EXPLORING HISPANIC TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND SCHOOL RESILIENCY: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY STUDY

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University

April, 2012
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Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

April, 2012

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ABSTRACT

Olga Estrada. EXPLORING HISPANIC TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND SCHOOL RESILIENCY: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY STUDY. Under the direction of Dr. Angela Smith, School of Education, Liberty University, June, 2012.

Teenage mothers face multiple risk factors that may prevent them from graduating from high school. This study examined the phenomenon of Hispanic teen pregnancy and teen mothers’ experiences with emphasis on academic, social, and personal factors to stay in school. The study explored the resiliency of twelve Hispanic teen mothers through a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. Their stories provide an insight into the challenges the young pregnant/mothers encountered during pregnancy and motherhood at home and in school. Their lived experiences also provide a framework for exploring the school, personal, and economic factors that most influenced their ability to remain in school. Their reflections were analyzed to determine their resiliency to get an education. The data was transcribed then interpreted using the philosophical underpinning of phenomenology to guide the researcher’s interpretation as to the impact level of school, personal and economic factors in the participants’ lived experiences.
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the twelve young mothers who allowed me into their lived experiences. May God guide them through their education and endeavors of life. This dissertation is dedicated to the loving lasting memory of my parents, who always pushed their children to get an education and achieve.

I give my work to my Lord and Savior for helping me obtain the desire of my heart and never leaving me to travel through this journey alone.
Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge everyone who made this journey possible. I am very appreciative to my chair Dr. Angela M. Smith and my other committee members, Dr. Jose Puga and Dr. Wilma Jo Smetter for their guidance and support. Their contributions of their time and expert advice made this dissertation possible.

To my family and friends I owe with lots of gratitude. For my sisters, Jovita and Lolly, and my friend Lupita who gave me the encouragement to keep going forward. They were my prayer warriors knowing that if I didn’t call them, it was because I was writing. To my fellow co-workers who showed great compassion and kindness toward me during the whole process. I owe my deepest respect to each one of them.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Educational leaders are in continuous search for ways to prevent the silent epidemic of high school dropout. Teenage pregnancy is a growing contributing factor to high school dropout across the nation. Furthermore, dropout and pregnancy rates of teenagers are the highest among minorities—most notably Blacks and Hispanics. The country’s teenage pregnancy rate remains the highest among Western industrialized nations, with 4 of every 10 pregnancies occurring in women younger than age 20 (Faber, 2003; Merrick, 1995; Shapland, 1999; Smith Battle, 2003; Spear, 2004). Teenage mothers are at a greater risk to drop out of school than their non-parenting classmates. The study will focus on hearing the voices of high-risk Hispanic teen mothers who are faced with challenges and opportunities of school, personal, and economic factors and manage to stay or graduate from high school.

Background

Research states some of the reasons students fall short of graduating from high school include boredom, financial responsibilities, school-related negative behavior, academic problems and pregnancy or marriage (Brigeland, Dilulio, & Morrison, 2006; Rumberger, 1987). Research also noted that the decision by students to drop out normally occurred over time, often beginning in elementary school (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Rapp-Paglicci, 2004; Rumberger, 1987). Teenage pregnancy and parenthood is considered a risk factor which can be analyzed. Pregnant or parenting students represent twenty-six percent of students who leave school without graduating (Bridgeland et al,
2006; Rumberger, 1987; Woods, 1995). Through the voices of students who are pregnant while in high school, factors that caused them to remain in school may be identified.

A study commissioned by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation warned the nation of the dropout problem in America’s public high schools (Bridgeland, Dululio, & Morrison, 2006). The study drew attention to the dangers of the silent epidemic and implored educators and political leaders to heed the voice of dropouts themselves to explore a panacea for this national epidemic. The dropout crisis deserves national attention as large numbers of dropouts are linked with devastating social costs and consequences to society (Hoyle & Collier, 2006). Economically, society as a whole greatly suffers when students leave school prior to obtaining a high school diploma. Hoyle and Collier report that dropouts are a significant financial burden to the U.S. government as approximately $260 billion are lost annually in wages, taxes, and community services.

This research study will provide an in-depth qualitative analysis of twelve Hispanic females who are pregnant or parenting in high school and are enrolled to complete high school in spite of their “at-risk” factors of pregnancy. It is important to educators across the nation to consider why students remain in school and what support systems are in place to keep them in school. This research will provide a voice for teen parents involved in the educational environment who “might not otherwise gain the attention of practitioners, policymakers, and researchers” (Harvard Educational Review, 2007).

Because Hispanics are the largest growing segment of the U.S. population, it is important that research, such as this present study, be conducted to determine what
factors may be involved in the educational success of this group. The study will examine the lived experiences, resilience and motivating factors that contribute to the success of high school completion of Hispanic teen pregnant/teen mothers that have not been explained or explored in previous quantitative or qualitative research. While there is a small amount of research on many of the issues involving Hispanic females in the school system and even fewer studies that discuss the socio-cultural, resilience, persistence, and gender role expectation factors that contribute to the Hispanic female’s academic success, none is focused solely on Hispanic parenting females. For example, Ginorio & Huston (2001) stated that Hispanic females in public schools are confronted with many issues on a daily basis: high dropout rates, low enrollment in advanced placement (AP) classes, exam taking, low grades, gender role issues, possible selves and/or self-esteem, and family obligations, issues with parental discord, and issues with acculturation.

**Definitions**

There is need to define concepts related to the study. Therefore, to aid in a clear understanding of the subject matter, the following definitions have been provided:

- **Essence** - “the inner essential nature of a thing, the true being of a thing. Essence is that what makes a thing what it is and without which it would not be what it is” (van Manen, 1997, p.197).
- **Hermeneutics** - covers a theory of building insight and interpretation through examination of linguistic expressions in constructs, patterns, memories, perceptions, patterns, and themes. Hermeneutics stands as a philosophy that accepts the truth of what a participant states, no matter if it presents objective truth or not, describing the different perspectives on reality (van Manen, 1990, 2002).
• *Hermeneutic circle* - a concept that includes a constant interplay of parts that lead to a joining of ideas of philosophy, perspectives, implications, and interpretation (Jasper, 2004).

• *Hermeneutic phenomenology* - a qualitative method that examines the lived experiences of study participants through the accumulation of written data (Jasper, 2004).

• *Lived experience* - immediate, natural, fodder for reflection, an ego starting point that can emerge as a relived experience through reflection (van Manen, 1990).

• *Participants* - the participants in a phenomenological study are people who share their personal actions, insights, and reflections (van Manen, 1990).

• *Resiliency* - the ability to thrive, mature, and increase competence in the face of adverse circumstances or obstacles. These circumstances may be severe and infrequent or chronic and consistent. In order to thrive, mature, and increase competence, a person must draw on all of their resources: biological, psychological, and environmental. Resilience, therefore, is a multifaceted phenomenon (Gordon-Rouse, 2001, p.461).

• *Risk factors* - risk factors are defined as stressful situations and adversity such as teenage pregnancy, chronic poverty, child abuse, neglect, marginality, divorce, violent environments, and prenatal stress. Risk factors can have potential external and internal barriers to student development and academic learning (West & Verhaagen, n.d.).
Problem Statement

Among female high school students, the incidence of dropping out and/or becoming pregnant during high school negatively