2001). The process of heuristic inquiry is subjective and requires an inverted perspective when investigating, processing, and sifting through the varying responses of the human condition in reaction to circumstances (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Moustakas, 1990). Implementing a heuristic inquiry approach is particularly useful in reducing opportunities
of collusion or bias to surface in the interview (Shannon-Baker, 2016), which is essential considering this researcher’s personal connection to the Black American journey of teen motherhood.

Modeling this study from a previous similar research is another method being used to limit bias in the study. According to Patten and Newhart (2018), replication studies consist of “mimic[ing] an original study in all the important aspects...to see if the same types of results as those of the original study will be obtained” (p. 41). The authenticity, appropriateness, and objectivity of the research have been certified in the Benitez (2017) study as valid and reliable. Benitez (2017) ensured that impartiality by “including field tests, cross-checking interview format[s],…and purposely not answering the research questions based on the researcher’s own journey” (pp.55-56).

This study’s core central research questions aligned with Benitez’s (2017) study to ensure the researcher is able to build upon the original study’s ability and gain recommendations from women, who were teen mothers, to support other teen mothers’ ability to achieve educational goals. However, the study varied from the original Benitez (2017) study by focusing on the personal journeys and lived experiences of Black American women who have achieved master’s degrees or higher. “Social justice demands that disenfranchised populations such as teen mothers, have the opportunity to give voice to their lived experiences as a way to battle the stigmatization of “othering” prevalent in current research and society in general” (Watson, 2014, p.38). In an effort to remain sensitive to the cultural differences discovered in the Black American population, the interview questions have also been adjusted to help gain a deeper-level insight on the cultural perceptions of the participant’s teen motherhood journey. Implementing
this change helps the researcher capture the “feelings, thoughts, beliefs, ideals, and actions in a natural, [unstructured] situation” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 340).

**Population**

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined research populations as “a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects or events, that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research” (p. 129). The population of a study is meant to identify a grouping of individuals that can provide a purposeful response to the information being sought. This study’s population of interest focused on Black American women who birthed children between the ages of 15-19 years old and eventually achieved postsecondary degrees, specifically master’s degrees or above, despite statistical evidence that reflects poor educational outcomes of teen mothers (Bar & Simons, 2012; Winters & Winters, 2012).

According to statistics maintained by the Centers for Disease and Prevention (2019), “In 2017, a total of 194,377 babies were born to women aged 15–19 years, for a birth rate of 18.8 per 1,000 women in this age group” (para. 1). This birth rate was a significant decline of 7 percent from 2016 statistics and a record low for teen pregnancies in the United States (“Centers for Disease and Prevention”, para. 1).
Table 1.

*Total births of teens in United States by minority*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Data Type</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>3,813</td>
<td>3,563</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rate per 1,000</td>
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<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian and Pacific Islander</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>3,951</td>
<td>3,631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rate per 1,000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>48,240</td>
<td>45,421</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rate per 1,000</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>74,822</td>
<td>69,354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rate per 1,000</td>
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<td>29</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Non-Hispanic White</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>78,133</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rate per 1,000</td>
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<td>13</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>209,809</td>
<td>194,377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rate per 1,000</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>8,629</td>
<td>8,539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rate per 1,000</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Rate is per 1,000 females between age 15 and 19. This measure of teenage childbearing focuses on the fertility of all females ages 15 to 19, regardless of marital status. Rates from 1991 through 1999 are based on revised population estimates that are consistent with results from the 2000 Decennial Census.

While the 2017 data indicates a population of 194,377 teen mothers in the United States, 45,421 of which identify as Black Americans, it is not possible to identify how many teen mothers within this population have obtained a master’s degree or higher. Statistical research focuses on the successful matriculation of teen mothers who have achieved postsecondary degrees but does not specify numerical data. The research also does not provide numerical statistical data that focuses on the matriculation success of Black American teen mothers.

**Target Population**

The purpose of the target population is to identify a group of individuals that conforms to the criteria in which the researcher intends to generalize the results of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The target population of this study is Black American women who were teen mothers and have obtained master’s degrees or higher. The characteristic of a teen mother is defined as an individual that birthed a child between the ages of 15-19 years old, per the
statistical data used in the Center for Disease Prevention and Control annual federal reports (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019).

The National Conference of State Legislatures (2019) reports that “Only 40 percent of teen mothers finish high school” compared to 90 percent completion rate of their non-parenting peers (para. 1). Black American tee Furthermore, reports state that “fewer than 2 percent [of teen mothers] finish college by age 30” (“National Conference of State Legislatures”, 2019, para. 1). The Annie E. Casey Foundation developed high-quality data and trend analysis through the project, Kids Count, which focused on the statistical average of teen mothers in the United States. In 2017, a population of 45,421 births to Black American teen females occurred in the United States (“Annie E. Casey Foundation”, 2019). Based on the subset of data, research would suggest that approximately 18,168 these identified Black American teen mothers are likely to complete their high school education; yet, only 908 of this Black American teen mother population is likely to achieve a postsecondary degree (“National Conference of State Legislatures”, 2019).

To be consistent with the study’s intended population sample the base framework used to characterize the target population criteria for this study was adapted from Benitez’s (2017) research study. The criteria for participation was designated to women who:

- Were teen mothers
- Achieved a master’s degree or higher
- Are willing participants in the study

The researcher narrowed the data to specify Black American women who were teen mothers and located in the Southeastern region to include Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Texas. This regional population was selected to align with the data
presented in the 2017 United States Census report that identified those previously mentioned states as leading in minority teen pregnancies (“World Health Organization”, 2019). In addition, the location of the sample population was also chosen to ensure the researcher was able to have accessibility to potential participants of the study. The researcher resides in the Southeastern region, specifically Georgia. Designating the target population of this study be confined to the specified states of Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Texas supports the researcher’s ability to have adequate proximity and financial resources to engage in the data collection process of this study.

The data collected from Annie E. Casey Foundation project, Kids Count, assisted in the researcher’s ability to narrow the estimation of Black American women who could meet the required criteria to be a participant of the study. The data also provided a statistical reference that aligning with the 2017 United Census report that stated Black American females have an increased rate of teen births in the Southeastern region in comparison to averages within the United States (“World Health Organization”, 2019). The data found in the below chart indicates an average of 60,558 Black American teens gave birth annually in the Southeastern regions of the United States.
Table 2.

*Births to teenagers age 15 through 19 by race, ethnicity, and geographical location.*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Data Type</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
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<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>Rate per 1,000</td>
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<td>65</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>59</td>
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<td>47</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>Rate per 1,000</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>62</td>
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<td>50</td>
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<tr>
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Applying the historical data that suggests only 2 percent of teen mothers attain postsecondary degrees, statistics would suggest approximately 1,211 Black American women who were teen mothers in the were likely to meet achieve postsecondary degrees. This statistical result also framed the potential available population that meets the studies criteria.
There are a multitude of statistical reports that highlight major components related to teen births such as marital status, geographical locations, poverty indicators, repetitive births and secondary school completion rates. The researcher was unable to locate data that specifies the rate of attainment of master’s degree among women who were teen mothers. This gap in information prompted the researcher to seek alternative methods to locate potential participants for this study which meet the designated criteria.

The researcher was informed about an online forum on a social media site that boasted a population of 150+ thousand women who identified as Black American. This online forum is titled, “Mothers of Black Boys United.” Within this population, 120 women self-identified as teen mothers who birthed children when they were between the ages of 15-19 years old. Through discussions within the online forum the researcher was able to inquire further into the educational achievement of those self-identified women who were teen mothers. The results highlighted 45 women in the social media forum identified themselves as previous teen mothers who achieved master’s degrees. The women in the social media forum also provided access to additional private, online community forums such as “Mothers of Black Daughters “and “Black Mothers” with potential participants that met the characteristics of the study.

Sample

Sampling is introduced as a method for analyzing the population of interest for a particular study (Patten & Newhart, 2010). The expectation is that the subset, or sample, of the study population can provide a response that captures the generalized ideas, thoughts, and feelings of the intended group being researched. In qualitative studies, this subset is typically small in comparison to the larger study population to gain information-rich data to support the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).
For this study, the researcher elected to interview 16 Black American women who identified themselves as teens who birthed children during their adolescent ages of 15-19 years old. The selected sample also identified themselves as master’s degree recipients to meet the criteria for participation in this study. Selected interviewees resided in the Southeastern region, specifically Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Texas, to align with statistical data that reflects increased teen pregnancies among Black American youth in the specified region. The determination of a mid-size sample population was based on Creswell’s (2013) suggestion that 5-25 interviews is sufficient for a qualitative inquiry, which typically does not designate a sample size (Patton, 2015).

The researcher has chosen to implement nonprobability purposive and convenience sampling to access participants for this study. Similar to Benitez’s (2017) research studies, the aforementioned nonprobability sample methods were selected to ensure a “cultural domain was achieved with knowledgeable experts within” (Tongco, 2007, p. 147). This methodology is particularly useful when the population of the study is small, but specific representation is necessary to collect thorough data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Nonprobability sampling was used as a method for determining the sample for this study. Nonprobability sampling supports the researcher’s ability to ascertain a sample of the population that is available and specifically meets characteristics specified for the study’s population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Purposive Sampling

Purposeful sampling is implemented when the researcher has knowledge on a specific availability of a population that can help support developing the study (Patten & Newhart, 2010). Purposive sampling allows the researcher to select participants based on their perceived ability to
contribute information to the study (Guarte & Barrios, 2004). Using purposive sampling, this researcher was able to ensure the participants of the study were Black American women who were teen mothers and resided in the Southeastern region. The researcher located the potential population of the study through indirect communication of an online, social media forum.

The social media forum titled, ‘Mom’s of Black Boys United,’ revealed a population of 45 women who were teen mothers that achieved master’s degrees and higher and resided in the Southeastern region. For phenomenological studies, Creswell (1998) recommends a maximum population study of 5 – 25 participants; Morse (1994) suggests at least six. To ensure the study aligned with phenomenological research design standards, the study population was limited to teen mothers that resided in specific Southeastern states including Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Texas. This delimitation reduced the eligible participants that met the study criteria from 45 individuals to 21.

Convenience Sampling

Convenience sampling was also used as a method of participant recruitment for this study. Convenience sampling involves selecting participants based on accessibility and willingness to engage in the process (Patton & Newhart, 2010). In this study, the researcher used social media as a primary tool to access a larger range of the population within the designated region. According to Akard, Wray, and Gilmer (2015), social media recruitment may be used as one strategy to recruit a more diverse or large sample of participants. Facebook, specifically, was noted in the study as a useful, cost-effective means for collecting diverse samples of participants (Akard, Wray, & Gilmer, 2015).

The researcher used large social media groups on Facebook to gain access to potential study participants. These groups are titled: “Mom’s of Black Boys”, “Beauties and Boots”,

59
“Doctoral of Education (Ed.D) Network”, and “Doctoral Moms.” The primarily Black American, online community groups account for over 170 thousand women, of which, 45 individuals have been identified as previous teen mothers with master’s degrees. This numerical response is not an indicator of total women who achieved postsecondary degrees, but rather the participants who voluntarily provided demographic information labeling themselves as women, who were teen mothers, with master’s degrees.

Sample Selection Process

The researcher obtained the population sample for the study through conversations within the researcher’s professional social circle. Specifically, the researcher wrote an informal statement in a closed-circuit social media group for women with children inquiring if there was a population of teen mothers that achieved postsecondary degrees. The social media group comprised of 170 thousand members revealed a population of 67 women who labeled themselves as previous teen mothers with postsecondary degrees. Of the 67 identified Black American women who were teen mothers, 45 women volunteered information that they held master’s degrees or higher.

The researcher various methods of communication with participants including email, telephone, and face-to-face conversations when physically feasible. As an additional mode of communication, the researcher provided an opportunity to meet using video conferencing tools such as Zoom, Adobe Connect, Skype or Facebook messenger. This introduction of this virtual mode of communication supported the researcher’s ability to engage with a diverse population within the study using a cost-effective, easily accessible communication feature.

A sample selection process was used to acquire potential participants for the study. However, this researcher included additional steps to align with the process for soliciting
participation through virtual, or social media, settings. The following steps were implemented to access participants for the intended study:

1. Introduce a background of the study in the social media pages titled, “Moms of Black Boys”, “Beauties and Boots”, “Doctoral of Education (Ed.D) Network”, and “Doctoral Moms”

2. Solicit volunteers to participate in the study to assist in the future encouragement and resiliency of teen mothers.

3. Identify individual women meeting the criteria for participation in Georgia and surrounding Southeastern states.

4. Ask the women to identify additional women who met the study criteria, ask those women to identify additional potential participants, and so on until a list of 50 possible potential participants were identified.

5. Identify women who meet the criteria and are accessible to the researcher, begin contacting the women, and secure 16 to participate in the study.

6. Provide each participant with a Participant Letter of Invitation (see Appendix B), Informed Consent documents (see Appendix C) assuring confidentiality, Audio Release form (see Appendix D), and Participants’ Bill of Rights (see Appendix E).

The researcher contacted each potential participant using social media messaging as an initial method of communicating study procedures. Post initial conversation, the researcher altered the communication mode based on the participants preferred method of engaging in the study. Each participant was assured of the confidentiality of the study and the ability to withdraw if the individual so chose.
Instrumentation

Qualitative research studies often involve the researcher operating in the capacity of the instrument (Patten, 2015). The researcher engaged with participants in a semi-structured interview format to limit potential areas of bias forming during the interview process. According to Patten and Newhart (2010), “semi-structured interviews are popular in part because thinking through questions wording carefully in advance allows the researchers to consider if the question is complete, or it is biased or leading” (p. 161). The researcher used a designated set of interview questions as the outline for navigating the interview session (see Appendix F). An adaption of the interview questions within Benitez’s (2017) and Rodriguez-Chalfant’s (2019) study was used as a framework for developing the questions for this study.

However, these interview questions were developed to address the cultural sensitivities of Black American teen mothers and their specific social, physical, and educational challenges. Participants were encouraged to speak freely regarding their life experiences but the utilization of a guideline for questions also assisted in increasing the researcher’s ability to ensure consistency in interviews.

The research design and implementation of instruments for this study were selected to protect against potential threats of bias. Benitez (2017) developed protective measures development of the interview instrument, administration of the interviews, and overall implementation of the interview data gathering process to limit potential bias from tarnishing the validity of the study. The researcher aligned this study according to those protective measures to assist in safeguarding the study from internal or external factors that could hinder the validity of the study. Some of these protective measures included having subject matter experts and colleagues observe and review the administration of interviews and data collection materials for
any potential behavior or approach that could limit, taint, or influence the data (Benitez, 2017; Rodriguez-Chalfant, 2019).

The researcher’s background as a Black American woman, who was a teen mother increases the importance of maintaining an interview process that safeguards the material from any threats of data corruption. The researcher recognized the effect that unique personalities, characteristics, and interview techniques can have on influencing data collection (Pezalla, Pettigrew, & Miller-Day, 2012). The researcher also remained aware of any potential assumptions made within the data collection process based on perceived cultural, socioeconomic, or educational similarities.

Instrument Reliability/Validity

Qualitative interviewing is a complex activity that requires the researcher to balance a line of embracing their involvement in the role of research, encouraging conversation and maintaining neutrality (Patten & Newhart, 2010). A well-designed interview strategy and guidelines to follow throughout the data collection process is essential to help minimize threats to validity and reliability (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010).

In an effort to ensure the reliability of the instrumentation used for data collection, the researcher had the interview questions reviewed by a panel of three experts for validity to the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten & Newhart, 2010). The researcher utilized a Dissertation committee whose focus remained on ensuring the instrumentation quality and validity protocols during its development. The committee was characterized as experts because of their doctoral education background, as well as experience and familiarity with data collection. These characteristics were considered essential to the study to ensure the interview instrument and questions were not bias and sensitive to the targeted population. In addition to
the panel review, the researcher conducted a pilot test of the interview process to ensure the method of presenting the interview material was accurate, consistent, and relatable to the study’s research objective. Creswell (2013) defined this method of ensuring consistency across research groups as qualitative validity.

Field/Pilot Test

This researcher adopted the same collaborative approach to safeguarding the study from potential bias with slight differentiations to accommodate the virtual aspect of the interview process. Using the population access within social media, particularly Facebook, the researcher was able to identify three doctoral candidates that are also Black American women, who were teen mothers. The researcher wrote an informal, indirect message in a social media forum titled, ‘Mom’s of Black Boys United’, inquiring about the success of teen mothers achieving postsecondary degrees. Six participants responded to the message and identified themselves as women who were mothers and have achieved doctoral degrees. The researcher contacted the individuals through social media electronic messaging tools to request assistance with participating in the pilot study and providing feedback regarding the correlation of interview questions to the perceived objective of the study. Three pilot test participants were selected based on availability and designated study criteria. These individuals were considered essential to developing a study that limits bias and is sensitive to the challenges of teen mothers.

The pilot study participants were purposefully selected because of their knowledge of the doctoral research process, familiarity with research interview protocols, and personal experience as women who were teen mothers and have achieved master’s degrees and higher. Each participant was requested to participate in the pilot study and confirmed their preferred method of communication (i.e. online social media electronic messaging applications, email, or
telephone) to schedule a collaborative time to engage with the study. All interview protocol
documentation, including consent to interview and confidentiality agreements, were provided to
participants based on their preference of communication, -primarily email. The researcher used
the Brandman Field Test Interview Participant form as an outline to gain feedback from the pilot
test to modify the interview material to ensure applicability and accuracy to the research
objective. Specifically, the field participants stated the delivery of interview questions solicited
the participant to think about their educational journey as an adult “achieving a master’s degree”
and less about the trials of teen motherhood to get to that point in their life. The pilot
participants agreed that having an interview protocol with prompted sub-questions that redirects
the participant to focus on their journey as a teen mother is important.

Data Collection

Prior to initiating the data collection process, the researcher sought permission from the
Brandman University Institutional Review Board (see Appendix G) and complete the necessary
coursework by the National Institutes of Health “Protecting Human Research Participants” (see
Appendix H).

Once approval was granted from the Brandman University Institutional Review Board to
conduct data collection, the researcher began the process of soliciting participants for the study
through the Moms of Black Boys United, Mothers of Black Daughters, Doctoral of Education
(Ed.D) Network, and Doctoral Moms social media group pages. The researcher posted a flyer
within the designated social media forums soliciting women who were teen mothers, that meet
the specific characteristics of the study, participate in the study at their will. All interested
participants were contacted through social media messaging applications to determine their
preferred availability and method of communicating (i.e. face-to-face, virtual conference,
telephone conference). The researcher designated an appropriate office space that established a comfortable environment for interviewing to occur. Furthermore, online video conferencing applications such as Zoom and Adobe Connect were offered as a secure location to host interviews.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is defined as the “systematic process of coding, categorizing, and interpreting data to provide explanations of a single phenomenon of interest” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 367). It is the process in which the researcher is able to determine critical patterns, interwoven ideologies, and influences of behavior (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This synthesis of information is gained through the researcher’s ability to intellectually interpret the information gained from the data collection process (Patten & Newhart, 2010).

Individual Analysis

This researcher used various data collection tools to assist in analyzing the content obtained in the interviewing process. As an example, audio recordings were used as a primary tool to capture the in-depth information being presented in face-to-face and telephone interviews without taking physical notes to avoid distractions during the interview process. The mp3 audio data was converted using an online media application called Temi to transcribe the interviews. Virtual communication applications, such as Zoom and Adobe Connect, also provide audio recording and transcription services that supported the researcher’s ability to collect, decipher, synthesize, and code the data for emerging themes.

Inter-Rater Reliability

The researcher solicited the expertise of a fellow researcher with extensive educational knowledge on categorizing data as a form of inter-rater reliability during the coding process.
Inter-rater reliability, also termed interobserver agreement for qualitative studies, employs a comparative analysis process that allows the researcher to ensure the validity of their data (Patten & Newhart, 2010). The decision to implement inter-rater reliability in the research supports the researcher’s efforts to combat bias in the coding process (Benitez, 2017).

Composite Analysis

A composition analysis is the comparative process in which the researcher sought out themes, characteristics, and patterns in the data collected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Developing a systematic process for identifying, coding, and categorizing data into groups in clarifying and rationalizing the presented content. The researcher also used qualitative data software, such as NVIVO, to organize the interview content for an easier coding process. The development of codes is based on the frequency, pattern, and characteristics of themes that emerge as each participant is interviewed (Creswell, 2013; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten & Newhart, 2010). McMillan and Schumacher’s (2010) suggestion to use predetermined categories based on the topics embedded in the questions to assist in building workable units, or nodes, will also be influential in the data collection process.

Figure 8. McMillan and Schumacher’s Steps in Analyzing Qualitative Data

Figure 8. The Steps in Analyzing Qualitative Data shows the iterative, inductive process which researcher’s survey, to ensure the qualitative analysis is monitored accordingly. Adapted from “Research in Education: Evidence-Based Inquiry (7th ed.),” by J. H. McMillan and S. Schumacher, 2010, p. 369. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson
Limitations

All research is vulnerable to the implications of bias and limitations of the study (Patten & Newhart, 2010). Though most limitations are discovered in the design and sampling of the study, other study interpretations can impact the results of the study. This researcher has identified the following areas as potential limitations within the study:

1. The small sample size of the study can create limitations on the data collected and available to be used to generalize the population. The minimal sample population can affect the researcher’s ability to gain a significant amount of content to use for coding.

2. Utilizing social media as a primary form of population recognition could also be considered a limitation. Ethical issues and concerns regarding social media recruitment can be considered based on preference, interpretation and comfortability with social media tools. However, Gelinas, Pierce, Winkler, Cohen, Lynch, and Bierer (2017) asserted that

   Social media is also subject to the same regulatory and ethical norms as traditional recruitment including requirements of prospective review and approval compliance with all applicable federal, state, fair, and equitable laws subject to selection, respect for the privacy and other interests of potential participants, sensitivity to the norms and values of different communities and consideration for the impacts of different recruitment techniques on public trust in the research enterprise (George, 2018, p. 59).

The researcher approached recruitment using social media in the same manner and means as utilized for traditional recruitment approaches.
Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the purpose statement, research questions and purpose of this study. Chapter II further described the methodology, research design, population, and sampling methods implemented to develop an information-rich data collection process. The researcher went further into an explanation on the validity, reliability, and instrumentation procedures implemented to ensure the data collection process minimizes bias from threatening the validity of the research process. Lastly, the study reviewed the potential limitations of the study. Chapter IV and IV exposes and explains the data uncovered in the data collection process, suggestions gained from the revealing of the information, and future recommendations derived from the data.
CHAPTER IV: Research, data collection, and findings

This study explores the challenges experienced by teens who become pregnant in their adolescent years and the furthering impact on their educational advancement. The study also advocates to understand the plight of those who were deemed successful through the achievement of postsecondary degrees. Limiting the study to understand the commonalities and differences of teen mothers in a specific cultural group, such as Black American, enhances the researcher’s ability to identify support services and resources that relate to potential needs relating to the subset of that population.

Overview

This chapter is a compilation of the data collected from 16 Black American women who identified as former teen mothers. The women that participated in this study shared their personal experiences as a teen mother and how their journeys led them to accomplish obtaining postsecondary degrees. The chapter expresses the similarities and differences women, within the Black American cultural group, experience when balancing the maternal requirements of teen pregnancy and advancing through life to achieve master’s degrees or higher. Empowering the women in this study to vocalize their perseverance through the challenges of teen motherhood highlighted the pride, vulnerability, and commitment these women dedicated to achieving their goals.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this heuristic phenomenological study was to describe and identify the economic barriers and support resources Black American women who were teen mothers perceived as impacting or encouraging their ability to achieve a master’s degree or higher. In
addition, the purpose of this study is to describe the recommendations of teen mothers to assist current and future teen mothers in accomplishing educational goals.

**Research Questions**

a) What are the lived experiences of Black American women who were teen mothers and went on to achieve a master’s degree or higher, including the economic barriers and support resources that impacted their educational achievement?

b) What recommendations do Black American who were teen mothers, and have achieved a master’s degree or higher, have for teen mothers to accomplish educational goals?

**Research Sub-Questions**

1. What is the lived experience of Black American women leading up to the time before becoming a teen mother?

2. What economic barriers or impacts were encountered by Black American women who were teen mothers as they worked toward achieving a master’s degree or higher?

3. What support resources inspired Black American women who were teen mothers to pursue the achievement of obtaining a master’s degree or higher?

4. What specific person or people influenced Black American women who were teen mothers to achieve a master’s degree or higher?

5. What type of support was received by Black American women who were teen mothers from family members (parents, partners, siblings, relatives) or educational/ personal mentors?

6. What societal or stereotypical barriers were encountered by Black American women who were teen mothers as they pursued a master’s degree or higher?

7. What advice do Black American women who were teen mothers offer teen mothers to pursue a master’s degree or higher?
Methodology

The research protocols of the study were designed by the researcher, reviewed by the dissertation committee, and approved by the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BUIRB). An overview of the research process is provided in this section, followed by sections that report data findings and analysis.

A phenomenological approach was used to conduct the qualitative assessment of this research study. The phenomenological research approach was considered for this study because of the method’s compatibility with fluid data gathering. According to Ungvarsky (2019), “Phenomenology looks at an event through a lens of how that event is viewed by a person, not how the event actually took place. In other words, the person's perception and interpretation of the event is given priority in understanding how the event unfolded” (para.1). Using a phenomenological approach, the researcher is more likely to obtain thought-provoking reflections on personal experiences of individuals that could be used to inspire a change in behavior or actions for current and future teen mothers.

As an additional layer of implementing a phenomenological approach, heuristic inquiry is implemented as a systematic form of observation. Heuristic inquiry is described as the process of gaining a “human understanding [of] what we know but cannot articulate” (Patton, 2015, p.108). Heuristic inquiry also signifies that the researcher has personal experience with the phenomenon being studied (Hiles, 2001). The process of heuristic inquiry is subjective, and requires an inverted perspective when investigating, processing, and sifting through the varying responses of the human condition in reaction to circumstances (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Moustakas, 1990). Implementing a heuristic inquiry approach is particularly useful in reducing opportunities of collusion or bias to surface in the interview (Shannon-Baker, 2016), which is
essential considering this researcher’s personal connection to the Black American journey of teen motherhood.

Once approval was granted from BUIRB to conduct data collection, the researcher began the process of soliciting participants for the study through the several Facebook social media group pages, including Mom’s of Black Boys, Beauties in Boots, Doctoral of Education (Ed.D) Network, and Doctoral Moms. The researcher posted a flyer within the designated social media forums soliciting women who were teen mothers, that meet the specific characteristics of the study, participate in the study at their will. All interested participants were contacted through social media messaging applications to determine their preferred availability and method of communicating (i.e., face-to-face, virtual conference, telephone conference). The researcher designated an appropriate office space that established a comfortable environment for interviewing to occur. Furthermore, online video conferencing application, Zoom, was offered and utilized as a secure location to host interviews.

Population

The population of the study consisted of 16 Black American women who identified themselves as previous teen mothers. Every participant had achieved the goal of obtaining a master’s degree, some women in actively in pursuit of a doctoral degree. The participants of the study all resided, currently or previously, in the Southeastern region of the United States, to include Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Texas. All of the participants were pregnant or parenting between the ages within the ages of 15 to 19 years old.
Sample

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), qualitative studies typically collect data from smaller subsets compared to larger study populations to ensure information-rich data is achieved to support the study. The researcher selected a sample size of 16 individuals who:

- Were teen mothers
- Achieved a master’s degree or higher
- Are willing participants in the study

The researcher identified 21 women through social media network pages that characterized themselves as meeting the requirements of the study. After reviewing demographic background information, the research reduced the participant results to 16 individuals (see Table 3).

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The participants of this study all self-identify as Black American women who were teen mothers. The women confirmed themselves as pregnant or actively parenting between the ages of 15-19. One of the participants birthed their child at 13 but remained the primary caregiver of their child through adulthood. Seven of the women were pregnant at 16, two at 17, four were pregnant at the age of 18, and two were pregnant at the age of 19. All women currently or previously resided in the Southeastern region of the United States. Specifically, two women identified their location as Georgia, two in Mississippi, five in Texas, three in South Carolina and two in North Carolina. The researcher did not delineate counties of local cities in the background review. All women confirmed they have been certified as holding a master’s degree. One participant currently holds a Specialist degree, which is the equivalent of a doctoral candidate.
Table 3.

**Participant Demographics**

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<th>Participant</th>
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<th>State of Residency</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Highest Degree Obtained</th>
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Research Question 1: Life before Motherhood

The first question of the study addressed the “lived experience of Black American women leading up to the time before becoming a teen mother.” The participants recounted pivotal moments in their lives progressing up to teen pregnancy.

**Participant a.** “My parents divorced when I was three. I didn't have any more contact with my dad, but my mom remarried, and then they actually divorced when I was 12. I actually stayed and lived with my stepdad and my mom actually moved on and was overseas in the military. I stayed with my stepdad until I went to high school. I didn't really have a mother figure in my life cause my mom's gone. And my dad basically kept her from us. I really was taken in by a lot of my teachers.

**Participant b.** “I am one of four children that was in the house with my mom. I’m the middle child and so I was in the 12th grade at the time that I got pregnant. I was a decent student
at the time. I was doing the co-op program at lunch time and then I worked when I first started my senior year.”

Participant c. “I was the eldest child of a teen mom living and being raised by her parents in the same city with her. The three of us were being raised by her parents in the home. We lived about two miles from where [my mother] lived. In fact, until I was six, I thought she was my sister. So, a lot of dysfunction in that. Living with folks that are on fixed incomes, my mother contributed to the household, but you know, like I said, we didn't live with her. I began to need things from my mother that my grandmother wasn't able to fill the gap on because of the generational differences. There was no education on relationships, school, sex, none of that. And so, I was just dumb. I was 15 when I got pregnant. But you know, everything happens for a reason. I was really, really, really, really depressed. And actually, I was suicidal and finding out I was pregnant is what made me rethink that. I tell my son, um, to this day that he's, he saved my life.”

Participant d. “I was raised by a single mother. It’s a chain that had to be broken. You know, my grandma was a teenage mother, my mother was a teenage [mother]. I was a teenage [mother] and my goal was to make sure that my daughters were not teenage [mothers]. School life was fairly easy for me. Academically, I was okay, but I didn't have any, um, motivation for school. My background, people weren't saying, ‘Oh, go to school. Oh, go to college’ you know what I'm saying? I didn't have that background. No one really finished high school. So, it didn't seem like a priority to them. [We] lived in an underprivileged community. I mean, my mother worked every day. We weren't welfare recipients or anything, but I was I was an only child.”

Participant e. “I came from a two-parent home. My mother and my father. I lived in a nice neighborhood. I went to a really good high school. I went to the same school district
throughout my childhood, so I stayed in the same area. As far as school, I really didn’t like school that much. But when I did meet my older two children's dad, he was really smart. He made 100s on his report card. So, he made like A's on everything and I was like, I can't be a dummy being his girlfriend. So, it kind of encouraged me to be more into school and take more pride in my education. So that kind of helped me. So, once I did meet him, I began to be in advanced classes because I cared more.”

**Participant f.** “I'm the third of four children. My mom was a single mom the entire time that I was alive. We just grew up her being the primary. My dad was absent most of my life. I think at three is when he left. I didn't reunite with him again until I was about 10. Primarily my mom worked a lot. I was the black sheep of the family. There was a lot of I guess resentment. Growing up with that, I'm kind of figuring out, you know, my ways in life because of how much I felt that I was, you know, treated very harsh. I was able to get the nurturing that I wanted from my mom, from my stepmom. [My stepmother] was very inspirational in where I am right now in life.”

**Participant g.** “I was a good student, um, honor student, honor society. Um, very active in school. I held a lot of positions in different clubs. Um, class vice president. Home life was a little bit more unstable, I guess you would say. Um, my father passed away when I was 15, and my mother was addicted to prescription pain pills. So, school was probably the most stable part of my life at that time. I grew up in a rural area. Um, with around a lot of family. Like all of my family were in the same little community. Although not a low socioeconomic [community], but you know, a lot of family around.”

**Participant h.** “I’m the oldest of four children. My mom remarried my two younger sisters, father. We grew up with a very strong woman led household, if you will. And um, when
she remarried, you know, you have other children from there, I don't want to say was like an outside kids’ kind of thing. But I guess during that time, it may have been just a little bit difficult to kind of blend your families and things. But ultimately, we had a good family home. It was structured, you know, at that time, two parent home regardless of the dynamics within the household. School was always important. You knew that you had to go to school. It was a high value on education. I always like academics, but I was not like involved in a lot of school activities, no sports or anything like that.”

**Participant i.** “I lived in an area that catered to low-income. Um, when I was born, I lived with my aunt, my mother, my uncles, and my grandmother in a four-bedroom apartment. My mom got married to my stepfather and she moved out and I stayed with my grandmother. It became more like my mom and my grandmother were co-parenting. knew my dad, but not like that. Me and my mom, we never seen eye to eye. My grandmother passed. So, my mom brought a trailer in a local trailer park and we moved there. In middle school, they grouped you in high, standard and basic. Basic wasn't, you know, special education, but it wasn't standard education. That means you struggled in something; you know. Before I had my first one, I did get pregnant in the ninth grade. I had met that same fate as my grandmother and aunt. The guy took me for an abortion. I chose him and after that he ignored me and then that's when the depression and stuff started coming on.”

**Participant j.** “I grew up with my grandparents. Um, they raised me from six weeks old. Um, my birth parents. Um, I never knew my birth mom, she passed away. My birth father passed away when I was in the ninth grade. So, I was with them. The city that I was in was small. We grew up from elementary school to high school, like in segments. So, it was the smart class, the middle class and the lower class. I was always in the high class. So, kind of with the nerds, well
with the nerds in that environment. I understood getting A's and B's and that importance, but also wanting to go to high school games and wanting to have sleepovers. My grandparents were strict so I couldn't do any of that anyway. So, um, instead of hanging out partying I was actually reading. Um, at 16, so I actually read up on how to conceive, um, how to have a baby. So, my pregnancy was planned, but it was probably more so planned because I had just lost my dad. So, I was like, I'm going to have a baby so that I can have somebody that wouldn't leave me and somebody to love.”

**Participant k.** “Um home was how should I describe it? Not good. Um, I had an abusive alcoholic father. Um, my mother was disabled. Um, she actually has cerebral palsy, um, grew up in a one-bedroom little shack. Uh, grew of course grew up in poverty. Uh, I've come from a trailer park, so I didn't have the best upbringing prior to, um, being pregnant. Um, as far as school, I didn't have a lot of friends. I was more so of a loner cause I was reading books that most people that age didn't, so they didn't really hang with me too much. Um, middle school, I was fortunate enough to go out and become a cheerleader. So right before, I had my child, I actually was a cheerleader during that time. It was crazy cause I was cheering at a game on a Friday night. I found out I was pregnant on Saturday and I had my daughter that Sunday.”

**Participant l.** “Prior to becoming pregnant, um, I grew up in a military family. My mom was in the military for pretty much my whole childhood up until my twenties and stuff like that. So just growing up, um, she was a single parent for the most part. Um, and like I said, she was in the military, so we've moved around quite a bit. Growing up, we lived in various states and stuff like that due to her military assignments and stuff like that. I grew up with an older brother who lived in the home. I also have a younger brother, but he didn't live with us. He'd come and visit and stuff during the summer. He was raised by his father. Growing up was pretty typical, I guess,
average of any, you know, child. I mean there was some, you know, trauma had experienced, you know, during my early teens and things like that. But for the most part it was your average upbringing. Um, you know, my mom worked, tried to provide the best she could for me and my brother. We had everything we needed, some of the things we wanted. I've always enjoyed school, always like going to school, um, participating like extra curriculars and things like that. I played volleyball in middle school and beginning of high school and stuff like that.”

**Participant m.** “I was raised in a small town in North Carolina. I was raised with my grandma. My mom passed when I was, I want to say five. My grandma raised me very Christian background, Missionary Baptist. And so, um, you know, we had that upbringing. Church every Sunday, Sunday school every Sunday, bible study every Wednesday. So just one of those things. My grandma also raised my siblings. So, you know, dealt with that. I was raised old school, wasn't allowed to date. Um, very strict, you know, not allowed to spend the night at other people houses, you know, but I was allowed to participate in school activities. So, I did participate in band. I was allowed to do like the football games cause I was in band. That was our way to get out of the house and participate in school activities and get out and do things like that. So, um, you know, that was just my upbringing really in the church, strict in the house.”

**Participant n.** “Starting off. Um, I had a very good home life, I would say zero to about middle school. I had a two-parent household. Um, my, it was three children, my brother, my sister and myself, and then my two-parent household. In middle school, my parents got a divorce and my father became like an alcoholic, abusive. We moved with our grandparents a little bit and then we moved into an apartment complex, um, before my mother remarried. I was always an athlete. I was always into sports. I was never really a problematic child. And then in 2002, my mother dropped me off at school and by the end of the day, she was dead. She had a brain
aneurism and my life changed. So um, it kind of started like right there when my life kind of changed. My grandparents took me, my brother and my sister in after a lot of, you know, family turmoil of fighting and then, you know, [family] kind of pressuring my father to relinquish his rights. And so, that was in 2002 and then I was pregnant 2003. Looking for love and all the wrong places because my friend, my mother, she basically vanished, you know, she dropped me off for school and I never saw her again.”

**Participant o.** “I grew up in a small town, um, where everybody kinda knows everybody. We only had one high school and middle school. I was a cheerleader from little league, middle school and then high school. I was a good student. I stayed on the honor roll in grade school and throughout high school. My parents got divorced when I was seven. Um, my mom kind of raised me, but it was more so my Aunt. [I] had a lot of dysfunctional things going on with my mother.”

**Participant p.** “My parents, um, divorced when I was 11 years old. I am the middle child of two brothers. I have an older brother; we are six years apart and I have a younger brother. We're five years apart. Um, my younger brother who has a disability, um, he has Apert syndrome. Basically, had a childhood of growing up with love in the home. Taught right and wrong. Raised in a Christian home. Uh, parents got along for the sake of us, for being divorced. I was in the band and play on sports as an athlete. 3.5 GPA, graduating high school, basically honor student.”

Data Summary: Research Question 1

There were no major variances between growing up in a “traditional” or two-parent home versus single-parent household. Several of the participants described living in rural, small or low-socioeconomic communities. While nearly-half of the participants described an environment with disconnected relationships with their parents, many of those individuals also expressed
having a stable, strict life with their alternate caregivers. The majority of the participants expressed a life of being active in school as a scholar and/or athlete.

The researcher noted that despite the various home settings each participant was managing, returning to school was not an option, but required, once acknowledging they were pregnant (see Table 5). The teen mothers recognized that education was their first step to a stable life despite their situation.

Table 4.

Life before Motherhood

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Participant Situation</th>
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Note. The N for interview participants = 16.

The frequency of single-parent households, “traditional” households, and raised by grandparents includes acknowledges changes in family dynamics. The participants in the study described home environments where shifts in family dynamics occurred. Examples of shifts in family dynamics include parental divorces and single parents remarrying. A few participants also described changes in guardianship related to deceased family members.
Research Question 2: Struggles after teen pregnancy

The second question of the study focused on “economic barriers or impacts encountered by Black American women who were teen mothers as they worked toward achieving a master’s degree or higher.” The participants of the study described noticeable physical barriers, if any, experienced on their educational journey as young mothers.

**Participant a.** “I stayed in school. I didn't tell anybody I was pregnant till I was like six months. I told my mom and my dad, so my mom told me to have abortion. Um, my dad was like, you're dumb, you're stupid. You know, so that conversation didn’t go well. I wasn't going to get rid of my baby. I was like, well, we're just gonna move on. We didn't have any family or any support. What we did to live is basically, um, I took out student loans. I had the hope scholarship and I took out student loans. So, all my student loans from my bachelors, like from undergraduate were all going toward like daycare help and pay the rest of the rent, helping pay for car notes, things like that. My husband's mom also, when she found out I was pregnant, she stopped helping him with anything.”

**Participant b.** “I grew up partially in a single parent household. My mom was married in my childhood. I would say that we were living in a low-income housing. [My baby] actually had complications at birth. So, I had her in the hospital for two weeks and then the day that she got out of the hospital was the day that I graduated. I ended up having to transfer her to neonatal intensive care, which was about 45 minutes from my hometown. And so, it was really hard because at the time I was 17 and so like I really didn't understand because I felt like I did everything that I was supposed to do.”

**Participant c.** “My grandparents were supportive in that I didn't get kicked out like a lot of girls do. And then you have to make desperate decisions like dropping out of school and
things like that. I was supported enough in that I didn't have to drop out of school and that I was still able to stay on track with school. I actually graduated with honors and by then I actually had another kid. I had my second child before I graduated high school. I won't say it wasn't a struggle, but my mindset switched, it matured and it focused on, okay, so now more than ever, I have to do good in school and I have to finish school and I got to figure out what the next steps is.” “My granddad was taking me back and forth to school, but I had no money to pay for school. And you get, what do you call it? Pell grants and stuff like that. And that pays for the tuition and stuff, but it doesn't pay anything else. I've got two kids who need babysitting. They're toddlers and they need things. The real world started hitting me and that's when I realized I can't go to school. And so I joined the military.”

Participant d. “I was a teen mother, but me and the teen father married. We married when I was 16, he was 17. He turned 18 when my daughter was born. And so, he really took on support of us, got a job, quit school, did the whole thing. You know, it's like being poor and you don't know you're poor, you know, because you have everything you need. We couldn’t walk around school pregnant, so we just dropped out. So, what ended up happening was he went to military and those first two years he was in the military I, uh, went right to Alamo community college and enrolled in GED classes. And, I began my military career and then college started after that.”

Participant e. “When I became pregnant, my mother and father were going through a divorce, so, um, my dad had moved out of the house, which changed everything economically because he was no longer in the home. My mother was dealing with a lot with the changes that were going on in her life and she wasn't pleased with me being pregnant. The household situation was very, um, uncomfortable situation. So, I wound up moving out and moving with my
boyfriend at the time and his family who were not as well off as my family. She had five kids. She was on government assistance. So, my life did change. I did stay in school, but, I didn't graduate because I was missing half a credit at the end of it. I was just too stressed out to even try to go back to school. So, for two years I was like I'm a high school dropout. I just got frustrated with my situation and I just went and got a GED. I was pregnant 16, I had my first child at 17 when I was walking across the stage (even though I didn't really graduate from high school), I was already pregnant with my second child. I was 17 at the time and I had her at 18.”

Participant f. “I got pregnant when I was in high school and I was a senior. So, when I graduated from high school, I was six months pregnant. I almost didn't graduate on time, but I had messed up in ninth grade and so I had to do some credit recovery. My senior year I had to take 14 credit hours. So, I did day school, which was like from 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM and then they had a PM [class] that was from 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM. And then I had to go to night school they had as well. And that was like at 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM or something like that. So, I was able to simultaneously take all of my credits that year and I was able to graduate when I was supposed to graduate. I didn't get a lot of support from my mom nor my dad. And I don't think that it wasn't that they would not help me, but I was just very determined that I was going to do it on my own. So, in that, I struggled more than I probably would have had I gotten support from my parents. We were about to get married, I found out I was pregnant with my second [child]. I think the reason why I got married was because when I found out I was pregnant, I didn't want my, um, parents to know that I was pregnant again. I didn't want to get married to him, but I did it anyway because of not wanting to disappoint. And so, um, in that five years from 19 to 24 is when I experienced domestic violence in my first marriage.”
Participant g. “It was like a struggle for me to participate in, you know, class activities, class trips, because I was like constantly sick. I mean I finished. I was able to, you know, manage and finish all my courses and all my tests and everything like that. My goal was always to go to school. Well go off and go to school and I didn't want to change any of that. So, it all worked out. Luckily for me, my first semester of college I was pregnant. So, I completed my first semester and then I had my son during the winter break at home with my mom. And then, she decided to keep him while I finish school. So then, I was able to go back to school at the beginning of the semester and finish out the year.

Participant h. “I had my son in my 10th grade year. It was very difficult. It was still, um, a social taboo to be a teen mom. We lived in an apartment complex and so, you know, it was kind of close knit, but when you're pregnant, your friend's parents are not gonna let them talk to you. You're really alienated. You’re kind of shunned. My brother, he was a teen parent, you know, as well. And so, I just think it may have had just more so during that time of not really communicating and having that conversation that you really should have with your children, it was more of, you know, sweep it under the rug. You know, you grow up immediately, you understand finances, you understand like my mom worked. Then you realize that, wow, you know, my insurance, this is going to basically kind of bankrupt us to carry you with this. And then so you, um, become familiar with, um, Medicaid and getting formula, you know, getting on WIC and these kinds of services. And that was traumatizing is you realize that the people that need the most help are not always treated the most humanly, if you will. And even being a teen mom, that was like even more pressure.”

Participant i. “I went [new school], got into it with some girls and I just dropped out. I got pregnant [removed] with my oldest and I ha[d] an awful pregnancy. After my son was born, I
wound up getting a GED the same month, within the same week, that I would have graduated from high school. I worked [removed] for a year and a half, bounced around temp jobs here and there trying to get jobs. I have never been able to secure jobs.”

Participant j. “At our school, we had a program called Homeward bound. So, you went to school as long as you could while you were pregnant, then you delivered, and a teacher would come out to the house every week to collect your homework assignment. Um, so I did that and that was my junior year. And so, then successfully did that and then was able to go back for my senior year. It was normal. I was still staying with my grandparents. My mom would take care of my daughter for me, um, and I was able to graduate.”

Participant k. “My father was deceased. He passed away when I was nine. Um, my mom, she was disabled. She really couldn't care for me and a young baby. So, I had an older sister that kind of stepped in and took charge, took care of me and the child. Of course, there were social services involved and police, all that stuff. But just because I was 13 years old child, you know, there's legal things they want to know. Um, so I was able to pretty much be raised by my sister from, um, that Sunday. So, um, prior to having my child, I wasn't the best student, didn't really care about schoolwork. I was just kind of going through getting, C's D's, as long as I'm passing. Um, after I had her, going back to school, it was very different. I knew it was no longer just about me. Um, I now have a child that I had to take care of. Um, I literally have an obligation. Of course, with the support of social services and my sister, um, they made sure I was able to complete [school]. Um, at the time I was in the eighth grade. Um, moving on through high school. Of course, they stuck [around]. Um, I had her, I had to change. So that's why I did, in high school, um, I did very well. Graduated with honors. I was a loner, but it was mainly
because I was 15-year old with a child and probably was the only one. So, I couldn't really relate to other people.”

**Participant l.** “I had just graduated high school. It was like the summer before, I was supposed to go off and actually join the military myself. I met some guy a few months prior to that. Um, and I ended up getting pregnant. Me, my brother and my older brother got an apartment. And so, [my mom] was paying, you know, the rent and stuff for us and we just had to pay the utilities and everything. Um, so already it was hard cause I really wasn't working. My brother kinda was the one working.”

**Participant m.** “My senior year, that's when I got pregnant. And after that everything was a blur because I got put on bed rest. My grandma kicked me out the house. Oh yeah, yeah, I got kicked out the house cause I end up living with my son's father, um, until I graduated from high school. But you know I still graduated with honors. So, I had my son in June, that's when I went off to school. So, me and my [son’s] father had an agreement. So, I got the scholarship to [removed name], I would go off to school and he would keep our child. Um, that worked out for fall. Well, it worked out for a while.”

**Participant n.** “And so, I still was involved in sports pregnant. I, you know, kinda kept it a secret. And then, I had my son I was a junior in high school. Yeah, so that's when it, that's when it happened. I went to this outbound, like maternity. Where you are supposed to be able to take your baby and you go do like classwork. I'm a junior in high school. I've always been an athlete. And so, for some reason, I still try to figure out where have I gotten this intrinsic motivation. I stayed at this school for a week. So, I was only there for like a week and then I went back to [traditional] school cause I was like, they sending me trash, I don't know what this
work is, you know, this paperwork. So, I went back to school that next week and then you know finished and graduated still like a top 10 percent of my class.”

Participant o. “I was pregnant my senior year. The first six months, not so much [economic barriers] because I was still at home. Um, but then I had ended up getting my own place after that. I didn't really know what I wanted to do. Even like prior to graduating high school and getting pregnant. It was just like the goal was just to graduate high school. I worked a couple of factory jobs, but that wasn't for me. And then, eventually, I went to the community college and got a certification as a CNA, and a Phlebotomist and a med tech.

Participant p. “I graduated high school [on time] at 17. Actually, I kinda knew [about pregnancy] before I left for college, but I was scared to tell my parents, um, cause they were excited. I was my dad's first child. My mom was a teen mom. So, I kinda did not want to repeat that cycle. So, I was scared to tell her. And I'm my dad's oldest child and the oldest grandchild on my dad's side. And, um, I guess you could say my family kind of has some status in the community. So, going off to college, I knew. Living in a dorm, not getting prenatal care cause I was scared to tell anyone. I went home for Christmas vacation, stayed in my room. My mom, knowing that she went through that, she just came up and asked me, are you pregnant? And I just told her, yes, I am. Um, and she was like, why didn't you tell me? Um, I been through this, just let me know. So, after that, um, I did go back to school that semester.

Data summary: Research Question 2

Despite hardships experienced preparing for and navigating teen motherhood, nearly all (13/16) the participants graduated from high school on their original education schedule. The majority (10/13) of the women who were able to complete their secondary education “on-time” noted a supportive family and household dedicated to helping the young mother achieve
educational goals. In addition, a few of the teen mothers were able to accomplish their secondary school goals while managing illness, - whether it was their own or their child’s.

Slightly half of the participants (9/16) described the path to complete postsecondary educational goals as slower because of the reduction of available in-home assistance.

The ability to maintain focus on their education is largely attributed to their family’s willingness to assume some of the pressure of managing motherhood at a young age, as well as having the resources necessary to supply their child with basic necessities (see Table 6).

Table 5.

Struggles after teen pregnancy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Situation</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>J</th>
<th>K</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>P</th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent based on N</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of future planning</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>43</td>
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<tr>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hid pregnancy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning to be a parent</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-traditional class options</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Graduated HS on-time</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple teen pregnancies/births</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The N for interview participants = 16.

The introduction of non-traditional class options assesses the methods deemed “above” normal expectations to attend courses and accomplish educational goals. Some of the actions included bringing their children to class, extended and inconsistent academic schedules, and collaborating with peers and school officials to accomplish educational tasks while managing.
postpartum restrictions. The actions of the participants describe some of the paths necessary to overcome the barrier of young motherhood and educational advancement.

Research Question 3: Support resources

This research question, “What support resources inspired Black American women who were teen mothers to pursue the achievement of obtaining a master’s degree or higher?” highlights the community and personal resources used by participants in the study to achieve their educational goals.

Participant a. “Just like student loans, um, WIC and I guess like, yeah, we got food stamps. I'm sure he was on Medicaid. We try to use many of the resources we ha[d], we were on income-based housing.”

Participant b. “I had a really good support system, my mom and my siblings, everyone in my family, they all help with her, but it was definitely a journey. Just being supportive of, you know, having to go to appointments or like, we had services comes to the house, so therapists, occupational therapists will come to the house and work on [my baby]. I worked at [removed]. Make it do. Luckily, I didn't have expenses of actually maintaining my own home. I just gave my mom some money from me and my ex. I started her [on]formula, it was through Medicaid.

Participant c. “You end up on the system, so there's Medicaid, you know, you end up on food stamps and WIC. Of course, you end up at, what we call now last chance healthcare…basically your County healthcare, you [get] at the County office. I ended up working, but it wasn't a do or die and everyone in my life was still [saying] you will finish school. Even my boyfriend at the time was like you will finish school.” “Now, I'm carrying a huge student loan debt because I went and got my masters, which I gave my daughter some of my GI bill. And so that took away my military benefits for my master's. But for me, I would
rather take the debt than her have the debt. So, I gave that to her cause it was all about stopping the cycle.”

Participant d. “I had this great community, which was the Air Force. You know. That is an amazing community. For one thing you don’t have to worry about the resources paying for school because you have tuition assistance, you have the GI bill. And, if you don't take advantage of those things. You know, you crazy. You know what I mean? So, I had all that. I had that as a community and that was a great community. And being in the Air Force there was also daycare for the kids and stuff, you know, it's there and everybody's in the same boat, so they understand.”

Participant e. “I was on Medicaid and then after I had my child, I was on WIC and I did get food stamps for a while, which was totally different than anything I've ever [experienced]. For me, I was very embarrassed, but that was my life.”

Participant f. “As I mentioned, our [mother and teen mom] relationship was very strange. So, I stayed with her shortly, but I was able to get assistance. So, I was able to get approved for low income housing. I was probably about 19 years when I moved out of my mom's house and I moved into low income housing. So I, um, moved to New York to get away from the [domestic violence] situation and I struggled for many years. I've got on public assistance, food stamps, but I kept working and it was just my desire to continue, to just do all I could to make sure that my children grew up with having what they needed.”

Participant g. “I mean I think it was a group effort. It was my mom, my stepdad, my grandparents, my aunts, uncles, everybody kind of pitched in. But my mom was the main source of support. I went to school and I worked. I would go to the school during the week and then
come home on the weekends and take care of my son and then go back. I did use a WIC. I guess I did, or one of us did, either my mom or myself receive public assistance.”

**Participant h.** “I know WIC was very important. It was like, just to have those things that was just like an additional help in the household. It may have been just for me and my son, but the family really benefited, you know, from the medical care and the aftercare. Um, that was a tremendous help because that carried him through several years. And you know, follow up visits and different things like that. There weren't a lot of organizations that assisted you from there. I was still a student, you know, that had a child that basically still got on the bus and went to school and came home, you know, walk to the daycare to pick up my kid and walk to my grandmother house.”

**Participant i.**” We had given up the place that he had in his name and I got on the section 8 program. I’d drive the bus and other odd jobs. My first child for a long time, he was the only child and I was in and out of the community college. I became homeless and I attempted to go back and stay with my aunt. I never stopped doing. I never stopped reading. I'm a hopeless romantic. So, I never stopped reading. I never stopped learning. I never stopped teaching my oldest son, I never stopped teaching, both of them. So, you know, I'm homeless, pregnant, sick all the time, no job, reliant on child support to get me and my oldest son through.”

**Participant j.** “I was also, um, because my dad died, I was getting social security. Um, so my grandparents were receiving that. And, uh, also with my daughter, I was receiving the welfare stipend and also food stamps.”

**Participant k.** “They had groups that provide, um, I guess it was like a parenting support group. So, we will meet with the literacy coordinator. All young parents of course. Um, I was the youngest, but um, it was 14 [and]15-year olds, that were in there just to kind of give us a little
help, a little support of how to be a parent and students at the same time. DSS, provide a transportation assistance or a cab will come pick me up in the morning, take her to daycare, the school, um, pick me off from school and take me home. The main thing we had, um, DSS cause at that time I wasn't able to go out and get a job. I'm only 13. Um, they had the TANF program, which, you know, gave a monthly stipend and um, gave you [inaudible] services that you needed.”

Participant l. “Um, about two months before I had my son, I ended up moving into public housing and so I was living in an apartment and stuff like that. And yes, I was receiving public assistance. Then after having my son…my son was born with a heart condition. And so, I was getting, you know, food stamps and WIC and stuff like that. He was getting SSI. So that's kinda how I was able to pay my rent and pay other little bills and stuff like that and survive.”

Participant m. “Absolutely not. One of the biggest things that I really dislike about a little, rural areas, small towns that are from, because I saw it so much. I said that even though my grandma kicked me out, it still made me strong. It made me, you know, resilient. It made me defy the odds because I knew I wasn't going to give up. I knew I wasn't going to be another statistic. So, you know, I felt like in a small town what they need to do more things for a lot of these teen moms, you know, and teen fathers as well because there is nothing, nothing there to support them. Financially I did get a job on campus. He [son’s father] had the support of his mom and his family because he stayed at home and he worked. Um, of course my family, you know, supported with you know buying things and I came home every weekend, but [my college], is not far from my hometown, 45 minutes. So, my aunt brought me a car and stuff so I can, you know, come home and get my son on the weekends. I got him to give his dad a break.”
Participant n. “So basically, thank God, I was classified as an independent student because that's another, you know, trial that I kind of went through because although we received Social Security, you know, in the black household you don't question money. So when I graduated high school, you know, -because I was always told, well, they’re raising you, this [is] they house, that’s they money, you know.- I graduated school with not a dollar in my name, not a car, not a vehicle, just me. And so, I took out max loans. That was the only way. And so it's killing me now, but that's the only way, literally I have survived for 20 years is taken out max loans because I have no one else but me. I got a lot of, um, scholarships as well.”

Participant o. “The CNA class I paid for, but the phlebotomy class I like got like a little scholarship for it. But I like had to write a paper or something about it and I got a scholarship from the community college. I can't think when I first thought I started at [school name removed] for undergrad is, it's a private school, but it's like very expensive. I went there for almost two years or three semesters and then I realized, um, I was going to be in some serious, serious debt, so I had to leave there. And then, um, some years later I ended up at [school name removed].

Participant p. “I've never had any help from my son's father, so I told him, um, he was older. He was like, okay, it must have happened while he was at school. So, I've never gotten any help from him. So, um, the financial help that I got was from my parents, from my aunt, and my grandmother, um, and refund checks from college. I was able to get food stamps. Um, I learned how to use the system by being an intern [at DFACs]. Other community resources would have been, I applied to get daycare assistance. But because I was not on welfare, they will not give it. So, like I kind of was not in that situation to where I needed welfare because I had parents who would help and my aunt's help and my grandmother’s help. I kind of was like, I don't need this. I want to go somebody else who does need it.”
Data summary: Research Question 3

The access to medical care and food supplemental programs such as Medicaid and Women, Infant and Children (WIC) are noted by 9 out of 16 of the participants as contributing to their household and providing support for their child. Additionally, state programs such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) were described as contributing to the stability of the young mother to provide care for her child. In conjunction with receiving external assistance, 10 out of 16 of the participants described having stable employment while attending school.

It was identified during the interview process that 5 out of 16 of the participants sought out the military to accommodate their quest to provide a stable, financial environment for their child and accomplish their educational goals. It was also noted that several of the children’s fathers joined the military to contribute to the mother’s ability to provide a stable household.

The participants expressed some feelings of embarrassment for having to seek government assistance. Nevertheless, their desire to provide a stable home and better future for their children was their motivation to push forward with their educational goals (see Table 7).

**Table 6.**

*Support resources*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Situation</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>J</th>
<th>K</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>P</th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent based on N</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13</td>
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</table>
The reoccurring higher frequency found in this question is representative of the amount of times participants related their ability to accomplish education and financial goals based on the family and government support they received in their adolescent pregnancy years, as well as during their postsecondary educational advancements. Many of the participants repeatedly identified how access to state and family resources minimized many of the expected burdens associated with being a teen mother. Furthermore, many of the participants described additional support from the father and paternal families of their children, whether physical and/or financial.

Research Question 4: Influence to achieve education

Research question number asked the participant, “What specific person or people influenced Black American women who were teen mothers to achieve a master’s degree or higher?” The participants provided background about the people the most influenced them to explore educational advancement.

Participant a. “My parents didn't finish college. They didn't go to college at all and nobody in our family really went to college. I had a teacher named [removed] who actually, guided me and actually got me to actually apply for schools. Basically, I took upon myself to kind of go and figure out how to, after my teacher kind of said I need to do these things, figure those things out and how to get to school and how to get to college.”

Participant b. “I would say probably my dad [was influential] because when he found out I was pregnant, he asked me was I going to stay in school and I wanted to prove to him that I was, so that was kind of motivation. I think because I always knew that I wanted to go into the military. I didn't, at the time, feel like college was an option for me. I didn't start going to
[postsecondary] school until after, um, [my baby] passed away. I had a baby a year later.” “One of my mentors was like, you might as well get your master's degree, you aren’t that busy at work. You have the time to do it.”

Participant c. “It was always my intent to go to college. Actually, I wanted to be a doctor. Had been wanting to be a doctor since I was eight years old. There’s only one teacher that I remember that was specifically pushing me to not give up. She would not let me quit. And even through, um, the pregnancies and having to be out of school, during, you know, the delivery and the six weeks or whatever, she arranged [assistance] with my counselor who didn't really care one way or the other. a retiree from the base. She was a retired nurse. And she happened to have been my boyfriend's former supervisor. She knew me and she paid attention to me as well and got me through that [Ancillary healthcare] class. So that when I graduated 12th grade, I actually had a CNA certification.”

Participant d. “Think I did have [influence] from my mother cause my mother always wanted better, you know what I mean? We didn't have better, but I got that from her to want better. And then again, I met this man, this major. He told me I could do better; I was smart enough to do better and therefore I did you see what I mean? So yeah, that was the motivation itself.”

Participant e. “My dad was always big on education. He was very educated, and he always would suggest to me to go to school. My pastor at the church was always encouraging us to go to school, you know, get your education. You know, money is not everything, but it helps with a lot of things. So he's like, go to school and get your education. And so, with my kids getting ready to graduate and me always encouraging them to go to school, it was not an option. They were going to go to college. So, I felt like I need to go to college and be an example.”
Participant f. “When my stepmom came in the picture, she was so encouraging. She would treat me like I was her own child and she literally would not let me give up. She wouldn't let me make excuses. You know, at one time in high school, I got so frustrated. I said I was gonna drop out and get my GED. And she said, ‘no, you're not’. You're going to finish school. She was like my guardian angel because she literally just poured in so much love to me and encouragement and that's what I needed.”

Participant g. “My family was very instrumental. Like my grandparents were always advocates of going to school. So, from a young age that was like instilled in me to go to school and get an education. So, that and then I would say my husband was pretty supportive as well. Um, as far as you know, wanting me to finish.”

Participant h. “There were assistant principals and things that just made sure that they knew, okay, you're out now, you're back. You need to get your doctor's excuses in so you don't have unexcused absences and this is what you need to do. And then I was able to graduate on time with my class. They were the rocks. So, you know, ‘we're gonna get through this, um, you're going to, you know, continue on and you're going to finish and then, you know, get a job and that kind of thing’. So yeah, they were the ones that were really my cheerleaders. My biological father [was] just like, well, you know, you possibly could go to school, think about this, that, you know, kinda maybe sparked that interest from there. But even with that, I just enrolled in like a technical college, you know, kind of thing.”

Participant i. “In high school, I found out that I shouldn't have been in basic classes. I should have been in standard or high classes. I had black women teachers, um, and stuff. And, I didn't know at the time that, you know, their influence would make me want to be an educator.
One of my other good friends from high school or middle school, she came to see me and she was always the driving force.”

Participant j. “I think mine was, um, having been in school with the students doing the A's and the B's and the studying and just being at that higher level. Then I felt like, you know, I have the brains to go back to school and do well in it. Um, and that sense of learning that I think that was embedded in, in the younger year years. And so, I went back and I did the bachelor's and then I was like, oh, this, this wasn't too bad. I'm going to do the masters. But it wasn't that bad either. So, I was like, all right, let's go for a doctorate.”

Participant k. “Well I loved to learn just right off. Um, cause remember when I was a child, I used to read a lot of books because I knew even though I was growing up I guess- in so to speak- deplorable conditions, reading books taught me that there's world out there. Um, and that I needed to pretty much explore. So, once I knew I could read and read and learn more things, that's what kind of pushed me to, um, just keep going. Once I had earned my bachelor's, um, I knew that I didn't want to stop going to school. I knew I didn't want to stop learning, um, new things. Um, and not to mention, you know, you get an increase in income, the more you learn, the more you earn. I was always my philosophy with things. Um, so I continued on, got my master's in two years.”

Participant l. “I always wanted to go to college, you know, I just didn't want to have to be crippled with a whole bunch of your loan debt. So that's why I was going to do the military thing, you know, because they would've paid for college for me and stuff like that. But no, I've always, education has always been important to me. Um, you know, even from my mom, grandparents and stuff like that. Like everyone has some schooling, past high school, things like that and careers. So, education was always something I wanted to do. So, like the first two years
of [my son’s] life [we] were in and out of hospitals all the time. He had like two open heart surgeries and things like that. So, we were constantly going to hospitals and these interactions I was having with hospital staff and social workers at hospitals is what really got me interested in social work.”

Participant m. “I would say I wanted to be better than my last generation. It was kind of a disappointment to myself, but I wanted to be better, then I wanted to go a step further. Like out of my siblings, I was the first one to, you know, go to a four-year college. So, with that, I didn't have any one like I looked up to and say, I want it to be like you. I always said that I feel like I need to carry the torch and I wanted to be better. Then I want my son to have me to look up to. It'd be like, you know, dad, my mom did it. She was a teen mom. Right. She did it. She beat the odds.”

Participant n. “You know, it's kind of always been like my teachers. That's why I am in education now because it was my teachers. When I initially had my son, you know, I was in a defiance period, you know, my momma dead. Who are y'all? Y'all are nobody, you know, I don't have to listen to you. You know, so my confidants, my people, were my teachers. You know, they're my Facebook friends to this day. So, um, my educators, there was a, a select few of educators who kind of just kind of push, you know me through.”

Participant o. “I can't really say I had an influence with that. Maybe. Um, it was more so of my peers just seeing how some people, you know, finished high school. A lot of people did go to college and they finished it, you know, was starting their careers or whatever and it's just like, oh, I'm doing this. I've had a lot of experience as a CNA. I think people typically think of it in terms of like, you're just working with elderly people and working like in a nursing home or something like that. But I worked in foster homes with children with disabilities. I've worked
with like young adults with disabilities and things like that. I've even worked in a drug rehab
facility with children as, you know, being a CNA. I've had different opportunities. I think the
main motivator for me was that I just wanted to be able to do something more to help people
other than what I was doing. It wasn't like a specific person.”

**Participant p.** “My mom. My mom was able to do the same thing. It's amazing that she
was able to go to school those four years. She completed all four years all the way through. And,
that's what they told me my job was, even as being a mother. Your job is to go to school so you
can support this baby and be able to, um, raise him because in the end he's going to need that
support from you. You know, we may not always be around, but you need him. You need to be
able to before your son.”

Data summary: Research Question 4

There was an equal representation among teen mothers regarding influences that
motivated them to seek out their educational goals. The influences are representative of the
home life each participant was experienced during their teen pregnancy. The researcher noted
that many of the participants who had absent or strained relationships were able to gain
emotional support through external channels such as teachers and/or peers. Additionally, six out
of 16 participants described how witnessing their peers achieve academic goals helped motivate
them to also seek out advanced educational opportunities. Specifically, the women described
thoughts confirming their abilities were equal to those of their peers and therefore capable of
achieving the same goals. Most notable was the internal desire many of the women described to
seek a life better than their current surroundings. This was especially noted among the women
who lived in rural or low socioeconomic communities. Ultimately, the ability to accomplish the
goals they designated in their lives was largely attributed to the physical and emotional support the mothers received from their inner circles (see Table 8).

**Table 7.**

*Influence to achieve education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Situation</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
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<th># of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent based on N</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<td>7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The N for interview participants = 16.

The frequency of influence identified for the participants had different characterizations based on personal motivations. For some, self-driven influence was based on a desire to maintain personal goals. Others described their self-driven influence as a motivation to overcome the stereotypical identifiers associated with being a teen mother. The same mentality of breaking stereotypical molds or familial trends was also frequently identified when assessing the influence of immediate family members to achieve educational goals. Several participants identified the military community as motivation to engage in personal and professional growth.

**Research Question 5: Type of support received**

This content question explores, *“What type of support was received by Black American women who were teen mothers from family members (parents, partners, siblings, relatives) or educational/personal mentors?”* Participants address some of the forms and actions of support provided during the educational journey.
Participant a. “I had night classes. So even when I was pregnant, like [my husband] would come because the campus [removed] is so big, so when he would get off work he would actually, cause we lived downtown, he would actually come pick me up and like drive me across campus to my classes and then he'd come back and pick me up at nighttime. But yeah, I graduated on time.”

Participant b. “My teachers all like when they found out that [my baby] was having complications, pretty much most of them was like, okay, for the finals you don't have to worry about this. You got a whole lot of other stuff going on, you pass. So it was, a little less stress, but like I still didn't really understand everything that was going on with [my baby]. My mother [became] the legal guardian of [my child] while I was in [military] basic training. When I started with my associate degree and it took me a long time to get that done because I'm working and taking breaks for promotion testing. I had a roommate, so we kind of just kind of help each other with our kids and supported each other. And I was like in class online.”

Participant c. “Of course, I'm in my hometown, so I have cousins everywhere. One of my cousins lived one house over from me. The way we did it, the way I was able to stay up on my schoolwork is she would bring home the work every day. Her and I were in the same grade, so we had a lot of the same teachers. She would bring home my work every day. I would do my work. And then when she went back to school, she would carry it back to school. So it was almost like I was in night school and then she'd be helping me with whatever the lessons were.

Participant d. “The Major that came into my life. To me, it was such a support that he would even babysit my kids for me to go to school. It took me a long time at first to get that bachelor's degree because you know, you're taking an assignment, you got kids, you're doing all this and you got a job too. And so, you're taking classes at night. Yeah. Then you take classes at
the next place you go to at night and then the next place. You know what I mean? Until you finally get to that point where you can walk across the stage. My exception was I had a group of great support.”

**Participant e.** “I didn't have the kind of support I needed to be able to go to school with young children. I did not go back to school until my older two were, um, about to graduate from high school. One time I had gotten laid off my job and they had given me a really great severance package. So, I was offered nine months. So, I took that time to go to a community college. While my kids were in school, I would be in class.”

**Participant f.** “My husband intentionally tried to sabotage my schooling. I remember calling the professor and explaining what was going on. And they allowed me to bring my boys to my class. And so, I brought them to class and I kind of had a desk area cause I think it might've been a computer class and I put them under my desk and let them play with their toys while I was doing my school. Had I not had that ability or was allowed to do that I don't think I would be able to finish school.”

**Participant g.** “I ended up, uh, finishing my first two years and then I got pregnant again and I mean I got up and got married and then, um, stopped going to school. I was pregnant, then I had two more children. And then after the fourth I decided to just go back to school and finish my bachelor's. So, it was almost 10 years later I went back and finished my bachelor's. My guidance counselor in high school, you know rural town, they didn’t really give you a lot of information. So, it was kind of like I had to figure it out on my own. I called my aunt actually crying about it and she gave me some advice. She told me to do something and I ended up, you know, being able to get registered and yeah. So, I think she was probably the biggest thing.”
Participant h. “I didn't think about school, you know, like it just didn't click. I realized, well, you know, I don't want to be a [job removed], you know, kind of things like this is not as like really finding what my passion and what I wanted to do. And so, I ended up just going to junior college and moving on upwards from there. I think the people in my life, thereafter, either through employment and just a different circle of friends professionally that had a greater impact on my new direction or my vision for my future.”

Participant i. “I met my other best friend, um, that lived a couple of doors down and she was young. She's younger than me. Uh, she helped me.”

Participant j. “My grandparents were at [the time] when I went to school, they had her. So, by this time, of course I could be social because I had a baby. What's the worst could happen? Um, so I was allowed to do more social [activities], you know, be out more so they were there the entire time. I didn't go into college immediately afterwards. That's when I joined the military. When I was doing all my training, my kids stayed with my mom and I want to say they stayed with her for a while. Um, but it was, I want to say maybe three years, four years, um, while I finished my training. And they were, they were totally supportive.” “I had the next daughter at 18. So right after graduating.”

Participant k. “So, my sister picked her up from daycare, so I would say, um, I will leave home about 6:30 AM. It's seven in the morning to get her to daycare, get to school. Um, I will leave school around, let's say 3:30 PM and I'd go home, and my sister would pick her up at around 5:30 PM. So, I had about a two-hour window, you know, to get homework done, um, prepare bottles or for the next day, um, just to kinda get ready before she got home. I moved out from my sister when I was 16, actually. Um, and I moved in with, the gentleman is now my husband.”
Participant l. “I mean my family was always very supportive of me. Um, even during pregnancy, being pregnant and stuff. Um, initially I didn't think I wanted to keep my child, I was thinking about going the adoption route and stuff like that, but my family was always like, you know, we're here to help you. You know, my mom was a young mom, my grandma was a young mom, and so, you know, they understood things happened sometimes and you know, they were always very encouraging like we'll be here to help you if you need it and stuff like that. So luckily, I've always had them to kind of fall back on and stuff like that. So even going to school and stuff like that, you know, they'd watch him, they go pick them up from daycare for me, they'd take me to school, things like that. Um, so yeah, they were very encouraging and supportive of that.”

Participant m. “I really do feel like even though me and my son's father, you know, went our separate ways, I felt like he stepped up, you know. It is very unheard of a black teen at that time, you know, stepping up, doing what he had to do. We broke up, you know, because we were young, but he did what he had to do, and he let me do what I needed to do to pursue my dream to go after what I wanted. You know, it was hard, but I did what I had to do. I had to do something. I do compliment him for that. On top of that, one of my aunts who was not my uncle, my biological uncle, his wife, she was very, very supportive. I would come home; I would be so tired. Monday through Friday driving to get my son and my son would cry. I wouldn’t hear him because I would be so tired. She would, you know, take him for him for me, change him, play with him, feed him, you know, just you know, all of that. Financially, you know, getting me things that I needed. Um, you know, with him and also with me, they helped me advance myself, you know, clothes. They um, helped me, you know, keeping my hair done. Um, washing my
clothes, you know, beddings all this stuff you need for, you know, college dorms. She brought me a car, gas money cause everything.”

Participant n. “So, I moved with my best friends that went to school here in San Antonio. My son actually stayed here though for about two to three years with my Aunt. But, I was pretty much sending half of my financial aid back home. So, you know, it was as if I paid, you know, for them to keep him while I was at school. So then, that was about two to three years. And then he came to Huntsville and like I said, I had already had a really good rapport, as well as joined a sorority. So, my sorority sisters literally like they’d be on the shuttle coming to school with him and I'd be coming from class, getting on the shuttle and riding back. So, you know, everybody knew my baby. And so that is kind of, you know, how [it]e worked. I have always had a second or third job all of my life. Um, I worked in high school [and] worked in college.”

Participant o. “I had support from my Aunt. Yeah, that was basically it, I had support from Aunt. I actually took those classes at night cause I had to work in the daytime.

Participant p. “My mother, who I say she's a saint. She changed her schedule around. She said, 'I'll work Friday, Saturday and Sunday and you go to school Monday through Friday.’ So that was a big deal. I drove to school every day, which was like a 45-minute drive and um, we would share a car cause I didn't have a car at the time until I bought one. So, we would share a car. She would use it on the weekends to go to work, which was basically her car. She just let me use it.”

Data summary: Research Question 5

There was a slight variance among the type of support identified as valuable to the participant’s ability to achieve their educational goals. The common support considered valuable by 12 out of 16 of the participants was the family’s willingness to absorb some of the physical
responsibilities of being a mother. Watching the child while in mother attended class, feeding the child, and assuming some of the financial burdens of raising the child were some of the roles families accepted to assist the mother in achieving her goals. There were three out of 16 instances were external sources provided support by tutoring, delivering coursework, and ensuring the mother was able to complete assignments on-time with their educational peers. The mothers described the motivation for their families to take on these responsibilities was to push the mother to supersede the expected limitations of teen mothers (see Table 9).

**Table 8.**

*Type of support received*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Situation</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
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<th>D</th>
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<th>F</th>
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<th>J</th>
<th>K</th>
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<th>P</th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent based on N</th>
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*Note.* The N for interview participants = 16.

The researcher annotated a high frequency of support when addressing the actions family members took to assist the teen mother on the path to educational success. Family members extended themselves to assist in areas such as transportation to classes, assuming many of the financial responsibilities of parenting, and caretaking of the child, -often for extended periods of time. For some participants, the supportive behaviors were characterized as encouragement to accomplish tasks and remain focused on the future, long-term benefits of achieving personal goals.
Research Question 6: Societal or stereotypical barriers

This content question seeks to identify, “What societal or stereotypical barriers were encountered by Black American women who were teen mothers as they pursued a master’s degree or higher?” The participants described their experiences with societal and stereotypical hurdles as they progressed in their educational journey.

**Participant a.** “I feel like [my mom] already was like, you can't make it. You can't do it. What are you doing? Like you can't continue on. But even I remember going down to the places, I just always felt they were like, well where's the dad? And they were just so like degrading. We always were forced figure out. We didn't have any support. There was nobody there. If we didn't do it, then no, it wasn't gonna get done.”

**Participant b.** “Um, I will say during that time, for whatever reason, there were a lot of teen moms in my hometown and I don't know the root cause of it was. I don't know [if] it was the community, I know a lot of the teen moms, the partner they had were older. So, um, there were a lot of probably inappropriate relationships taking place. Oh, I would say maybe it could have been the community because it was kind of like the norm even though it's not normal.”

**Participant c.** “[I] think that actually what stands out about it is that it was accepted as the norm, you know. I look back, then I look at how commonplace everyone acted. Teachers, I mean, the biggest uproar came from my church of course. You know, I had been born and raised in the church that my mom had been born and raised in. They didn't handle it well. They handled it with this shame and humiliation. You get up in front of the church and you apologize to this great big center in front of these people. And so, you start this whole thing off in shame and humiliation. In hindsight, too, it was a perpetuation of something that occurred for several generations. So, it was…’your baby coming. Okay, fine’. I think it was almost commonplace.”
Participant d. “I don't remember any major negatives because, you know, strangely enough from being married, people look at you as a team. Differently than being single, you know. But yeah, I don't know how to answer that, that, I didn't have any particular difficulties other than, you know, all the struggles of trying to raise a kid when you were a kid yourself… growing into a good parent when you're barely out of childhood.”

Participant e. “I really didn't have those type of feelings. I was so involved with my children. You know, I really don't look at things as Black American. I can be kind of blind to things. Sometimes something just happens and it's like, ‘Oh, really?’ So, I just look at things as a personal thing. Like, this is what I need to do and nothing's gonna stop me. Sadly, I don't really look at it as the victim, -like, I'm a Black American. Even though things have happened in life where I'm reminded or it's revealed to me, oh, this is a situation because of my skin color. But it wasn't necessarily when I was pregnant, it was just other things in life.”

Participant f. “So, my mom works so much. And so, I would ask her, you know now, but she said that she didn't want any of our fathers to do anything for us. She said she should not have to make them pay child support. They should do it. So, she never asked for anything. And so, had I been in that mindset, I probably would have been the same way. But I felt like, yeah, I'm going to work and take care of my kids. But also, I feel it's the responsibility of the fathers as well. And so, I did something different, but there are some that are out there that feel, well, if the dad doesn't want to do, then I'm not going to make him or something like that. I don't know if that's more of a cultural thing or it's just a person’s, you know, upbringing or what they've seen.”

Participant g. “Not, not particularly. I can't say I can't identify anything like right on hand that I could say.”
Participant h. “My counselor and, you know, she told me, she said, well, you know, you are going to end up a statistic. You know, um, if you are a teen mom, they automatically think you were highly sexually active. You know, they automatically think, um, it was almost like, you know, you’re being a fast girl. No one thought that you could have been preyed upon. You're a black person or you live in this area code or you grew up in an apartment, you're automatically, you know, this. Or it's gonna lead to, you know, a life of crime. And, when you're going to have your next one, you know, all this stuff. During my time, was a time where if you sinned or you were caught in public sin, shall we say, you know, you needed to come before the church and ask the church forgiveness and you know, and all of this. And I'm like, that's like the Scarlet letter.”

Participant i. “Low income families, they have a lot of negativity. And they thought that I was trying to be like, you know, “saditty” or something like that. No, I wasn't designed just to be a hood rat, you know, or I should say that, um, I wasn’t designed [for] everything be a generational thing.”

Participant j. “I’m going to say no. And that's only because I was surrounded by a military environment for so long, having been in the military. Then I separated and I took, maybe I want to say 6-8 months before me, and my ex-husband got together and then after that it was totally military focused. So, in the military you're just around too many diverse populations to have specific conversations about one population.”

Participant k. “The stereotype of, you know, young black women, they're going to be on welfare. All their lives are going to be on food stamps all their lives. They're not going to work. They won't be educated. Um, I used to read about those type of things and I was like, I don't have to be like that. Um, there's no law, no rule that says you were a teen mom. This is the route that you have to take. Um, I started just exploring the opportunities that were out there. Um, just
kinda being laser focused and knowing that, you know, this is the life that I have. I don't want that life anymore. I'm going to do anything I can to get away from it.

**Participant l.** “Just like people's assumption that yeah, once you have a kid then that's just kind of [person]who you are always going to be. Just like a mom sitting there, especially being on public assistance and stuff at the time. Like I had a lot of neighbors and friends who I saw weren't really trying to do anything with their lives type thing. Um, and so I feel like a lot of people probably looked at me that way too. There were times I go, like I said to appointments and things like that, WIC appointments or food stamp appointments and you know, people ask questions like, well, what's the name of your kids, -always plural. And I always thought that was funny. Like, what makes you think I have more than one kid? I always thought that was so weird. The fact that they just automatically look at me like, oh, she must [have] like five or six of them running around. Sadly, this society thinks that okay, well she's about to be a professional baby mom I guess for life and that's just going to be her role and she's going to be living on welfare for the rest of her life and you know, things like that.”

**Participant m.** “Yeah, so when I think about, you know, being a young black mother, you think about all that. Maybe she was fast or things like that, but I was such a total opposite. My [son’s] father was my first. Um, you know, I was a virgin. I was the total opposite. I was just a person who got caught up who was being rebellious, who was, you know, going against their upbringing. You know, was trying things out and got caught out. Yeah, I do think about like, young teen, were they fast. I do, even in my position, you know, even with my situation. When I see a young mom, I'm like, hmm right, 16 and pregnant. Okay, did she just happened to slip up or, you know, or what are you doing? You know? So, I just, you know, I do think like that even, you know, now. I, unfortunately, I still do think like that from time to time.”
**Participant n.** “[Statements like] Oh, you stupid. You know, you dumb, you a hoe…you never going to be nobody. It's always that negative connotation. And you know, I defend it to this day. [When I see] people are young parents, I'm like, look, really, I'm a young parent, you know, and it makes no difference. I have definitely gotten that whole, you know, uneducated, promiscuous misconception when they just initially see you with a baby, especially at the beginning…and actually, walking around and being a high schooler with the baby. Now it's not that bad because I have my, you know, accolades, I have my achievements and stuff.”

**Participant o.** “So, I don't remember what it was called, but it's like when you had a baby and the nurse comes do a home visit or something like that. I don't even know how to say this. Mmm. I think she had like some preconceived ideas about what she was walking into cause she couldn't believe like I had furniture, my baby room, you know, he had a crib, you know what I'm saying? Stuff like that. I still remembered that to this day. I think there is this assumption of, um, teen mothers don't work, or they don't do anything to take care of their self, or they don't try to better themselves. I think there is a stereotype with that.

**Participant p.** “I've had family members that were saying, Oh, she did the same thing her mom did. The other stigma, my cousin, he was a senior in high school. I felt like he didn't get the talks that I got for like what happened, you know. It was just like accepted that he got someone pregnant as a senior in high school. And here I am, I'm actually out of high school and you are coming down on me. And so, I kind of felt like I got it hard as a girl. And, also being that on my dad's side, I'm actually the first one to have a teen pregnancy.”

Data summary: Research Question #6

Though four out of 16 participants did not identify any major issues or cultural barriers experienced as a Black American woman who was a teen mother, there was an equal variance of
barriers experienced by the remainder of the participants. Some of the barriers noted were negative attitudes and behaviors directed towards the teen mother. Nine out of 16 of the mothers described experiences where negative, degrading terminology was used to describe their abilities and future as a mother. Some of these comments reduced the teen mother to merely a “welfare mother”, “fast or highly promiscuous teen”, or “bad influence” in society. In fact, nine out of 16 participants spoke about lasting memories of individuals’ suggesting the mother would be unable to manage motherhood or provide for their child thus limiting the future abilities. This negative mentality from external sources influenced five out of 16 mothers to have negative ideas about their own personal future.

An issue unveiled in the study was the normalcy of teen pregnancy in some smaller, rural areas. Three out of 16 participants described households and educational settings that seemed complacent and unaffected by the rise of teen mothers present in their environment. The in-home acceptance of teen motherhood could be related to a generational commonality among women in the family birthing children at an early age, as described by six out of the 16 women. Despite these societal and stereotypical barriers, many of the participants decided that the best method to combat negative societal perceptions was to achieve goals outside the deemed “norm” for teen mothers (see Table 10).

Table 9.

Societal or stereotypical barriers

<table>
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<th>Percent based on N</th>
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Table 9 (continued).

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</table>

Note. The N for interview participants = 16.

The feelings of shame identified during the interview process were presented as internally and externally driven. Some of the participants described feelings of embarrassment and shame for engaging in behavior that resulted in teen pregnancy. A few participants concurred with the feelings of personal shame but also described physical environments, such as church, where the participants were labeled as “shameful” and an “embarrassment” for their family. This external behavior correlates to the frequency of degrading behaviors towards the teen mother.

Interactions with community members, as well as family members are represented in the frequency of negative, poor attitudes and behaviors against the teen mother.

Research Question 7: Advice for teen mothers

The final question of the study asks participants, “What advice do Black American women who were teen mothers offer teen mothers to pursue a master’s degree or higher?” The participants expressed words of encouragement for current and future teen mothers towards accomplishing personal goals such as educational advancement.

Participant a. “Just keep going. Don't give up and know that sometimes if, if things, if people aren't out there to support you, then you can find [it] yourself, support yourself, like go out and find it because sometimes people aren't going to do things for you. Find a way, find a path. And once you find [it], once you have a goal, create your goals, then find the steps you
need to take to get there. And even if the steps are different or you might have to struggle a little harder, that doesn't mean that you won't accomplish it.”

**Participant b.** “There is an after. You might feel like it was a mistake, or you let people down, but like you can still be whatever it is that you want to be. Um, just a little bit more hard work. But if you commit yourself and remain dedicated, like it can happen. I wanted to go to the military and I'm thankful that my mom was supportive [and] willing to take my baby for me because if it would not have been for her there would've been roadblocks for me. Um, connecting with people that truly has your back and um, looking above your situation, not being stuck, like oh, I'm a teen mom I'm not going to be anything. You can be whatever you want to be, you have a little life looking up to you.”

**Participant c.** “Being able to allow the folks who are meant to sow into you. [Bettering yourself] to be a part of your village was very key for me. Um, and then joining the military that's how I ended up being able to pay for at least my bachelor's degree. But, the military I know it's not for everybody. And I know that getting education is all about financing. At the end of the day, it's about financing it. And so, it's really about turning over every leaf, every grant possibility.”

**Participant d.** “I know it's as hard. It's going to be harder most than it was for me because I had advantages, but I would say get that education because in the long run it'll make your life so much easier. If you do it a little a day, at a time, one class a week, a year or whatever…keep going, you have to keep going because if you don't do it, you'll be stuck and you don't want to be stuck. And then of course your children get stuck.”

**Participant e.** “Find out what kind of resources are out there. Um, because I think that there's a lot of resources out there that people just don't know about. I didn't know about it
because I probably could have, other than relying on my mom to help me take care of my kids while I was in school, I probably could have found an organization that would have been able to help me do that.”

Participant f. “For one would be if you can delay having children until you're financially able to. I would say that will be the first one. But if not, things happen, -we know- but never give up on what your dreams are. Because when you're in the midst of raising children, you tend to get really down and depressed and feel like I have to put [your] life on hold and I'm not gonna fulfill my dreams. But in spite of that, you can, it's just you have to, of course, do some juggling around and putting things in perspective and maybe delay. Because, you know, sometimes raising kids, you can't do everything at once, but never give up. Like whatever your dream is, whatever God has shown you despite what's going on, just keep moving and keep staying focused on the big picture rather than, you know, the situation that's presenting itself with being a single mom because it's not impossible.”

Participant g. “Know yourself, know your resources. Don't be afraid to ask for help. And you know, don't feel bad or ashamed about anything. And, I think reach out to make sure that you have a support system or know who is a part of your support system. Because I think that in and of itself plays a really big role, as far as, you know, outcomes. Um, and it's not always family. It can be support groups, or you know, other things like that. But look for those resources that can assist you.

Participant h. “I would tell them that one choice, um, it can have an impact, but how great an impact, it all depends on them. And through all of this, (since we have hindsight) who you associate with, who you allow to build you up and to pour into you, that's going to have a great impact on how things can turn out from there. You have a platform; you have a voice.
Don't let something that's a beautiful gift. Don't let that just throw you all the way off. You may arrive at your destination a little bit slower because you're doing a lot more than your average teen, you're making bottles, you're doing homework, you're up in the middle of the night. You're not going out. You might not be asked to prom. You have all of this, but you can do it. And you know, that other people have done it.”

Participant i. “’Don't stop get it, get it’. Keep going. Move forward. Your desire is bigger than your current situation.”

Participant j. “Enjoy your pregnancy and joy those first 2-3 years. But after that, have a plan, whatever that plan is, whether it's higher education, whether it's trade school, whether it's entrepreneurship, it doesn't matter, but have a plan, um, and find a mentor.”

Participant k. “My advice to them is, um, mainly find that support cause you're going to need it. I see where they have like, um, nurse family partnership. So when they're pregnant they have nurses that come out and teach them how to be a parent. Um, there are financial resources. You know, for mostly the African American culture, we stick together most of the time as far as family wise. So even though, you know, mom may not want to be there, there may be [an]aunt cousin, somebody that you can reach out to that can just kind of really help you with the child. Also, reaching out school. Um, I don't know if they have an obligation to assist, but I would go to your guidance counselor and let them know what's going on. They know of resources that are just for students. Utilize everything that you can to get where you need to go. That would be my thing cause we all have to take those steps. We're all gonna need some help. And, really dream big. You know, go forward. Um, just know that there are going to be roadblocks, um, but use those, to make you stronger.”
Participant l. “I would definitely tell them to definitely keep going for your goals. I mean, my son, you know, came into my life definitely at a time I wasn't expecting him, but I feel like he has made me a better person. He's made me want more things in my life and not just for him because I wanted to provide a good life for him, but because I want a good life for myself. Like when it's all said and done, I'm my own self. And so, I definitely still have dreams and aspirations and goals to achieve whether he was here or not. I still want these things or want to do things. So definitely don't think that you're kind of stuck in the moment that you're in right now. You might be struggling, it's hard. You might not really have support and things like that, but just know that there are other people out there that are going through the same thing you're going through right now. There are women before you who have went through it and succeeded. There are women going to be after you that are going to go do the same thing. So just, you know, definitely go forward. Those things that you have, those dreams that you have, definitely keep chasing them and reaching for them.”

Participant m. “I would tell the next generation or the next person that's in my position as a teen mom to go forward. Don't let anything hold you back. You can always do it. You just need the support. Um, resources are out there. The support is out there. Even if you are in a little small town like mine, it's like a little rural area in North Carolina. They make it [easier] now for more supportive services. I would say, you know, bust through that glass ceiling. Do not become a statistic. Do not let anything or anyone hold you back. If you have to take that baby with you to class get one of those wrappy, wrap things and what you need to do. And if you don't have the support of the father, you know, get you some girlfriends who could support you, you know, cause you would find them at college, trust me and they will love you and your baby. Like
they've known you forever. Trust me. I would tell them, go for it. If you want to do it, you could do it. Just don't give up.”

Participant n. “I would tell her to get her a good group of mentoring women to listen to their stories, to listen to their mistakes, to bank on their achievements. So many of us are starting from the bottom, you know, from Point A when really all we have to do is talk. Somebody could've just talked to us and it would have put us at, you know, Point G. I would tell them, don't fall for the American dreams. They’re, the hidden modern slavery tactics. Do your research. Talk to people who have gone through these things. You know, because I tell them go to the community college, get you a trade, work smarter, not harder. So, I feel like talking to people; making sure that they're releasing their thoughts and feelings. And, just do the research. The answers truly lie within strangers because the people are around you really aren't trying to help you. So, you have to yourself get out, get their research and learn people, you know, talk to people and navigate.”

Participant o. “I would say you have to crawl before you walk. Always try to stay focused. And when you have those and when you're working on your goals, you can’t be out here doing what everybody else is doing, cause that stuff still going to be there when you finish. You gotta look at the bigger picture. It's not about like instant gratification, wanting things to happen immediately. Umm, love on yourself. Do self-care if you don't know how, learn how. And it's okay if you don't know something or you’re feeling depressed or anything like that. You go talk to somebody. It's okay, we can be strong, but it's okay if you're not strong. It's okay if you need somebody to talk to, it's okay to go to therapy. You know what I'm saying? And love on yourself. Don't do so much to where you can't do anything to take care of your child. You gotta take care of yourself. People say stuff. We kind of condition in a sense to believe certain things
are selfish, but you have to, I feel like you have to be selfish on some level to be able to take care of yourself and your family or whatever it is that you're trying to do. You can't pour into a cup if yours is halfway or just a little bit in there. So, you have to be selfish.”

**Participant p.** “I would tell her see yourself in the future. That baby that you have is the person that can change your life. I can say for me, being the only girl, I was kind of selfish. Um, it was actually love at first sight seeing my son. It was nothing that I won't do for my son. And I think that you always want to know, like this person right here sees me. This person is depending on me for everything that they have. They didn't ask to be here no matter what anybody says. If this is the goal that I want to do, I'm going to do it. Use all of your resources. You know, people that you know that you can trust, use your resources. There is no shame in going to get help from DFACs or getting food stamps and getting TANF. I used to tell the girls (on the other side of the desk), I was on that side of the desk being a parent who use food stamps. So, there is no shame in that. You have to use what you could get to get to this point to take care of that baby. And if it's getting food stamps, getting assistance to take care of their child, I say go for it. But don't let anything stop your dream of what you want to become because there's somebody dependent on you.”

Data summary: Research Question #7

The responses provided from participants when asked to give advice to current and future teen mothers seeking educational advancement were similar among most of the women. The largest response received from 12 out of 16 participants was for teen mothers to identify a support system they trusted to help them achieve their goals. Additionally, teen mothers were encouraged to seek our local resources or government aid necessary to provide stability for their households while attempting to achieve their personal goals. Several participants expressed a
similar sentiment about mothers not feeling ashamed or embarrassed to utilize the resources available to provide stability for their family. However, nine out of 16 participants urged mothers to also ensure they were actively seeking out opportunities to advance themselves towards physical and financial stability for their children. Ultimately, the participants’ message for current and future teen mothers was to “keep going” no matter what barriers they experience and “figure it out” even if there are no answers readily visible.

**Table 10.**

*Advice for teen mothers*

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<tr>
<th>Participant Situation</th>
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*Note.* The *N* for interview participants = 16.

The participants consistently attributed their ability to overcome the challenges of teen motherhood and accomplishing their educational goals to their personal desire to not give up. The participants described an intrinsic motivation to figure things out by any means when unsure of how to accomplish tasks. For many, seeking out resources and people was highlighted repeatedly as their modes of behavior for achieving goals and thus a repeated suggestion to future teen mothers on how to move forward with accomplished their educational desires.
Conclusion

The data presented is meant to explore the various journeys of several Black American women as they navigated teen motherhood and achieving academic goals. As identified in the content, while several themes or commonality are present, no two stories are identical. Each participant made decisions towards achieving their goals based on the access to resources and supportive groups that they were privy to in their life. The methods, attitudes, behaviors, influences, and time to accomplish the goal of obtaining a master’s degree, or higher in some cases, varies among the interview group. However, the most universal theme identified during the data collection process was each participant’s relentless desire to “do more and do better” than what was expected of them.

Several of the participants expressed their rationale for participating in the study was to spread knowledge to current and future teen mothers that educational and financial success is obtainable despite their current situations. The participants wanted to combat age-old ideas and traditional mindsets that teen motherhood results in poor future outcomes for young women. Most participants asserted that while the message is not to encourage teen motherhood, society must not conceal the information, resources, or methods used by former teen mothers who have successfully achieved goals such as obtaining postsecondary degrees.

Summary

Chapter IV presented the methodology, population, summary, data and findings of this heuristic-phenomenological qualitative study that sought to understand the journey taken by Black American women who were teen mothers. This study’s population was comprised of 16 women residing in areas located in the Southeastern region, specifically Florida, Georgia,
Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Texas. The data collection and the analysis of the findings were presented using the most common themes and trends.

Chapter V presents the findings, conclusions, and implications found in this study. Furthermore, Chapter V includes the implications of further action and recommendations to extend the research in future studies.
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

Chapter V will explore the major findings, implication for actions, and recommendations for future research. These components of the study are influential in the ability to assist future Black American teen mothers during their journey to academic success. The compilation of data collected, along with the similarities and differences of the participant’s journeys, will provide future teen mothers with a realistic visual of the challenges and joys associated with teen motherhood and educational goals.

This phenomenological-heuristic qualitative study examined the pathways of Black American women who were teen mothers and achieved master’s degrees or higher. This chapter readdresses the purpose statement and research questions that were used to solicit data from participants. The researcher used the data to identify commonalities and unexpected findings on supportive influences that enhanced the teen mother’s ability to accomplish goals. The chapter also delves into implications for actions and recommendations for future research that can impact future generations of teen mothers as they manage teen parenthood and future goals.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this heuristic phenomenological study was to describe and identify the economic barriers and support resources Black American women who were teen mothers perceived as impacting or encouraging their ability to achieve a master’s degree or higher. In addition, the purpose of this study is to describe the recommendations of teen mothers to assist current and future teen mothers in accomplishing educational goals.
Research Questions

a. What are the lived experiences of Black American women who were teen mothers and went on to achieve a master’s degree or higher, including the economic barriers and support resources that impacted their educational achievement?

b. What recommendations do Black American who were teen mothers, and have achieved a master’s degree or higher, have for teen mothers to accomplish educational goals?

Research Sub-Questions

1. What is the lived experience of Black American women leading up to the time before becoming a teen mother?

2. What economic barriers or impacts were encountered by Black American women who were teen mothers as they worked toward achieving a master’s degree or higher?

3. What support resources inspired Black American women who were teen mothers to pursue the achievement of obtaining a master’s degree or higher?

4. What specific person or people influenced Black American women who were teen mothers to achieve a master’s degree or higher?

5. What type of support was received by Black American women who were teen mothers from family members (parents, partners, siblings, relatives) or educational/ personal mentors?

6. What societal or stereotypical barriers were encountered by Black American women who were teen mothers as they pursued a master’s degree or higher?

7. What advice do Black American women who were teen mothers offer teen mothers to pursue a master’s degree or higher?
Major Findings

The focus of this qualitative research was to explore the similar and different pathways Black American women used to accomplish their educational goals while navigating life as a young, teen mother. The data collection and analysis of the stories presented by the selected 16 participants resulted in four major finding domains:

1. Patience.
2. Passion.
3. Persistence.
4. People.

Major Finding #1: Patience

“You can do it a little a day, at a time, one class a week, a year or whatever...keep going.” Many of the women described achieving educational goals that accumulated over years of taking courses and exploring new trades. For most, the journey to postsecondary degrees was long and sometimes burdening. Participants described educational transcripts that display multiple schools, locations, degree plans and breaks in learning. At times, a lack of resources and support systems interrupted the progression of their educational goals. Others simply took breaks to focus on their highest priority, their children. Despite the journey the participant took to achieve their goals, a common theme was the importance of taking your time and staying focused. Participants vocalized a consistent message of encouraging current and future teen mothers seeking advancement in their lives to maintain self-care and take their time. The pace of a teen mother attempting to accomplish her goals might be at a slower pace than their peers because of the requirements of motherhood such as identifying consistent childcare. The women also indirectly described their patience as they managed challenges such as bringing children to
their educational environments because of lack of support systems, navigating the educational system with minimal counseling or administrative assistance, and attending multiple postsecondary establishments to identify a course structure that aligned with the needs of being a parent.

**Major Finding #2: Passion**

“Create your goals, then find the steps you need to take to get there.” A consistent message presented by all of the women in the study was the value they placed on building a stable foundation for their children. Repeatedly, the researcher heard statements describing the participant’s desire to “do more and be better” than their childhood environments. Many of the women were driven by the goal of not allowing the challenges of teen motherhood to deter them from childhood collegiate dreams. In instances where the participant did not have a lingering childhood collegiate dream, external motivators such as increasing financial revenue and advancing in their career aspirations were influencers in achieving an educational goal. Overall, the women pushed the message that achieving stability as a teen mom begins with having passion in your heart to achieve a goal, regardless if it is for your personal well-being or that of your child.

**Major Finding #3: Persistence**

“Don’t let anything stop your dream of what you want to become because there’s somebody dependent on you.” A major theme that developed during the process of exploring each study was the ability of the women to remain confident and focused on their goals. Despite sometimes having a lack of access to resources or people to assist them towards their intended goals, many of the women spoke about an intrinsic confidence that one day they would achieve their personal or professional ideas of stability. The women described barriers associated with
young motherhood such as lack of in-home support, minimal financial resources, and lack of awareness on educational requirements and processes. Several of the women also described the emotional barriers of managing negative societal stereotypes while attempting to achieve stability so they could pursue their educational goals. Despite these negative challenges, the collective group of participants spoke about their internal motivation to “keep moving forward”. There were multiple occurrences when the women spoke about their unwillingness to be a statistic and their drive to keep finding new solutions to their challenges in the effort to never give up on their goals. In essence, the women in the study embraced stressors of teen motherhood and used the triggers to reinforce their position on the importance of achieving higher education and financially stable careers.

**Major Finding #4: People**

**People for support.** “Get [you] a good group of mentoring women to listen to their stories, to listen to their mistakes, to bank on their achievements.” Many of the women attribute their ability to remain so focused on their educational goals to their solid support systems. Immediate and external family members, friends, and co-workers were all identified as assuming fluid, pivotal roles of support for the teen mother. Support was provided in terms of childcare and financial assistance as well as tangible aids, such as transportation and homework assistance. External influencers, such as teachers, school administrators, and counselors, were also deemed as having a major impact on the participant’s ability to remain focused on future goals. As an example, a few participants described interactions with teachers that involved personal mentoring, tutoring, and encouragement to push through “glass ceilings” of limitations designated towards teen mothers. For many of the participants, simply hearing an outside
perspective that solidified the positive abilities and enhanced intelligence of the teen mother was enough to catapult them in a direction of educational and professional success.

**People as resources.** “Know yourself, know your resources. Don't be afraid to ask for help.” There was an overall consensus of the importance of identifying resources available to assist teen mothers in maintaining a financially secure home for their child. While a majority of the women were employed through high school and postsecondary education, external community resources also contributed to their stability. Government resources such as WIC, low-income housing, Supplemental Security Income, and other cash assistance programs served as buffers against the typical stressors’ teen mothers face, thus bolstering resilient behaviors. Quite a few participants vocalized feelings of shame, guilt and embarrassment for being in a position to need government assistance, particularly when considering the stereotypical characterizations of young, Black mothers. However, every participant who sought external resources recognized its positive impact on their ability to focus on personal goals without concern providing a stable environment for their children.

**Unexpected findings**

The compilation of data collected for this study revealed two major unexpected findings. The first unexpected finding was the presence and/or support of many paternal families of the conceived children. The limited resources and literature available on teenage fathers created a societal perception that those within that population are unavailable or uninterested in participating in the financial and physical care of their offspring. In fact, some research concluded that, “for [some] low-income Black males, the joys of fatherhood lie in the act of procreation and in knowing that he has a progeny, not necessarily in knowing that he can support his babies” (Duckett, 2009; Majors & Billson, 1992). However, this study found that many of
the participants’ family dynamic included supportive fathers of their child(ren). For some participants the child’s father sought professional jobs such as the military, to provide financial support for the teen mother. Other fathers assumed physical responsibility of the child, ultimately supporting the mother’s ability to focus on their educational plan.

The second unexpected finding was related to teen mothers that lived in a low socioeconomic or rural area. According to Penman-Aguilar, Carter, Snead and Kourtis (2013), “family- and community-level socioeconomic factors [are] important moderators of the protective effect of teens’ educational expectations” (p. 20). An interesting concept, that supports the aforementioned theoretical concept, was presented by a few participants located in the Carolina states. The participants described an educational structure that siloed students between three core rank structures: basic (special), standard, and high-level. Based on the descriptions presented by the participants, the basic education structure was to support students with learning disabilities or exhibited behaviors below academic standards. Students with average academic scores were placed in the standard educational system. Lastly, high-level students had above average academic scores and were considered prime for postsecondary education.

The unexpected, second finding comes from the varying forms of assistance provided to teen mothers in this system based on educational ranking. The researcher uncovered a consistent theme surrounding support resources provided to teen mothers based on their educational system placement (i.e. basic, standard or high-level). Basic level students that were pregnant as teens described school and home environments that lacked support, both socially and financially. However, participants that were self-proclaimed high-level students described supportive educational and home environments. Some of these supportive factors included teachers bringing assignments to the teen while on maternity leave, counselors and school officials
waiving academic assignments that could hinder the teen mother’s academic grade point average. In addition to physical assistance, teen mothers characterized as a higher-level student repeatedly received words of encouragement from counselors, teachers, principals, etc. to ensure the student remained on the collegiate path.

**Conclusions**

This study’s primary purpose was to explore the journeys of Black American women who were teen mothers and achieved a master’s degree or higher. The overall intention of the study was to find common occurrences among the participating women that could further support the physical, emotional, and financial vitality of future teen mothers with educational goals. Based on the findings of this research, it was concluded that the participants’ while filled with challenges, strengths, overcoming obstacles and joy, all contributed to the conclusions which can be used to encourage and empower young women with similar backgrounds.

**Conclusion 1: Background**

Your current situation does not determine your future abilities. The women of this study had varying backgrounds and socioeconomic environments. Some had loving supportive households; others were not as fortunate. A few of the participants had additional support from the child’s father and some participants assumed the role as the sole parent. Most of the women were high school athletes and scholars, and a couple just wanted to make it to the next stage of their lives. Persistence is key. As described in the findings of this study, each woman was consistently strong, determined, and embraced their new direction. Each woman was persistent in achieving a life that would ensure increased access to opportunities for themselves and their children. There is no single representation of how a young girl becomes pregnant, just like there is no single representation of what it takes to become successful. What is important is to remain
dedicated and persistent in building yourself into the person you desire to become. And, remembering those hardships and success stories along the way so you can lend help to future girls to reach their goals on their individual journeys. Remember the journey, though presumably difficult, is merely a chapter in a story of success.

**Conclusion 2: Economic barriers**

Passion is a key motivator for successful behavior. The participants’ intentional behaviors and actions to accomplish goals as described in the second finding of this study was representation of the positive influence of passion. Life can be challenging. There is no true way around the challenges of being a teen mother. Even with the support of family, there will be moments of difficulty. The key is to be passionate in your efforts. You are capable of pushing past any barrier to reach your dreams and goals. If you focus on a path of success, you will find the resources needed to accomplish your goals. Discover your passion and use it as fuel and motivation to push you forward. It just takes patience, inner motivation, and faith in yourself. Be strong and confident in your decisions to enhance your life and the life of your child.

**Conclusion 3: Support resources**

Do not be afraid or embarrassed to advocate for yourself. You are not a statistic. You are embarking on a difficult journey and adjusting can take time. Be patient. You are a mother doing her best to make a better life and provide a stable home for her child. The third finding of this study addressed the importance of patience when achieving academic goals. Have patience with yourself and others. Reach out within the community and accept the offers of assistance available. These programs were created to encourage growth and stability, not humiliate or downgrade you. You are among thousands of women across the country reaching out for assistance in hopes of making a better tomorrow for your family. It might take time to find the
physical and financial stability you are seeking, but it can be accomplished. Never feel ashamed for accomplishing goals at a different pace than your peer group. Every journey is different, but ultimately leads to the same success with time, hard work, and commitment.

**Conclusion 4: Influencers**

The fourth finding of this study focused on identifying people and resources that could provide support throughout the journey to achieve educational success. Influence is a form of support and can be found in various forms. Influence can be derived from people, environments, negative or positive events, or future desires. Regardless of the means of influence, it can be used to motivate you towards new opportunities. Seek out paths that bring you to new heights of stability. Actively meet people that understand your challenges and future goals. You are among a special classification of women who have been where you were and understand the journey to get where you want to be. Reach out to them. Build your network.

**Conclusion 5: Types of Support**

An additional component of the fourth finding, People, focused on building a solid support system. Support systems can positively impact the confidence needed to accomplish stressful tasks. Do not be afraid or ashamed to ask for help. Support is not limited to only family relationships. Friends, workplace leadership and peers, school administrators, and community program managers all have the ability to serve in a supportive capacity. Identify the help you need and solicit the support from individuals that are able to produce those resources or fill that void. There is always someone available. Sometimes you have to step outside your comfort zone and begin the conversation. The result could open new, unimaginable doors.
Conclusion 6: Societal and Stereotypical Barriers

You are not a statistic. You are not a burden. Do not let anyone make you feel like you are not worthy of love and support. The scope of your abilities is not measured by your decision, or lack thereof, to become a teen mother. There might be systemic, external barriers that increase the difficulty in identifying or achieving a solid path to educational success. Barriers such as lack of information about how to achieve future endeavors, as well as lack of support and encouragement from key influencers in your life may weigh heavily on your ability to maintain a positive future outlook or self-love. Do not let the negative behaviors and commentary from external sources dictate or limit your abilities. Be bold. Walk with your head held upright and power in your strides. Do not be caged-in by the perceptions of other people. Although conventional literature would suggest that you are less capable of achieving educational goals in comparison to your non-parental peers, the reality is only you can limit your success.

Conclusions 7: Future advice

You owe it to your child to create a positive, loving home environment. No matter your background story, it is your responsibility to find new opportunities to do and be better for your child. They are looking at you to be their source of strength. Pour love into them and pour love into yourself. It is okay to take your time. If you are unsure of yourself; ask questions. Explore all roads of opportunity. You will make mistakes but continue to learn and grow from them.

Implications for Action

Implications for action are themes identified that could assist families, educators, advocates, policymakers, and community organizations in enhancing their support for teen mothers. The previously mentioned groups are expected to most likely have a direct influence on a teen mother’s ability to achieve educational goals. It is through the emotional, physical, and
financial support provided by families, educators, and community groups that teen mothers can find the intrinsic motivation and resiliency to overcome barriers and challenges of being a young parent.

**Implication 1**

Support is the overarching theme of this study. The first implication of action focuses on the importance of having healthy, internal home support for the teen mother. The success of the teen mother to accomplish educational goals is significantly increased when given direct support by members within the teen mother’s inner circle. Support can be provided through several measures of interaction. The most notable of these interactions include financial, physical and emotional support.

Financial support can include directing and assisting the teen mother with accessing local and state resources that could increase the revenue and stability of the household. Direct physical support includes assuming some of the more demanding roles of parenting to assist the mother. Watching, feeding, and bathing the child or other typical caretaker roles and responsibilities are examples of direct support that alleviates some of the weight of motherhood. This action increases the opportunities available for the teen mother to focus on external, stability-inducing goals. Emotional support behaviors include providing positive feedback and encouraging words to increase the teen mother’s confidence in her abilities to be a solid support system for her child. Positive, healthy relationships with family lineages increases the chances of a teen mother to achieve educational goals. This illustration of support relates the ecological system theory which suggested strengthening relationships among Black American teenage mothers and their familial units increases their well-being.
Implication 2

The second implication for action addresses the environmental influences that affect a teen mother’s ability to achieve personal educational goals. Specifically, the support received within the school system from administrators, which includes principals, counselors and teachers. Teen mothers are the least advocated population in schools (Pillow, 2004). Many teen mothers prior to pregnancy had personal expectations and goals fueling their passion to accomplish academic and athletic feats. Post-partum it is often difficult for teen mothers to maintain that passion for achieving future, long-term goals. The concept of alternative schools and its ability to support teen mothers with managing parental skills with educational requirements has significantly increased; however, many teen mothers seek to maintain a familiar, traditional educational setting. The trauma of embarking on a new life of motherhood increases the need to maintain some normalcy of their lives.

The term “normalcy” will have many definitions based on the teen mother’s values, but examples include remaining on sports teams, attending traditional high school events and graduating with the peers. There are a few preliminary steps that need to be enacted to support a teen mother’s ability to maintain their educational trajectory. Social Service programs need to coordinate with school administrators to enhance support for teen mothers. The collaboration between the two entities can ensure teen parents have access to high-quality infant daycares, health referrals and family planning counseling, and parenting education. School counselors should be provided vouchers for transportation and childcare services to distribute to teen mothers seeking to maintain enrollment in their standard high school.

In addition to physical resources, in-school administrators, including principals, teachers, and counselors, should receive specialized training on how to provide emotional support for teen
mothers and their children. Many teens will benefit from therapeutic services, specifically when experiencing or anticipating the cultural or structural barriers associated with then motherhood. An additional example of emotional support would include counselors guiding and encouraging teen mothers to recognize the many options available for creating different pathways to success. Providing this emotional support can help minimize the feelings of alienation common to many teen mothers.

Alternative schools are excellent resources for enhancing the parenting skills of young mothers; however, teen mothers should have the option to remain in their home school and maintain adequate support. An in-school Work-study program. The program would encourage teen mothers to maintain their high school curriculum in conjunction with skill training and parenting courses. Teen pregnancy can be a traumatic, stressful experience filled with broken family relationships, reduction of friends, disintegration of relationships with significant others, and etc. Lack of support and negative attitudes from in-school administrators increases the negative mindset teen mother’s battle on their abilities to achieve future goals.

**Implication 3**

The third implication for action addresses the need to increase the presence of teen mother support groups and mentoring programs. External support groups can have a major impact on positively influencing teen mothers to accomplish presumably insurmountable goals. There is a lack of statistical information available on the rate of Black American teen mothers who pursue and achieve postsecondary goals. Yet, modern literature including this study recognizes that this population exists and is very prominent. The key is to ensure teen mothers recognize this supportive population exists and is accessible. An increase in advocacy groups centered on encouraging the personal and professional aspirations of teen parents is needed.
Advocacy groups should be founded or comprised of women who were teen mothers and achieved educational or professional success. Access to former teen mothers is beneficial to helping teen mothers locate the resources that provide relief for many of their physical and financial barriers. Additionally, the advocacy group will likely be able to relate in discussions about the challenges, triumphs, and other topics of interest that apply to teen motherhood. A solid rapport and collaboration between the advocacy group and local school counselors serve as an additional layer of addressing the unique emotional and social challenges of teen motherhood.

Mentor programs using a similar framework of “Big Brothers, Big Sisters” is also needed to provide a level of advocacy in the community for teen mothers. The goal of mentoring programs is to provide tutoring services, parental education, and career planning such as resume writing. The mentoring group would also assist with helping the teen mother assess the various paths available for accomplishing educational and professional goals. Examples of these varying paths include trade school, online courses, four-year universities, military, and other traditional or non-traditional paths that align with the daily responsibilities of a teen mother.

The visual representation of women who were teen mothers and achieved educational goals can have a larger impact on the confidence of current and future teen mothers attempting to embark on the same journey. A mentoring group of successful women who were teen mothers ensures there is always a positive, supportive, influential network available and capable of assisting teen mothers in obtaining the necessary resources to accomplish specific goals.

Recommendations for Further Research

Exploring further research into areas underrepresented in literature is imperative to the growing stability and success of teen mothers. Establishing a full-scope visualization of the pathways, barriers, and positive influences that support a teen mother’s ability to achieve future
educational goals is a part of the method to build upon that framework of supportive literature. Recommendations for future research based on the data collected, major findings and implications for action is how this research contributes to the collection of supportive literature.

**Recommendation 1**

The first recommendation for research considers the impact an extended phenomenological case study can have on the journey of young Black American women from teen births to academic achievement of master’s degrees. Literature could benefit from a detailed account of the pathways and challenges teen mothers experienced during their quest for academic achievements. The study would help document many of the assumed minor details teen mothers overlook or disregard on their pathway to academic achievement. Some of these details include building new relationships in the college setting, academic enrollment barriers when entering new educational establishments, as well as any emotional anxieties or traumas experienced while navigating new educational domains. Identifying these areas provides future teen mothers with a more realistic account of how to prepare and navigate challenges of the educational system.

**Recommendation 2**

The second recommendation for research concentrates on the importance of identifying Black American women who were teen mothers and achieved success through entrepreneurship. The focus on educational advancement is important to increase the stability of future teen mothers; however, it eliminates a subset of women who have achieved the same qualitative level of success through business ownership. It is imperative to present alternative paths of financial stability for teen mothers especially considering the various ideas of future goals a teen mother might pursue. Including research on former teen mothers that have accomplished entrepreneurial
goals exponentially increases the network of supportive mentors available to assist those in the future.

**Recommendation 3**

The third recommendation for future research addresses the importance of assessing the pathways of Black American men who were teen fathers. The research should focus on the barriers or challenges teen fathers experience when accepting the role of a young parent. Furthermore, the research should seek to identify the supportive influences that encourage teen fathers to engage in more direct, hand-on roles with their child(ren) as a young parent. Historically, research has been geared towards identifying assistive resources for teen mothers seeking support. Conversely, teen fathers, particularly Black young men, are judged prematurely and negatively in media thus “diminishing the confidence they need to succeed as adults” (Johnson, 2019, para. 2). Introducing literature that bolsters the strength and dedication young, Black teen fathers also exhibit when managing fatherhood can begin to change the stereotypical narrative highlighting the population as “deadbeats”, etc.

**Recommendation 4**

The fourth recommendation for research is to explore the cultural influencers that deter communication about sexual intercourse in the Black American households. The delivery and content regarding sexual activity are believed to influence how a teen responds and navigates sexual encounters (Duckett, 2009). This is considered especially true when parental explanations lack detail or conflicts with mainstream media influences. Black American households are known to address the subject of sexual activity from the standpoint of promoting abstinence until marriage or reduction of resources if the teen engages in “inappropriate” sexual behaviors.
This mentality is considered to also be present in homes where there are occurrences of generational teen births. Rather than engaging in detailed conversations of the behaviors and actions leading to teen pregnancy, parental guidance focuses on the hardships that could be experienced post-teen pregnancy. The repetitive presence of generational teen pregnancies in families, despite teens witnessing the hardship of their parent(s), proves the need to solidify a transparent communication plan on the behaviors leading to engaging in sexual intercourse.

**Recommendation 5**

The final recommendation for future research is to examine a cross-sectional study on the military service, long-term stability for teen mothers, and educational advancement. Several women in this study identified their decision, or desire, to join the military service to achieve stability for their child(ren). Stable incomes, access to supportive communities, and resources to achieve academic goals were among the many factors presented as the rationale for wanting to enter the military. A long-term study observing the pathway from teen motherhood through military service could benefit teen mothers seeking additional professional paths to achieve personal goals. The study could also provide beneficial feedback to military organizations to alter or address laws that hinder young mothers from accessing military organizations.

**Concluding Remarks and Reflections**

My teen pregnancy began with shame and humiliation. I was embarrassed. I had done my best to minimize any attention to my pregnancy, but my presence as a young, Black American female in a predominately Caucasian school contradicted that opportunity. As the word began to spread about my “infliction”, I slowly heard my hard-earned titles of scholar and athlete stripped away and replaced with characterizations of “bad influence” and “lost cause”. The school was concerned less for my well-being and more for the potential “epidemic” that
could be created from the visible presence of a pregnant teen walking its halls. It offered the only resource within its purview, the removal of traditional school and placement in an opportunity school setting which focused on enhancing parental skills. My two-parent household, in a mid-upper socioeconomic community, had little influence on the decision-making of their teen daughter’s choice to blindly, with minimal knowledge on conception practices, engage in sexual intercourse. It was a single call from a school administrator that would change the trajectory of life. A teacher who encouraged my parents to fight against the stereotypical ideas of teen motherhood and unsupportive actions of traditional school administrators. She believed in my ability to be more than the societal definition of a “statistic”. This teacher’s belief in me coupled with the dynamic support system my parents produced ignited the fire in me to “do better and be better”. My motivation to succeed was driven by my desire to prove society wrong, certify the faith the teacher had in my abilities, and repay my parents for the roles they assumed as caregiver and financial guarantor for my child. More importantly, I wanted my child to have a mother that he could be proud to proclaim was a teen parent but achieved remarkable goals. The wavered path to achieve my educational goals was long and inconsistent. There were days of uncertainty, negative thoughts, poor decision-making, and loneliness, but similar to all the women in this study there was also the mindset of not giving up. Every challenging experience led me to a new level of achievement. But true growth came from the supportive relationships that encouraged me to attempt new goals, consider alternative approaches, and seek out resources when all seemed to fail.

I knew the abilities of teen mothers to accomplish unimaginable feats existed. I knew there was a collection of strong-willed, dedicated, intelligent Black American women who achieved similar educational goals as a previous teen mother. And, I knew there was a need for
literature studies to give voice to their stories. There is a new opportunity to change negative societal perceptions of young, Black teen mothers, but it begins with bellowing our success to the world.

Thank you to the women of this study for the transparency and honesty in their message. As stated by many of you during the course of this process, the new generation of young mothers is counting on us to reach back and pay it forward with knowledge and experience. With the right support system and the right motivation, a young teen mother can accomplish any goal. We, as the collective group of success stories, can fill the need for that support system and motivator.
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Appendices
## APPENDIX A

### Literature Matrix

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APPENDIX B

Participant Invitation Letter

Study: The Lived Experience of Black American Women Who Were Teen Mothers and their Pathway to Achieve Master’s Degrees

October ______, 2019

Dear Prospective Study Participant:

You are invited to participate in a qualitative research study that examines the lived experiences of Black American women who were teen mothers and achieved a master’s degree or higher. The main investigator of this study is Shuante S Bingham, Doctoral Candidate in Brandman University’s Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program. You were chosen to participate in this study because you identified yourself as a Black American women who were teen mother that achieved a master’s degree or higher. Participation is entirely voluntary. Willingness to participate in this study will require 1-1.5 hours of your time. You may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

PURPOSE OF STUDY: The purpose of this heuristic phenomenological study is to describe and identify the lived experiences, economic barriers and support resources that impact educational achievement as perceived by Black American women who were teen mothers and went on to achieve a master’s degrees and higher.

This study intends to understand the trials of other women who were teen mothers and the direct, or indirect, support systems that helped them defy the perceived odds of a teen mother. The expectation is that the information gained from this study will aid efforts in developing educational and support programs within high school systems and familial units so that young women who do find themselves in an adolescent parenting situation are able to maintain a strong educational journey. Additionally, the study seeks to gain clarity on individual, cultural challenges that affects successful educational attainment of teen mothers.

PROCEDURES: If you decide to participate in the study, you will be interviewed by the researcher. During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions designed to allow you to share your experiences as a woman who was a teen mother. The interview session will be audio-recorded and transcribed.
RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: There are minimal risks for your participation in this research study. It may be inconvenient for you to arrange a time for the interview, but it may be held face-to-face in a mutually agreed upon location or by telephone, as arranged with you when free from any distractions. Your interview will last between 1 - 1.5 hours. For the purposes of this study only, the interview will be documented using audio recording devices. These recordings will only be reviewed by the researcher. Your responses will be coded and unlinked to any personal identifying information before reporting or publication in the dissertation study.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: There are no major benefits to you for participation, but your feedback could help describe recommendations of Black American who were teen mothers with regard to help teen mothers accomplish postgraduate degrees. The information from this study is intended to inform researches, policymakers, and teen prevention programs.

ANONYMITY: Records of information that you provide for the research study and any personal information you provide will not be linked in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the study.

You are encouraged to ask questions, at any time, that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. You may contact me by email at sbingham@mail.brandman.edu. You can also contact Dr. Jalin Johnson (Dissertation Chair) at jbrooks@brandman.edu. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or your rights as a study participant, you may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-9937.

Respectfully,

Shuante S. Bingham
Doctoral Candidate, Brandman University
APPENDIX C

Informed Consent

INFORMATION ABOUT: The Lived Experience of Black American Women Who Were Teen Mothers and their Pathway to Achieve Master’s Degrees

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Shuante S Bingham, Doctoral Candidate

PURPOSE OF STUDY: You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Shuante S Bingham, a doctoral student from the Educational Doctorate Program in Organizational Leadership at Brandman University. The purpose of this heuristic phenomenological study is to describe and identify the lived experiences, economic barriers and support resources that impact educational achievement as perceived by Black American women who were teen mothers and went on to achieve a master’s degrees and higher.

This study intends to understand the trials of other women who were teen mothers and the direct, or indirect, support systems that helped them defy the perceived odds of a teen mother. The expectation is that the information gained from this study will aid efforts in developing educational and support programs within high school systems and familial units so that young women who do find themselves in an adolescent parenting situation are able to maintain a strong educational journey. Additionally, the study seeks to gain clarity on individual, cultural challenges that affects successful educational attainment of teen mothers

PROCEDURES: By participating in this study I agree to participate in an individual interview. The interview will last approximately 1 – 1.5 hours and will be conducted by in person or via telephone. For the purposes of this study only, the interview will be documented using an audio recording device(s). These recordings will only be reviewed by the researcher. Your responses will be coded and unlinked to any personal identifying information before reporting or publication in the dissertation study.

I understand that:
a) There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the Investigator will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research materials in a locked file drawer that is available only to the researcher.

b) I understand that the interview will be audio recorded. The recordings will be available only to the researcher and the professional transcriptionist. The audio recordings will be used to capture the interview dialogue and to ensure the accuracy of the information collected during the interview. All information will be identifier-redacted, and my confidentiality will be maintained. Upon completion of the study all recordings, transcripts and notes taken by the researcher and transcripts from the interview will be destroyed.

c) The possible benefit of this study to me is that my input may help add to the research regarding Black American women who were teen mothers and achieved a master’s degree or higher. The findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study and will provide new insights about the experience in which I participated. I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation.

d) If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Shuante S Bingham at sbingham@mail.brandman.edu or by phone at [redacted]; or Dr. Jalin Johnson (Dissertation Chair) at jbrooks@brandman.edu.

e) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide to not participate in the study, and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose. I understand that I may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the Investigator may stop the study at any time.

f) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed, and my consent re-obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-9937.
I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the “Research Participant’s Bill of Rights.” I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

__________________________________________
Signature of Participant or Responsible Party                    Date

__________________________________________
Signature of Principal Investigator                           Date

Brandman University IRB
RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: The Lived Experience of Black American Women Who Were Teen Mothers and their Pathway to Achieve Master’s Degrees

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD
IRVINE, CA 92618

I authorize Shuante S Bingham, Brandman University Doctoral Candidate, to record my voice. I give Brandman University and all persons or entities associated with this research study permission or authority to use this recording for activities associated with this research study.

I understand that the recording will be used for transcription purposes and the information obtained during the interview may be published in a journal/dissertation or presented at meetings/presentations.

I will be consulted about the use of the audio recordings for any purpose other than those listed above. Additionally, I waive any right to royalties or other compensation arising correlated to the use of information obtained from the recording.

By signing this form, I acknowledge that I have completely read and fully understand the above release and agree to the outlined terms. I hereby release any and all claims against any person or organization utilizing this material.

__________________________________________
Signature of Participant or Responsible Party Date

__________________________________________
Signature of Principal Investigator Date
APPENDIX E

Research Participant’s Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.

2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.

3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.

4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.

5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.

6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.

7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.

8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.

9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.

10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

Brandman University IRB   Adopted   November 2013
APPENDIX F
Interview Protocol

Interviewer: Shuante Bingham
Interview time planned: Approximately 1.5 hours
Interview place: Via telephone or at the arranged location between the researcher and participant
Recording: Digital voice recorder

OPENING COMMENTS:

First, I would like to welcome and thank you for participating in this interview. The goals of this conversation is to share your personal experience as a women who was a teen mother and obtained a graduate degree. I appreciate you joining me today to engage in dialogue about your personal journey as you pursued your academic goals.

An email was submitted to you that highlighted the purpose of this research study is to gain a better understanding of the factors that contributed to your ability to achieve your educational goals. The interview will assist in understanding your lived experience as a woman who has been a teen mother and accomplished achieving a master’s degree or higher.

The information that we discuss will be included in my dissertation. To ensure privacy, your identity will not be revealed and will remain confidential. While you have been provided and signed the informed consent form, please know that you may choose to withdraw from your participation at any point in the process.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we start our interview?

Demographic questions:

1. What is your age:
   18-24 years old
   25-34 years old
   35-44 years old
   45-54 years old

2. Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish origin?

3. How would you describe yourself?
   American Indian or Alaska Native
   Asian
   Black or African American
   Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   White
   2 or more races

4. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?
5. What is your marital status?
   - Single (never married)
   - Married, or in a domestic partnership
   - Widowed
   - Divorced
   - Separated

6. What is your current state of residency?
7. What was your resident city and state during your adolescent pregnancy years?

**Interview questions:**

1. What is the lived experience of Black American women leading up to the time before becoming a teen mother?
2. What economic barriers or impacts were encountered by Black American women who were teen mothers as they worked toward achieving a master’s degree or higher?
3. What support resources inspired Black American women who were teen mothers to pursue the achievement of obtaining a master’s degree or higher?
4. What specific person or people influenced Black American women who were teen mothers to achieve a master’s degree or higher?
5. What type of support was received by Black American women who were teen mothers from family members (parents, partners, siblings, relatives) or educational/ personal mentors?
6. What societal or stereotypical barriers were encountered by Black American women who were teen mothers as they pursued a master’s degree or higher?
7. What advice do Black American women who were teen mothers offer teen mothers to pursue a master’s degree or higher?

**CLOSING STATEMENT:**

These are all the questions I have for you at this time. Thank you very much for your time today and your willingness to allow me to interview you for my dissertation. If you would like a copy of my research at the conclusion of my study, I will be happy to provide that for you. Please accept this as a small token of my appreciation for your participation.
**PURPOSE STATEMENT** --- The purpose of this heuristic phenomenological study was to describe and identify the economic barriers and support resources Black American women who were teen mothers perceived as impacting or encouraging their ability to achieve a master’s degree or higher. In addition, the purpose of this study is to describe the recommendations of teen mothers to assist current and future teen mothers in accomplishing educational goals.

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<th>Aligning Interview Questions (To be utilized in your instrument)</th>
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<td>Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish origin?</td>
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<td>What was your resident city and state during your adolescent pregnancy years?</td>
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| 1. What are the lived experiences of Black American women who were teen mothers and went on to achieve a master’s degrees | What is the lived experience of Black American women leading up | Prompt if needed: * Can you elaborate on your experience in high school before
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<th>and higher, including the economic barriers and support resources that impacted their educational achievement?</th>
<th>to the time before becoming a teen mother?</th>
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<td>What economic barriers or impacts were encountered by Black American women who were teen mothers as they worked toward achieving a master’s degree or higher?</td>
<td>Prompt if needed: * How would you describe the socioeconomic environment of your community when you were a teen mother? * Can you provide information regarding the availability of financial, social, or physical resources for teen mothers in your community?</td>
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<td>What support resources inspired Black American women who were teen mothers to pursue the achievement of obtaining a master’s degree or higher?</td>
<td>Prompt if needed: * Were there any school resources provided that assisted your ability to achieve educational success as a teen mother? Please describe them? * Were there any community resources provided that assisted your ability to achieve educational success as a teen mother? Please describe them?</td>
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<td>What specific person or people influenced Black American women who were teen mothers to achieve a master’s degree or higher?</td>
<td>Prompt if needed: * Describe a specific individual or moment that you would attribute to your decision or ability to seek higher educational goals, if any?</td>
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<td>What type of support was received by Black American women who were teen mothers from family members (parents, partners, siblings, relatives) or educational/personal mentors?</td>
<td>Prompt if needed: * What type of in-home support was provided to assist in your ability to achieve educational goals, if any? * How would you describe the attitudes and/or behaviors of the individual(s) that provided the support?</td>
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<td>What societal or stereotypical barriers were encountered by Black American women who were teen mothers as they pursued a master’s degree or higher?</td>
<td>Prompt if needed: * How would you describe your experience as a teen mother and the attitudes or behaviors of individuals in your community?</td>
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2. What recommendations do Black American who were teen mothers, and have achieved a master’s degree or higher, have for teen mothers to accomplish educational goals?

| What advice do Black American women who were teen mothers offer teen mothers to pursue a master’s degree or higher? | Prompt if needed: * What would you consider are the most important factors to consider as a teen mother pursuing higher education? |
APPENDIX H:  
Benitez (2017) Interview Questions

The questions chosen for this interview were designed to address the research questions of the study in the life stories and experiences that shaped former teen mothers accomplishing a master’s degree or higher. All data collected through this interview will remain anonymous and confidential with control of the data in sole possession of the researcher.

Interviewer: Tanya Benitez

Interview time planned: Approximately 1.5 hours

Interview place: Via telephone or at the arranged location between the researcher and participant

Recording: Digital voice recorder

Opening Comments: First, I thank you for joining me in the interview today. Welcome to our interview conversation to share your personal experience of being a former teen mother who pursued a graduate degree. I thank you for joining me today to engage in dialogue about your personal journey to degree achievement based on your personal story. Based on the email that you received, you understand that the purpose of this research study is to understand the lived experience of former teen mothers who have achieved a master’s degree or higher. The information that we discuss will be included my dissertation. To ensure privacy, your identity will not be revealed and will remain confidential. While you have signed the informed consent form, please know that you may choose to withdraw from your participation at any point in the process. Do you have any questions or concerns before we start our interview? [Answer any question]

Interview Questions:

1. What is your life story leading up to the time before you became a teen mother? This question is optional and the participant is not required to answer it to participate in the study.

2. What external motivators or actions led you to pursue the achievement of obtaining a master's degree or higher?
3. What internal motivators or efficacy inspired you to pursue the achievement of obtaining a master's degree or higher?

4. What specific person or people influenced you to achieve a master's degree or higher?

5. What type of support was received by you from family members (parents, partners, siblings, relatives) or educational/personal mentors?

6. What struggles or obstacles were encountered by you as you worked toward achieving a master's degree or higher?

7. What societal or stereotypical barriers did you encounter as you pursued a master's degree or higher?

8. What advice do you have for current or future teen mothers to follow to pursue a master's degree or higher?

Closing Comments: This concludes my questions for our interview today. Again, I thank you for your participation. Your lived experience as a former teen mother is a valued one that I am thankful to learn about in our conversation today.
Dear Shuanie Bingham,

Congratulations! Your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the Brandman University Institutional Review Board. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If you need to modify your IRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at [IRB Brandman.edu](http://IRB.Brandman.edu).

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank You,

IRB
Academic Affairs
Brandman University
16355 Laguna Canyon Road
Irvine, CA 92618

This email is an automated notification. If you have questions please email us at [irb@brandman.edu](mailto:irb@brandman.edu).
APPENDIX I:

NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH CERTIFICATE

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that Shuante Bingham successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants."

Date of Completion: 05/15/2018

Certification Number: 2819960

National Institutes of Health
Office of Extramural Research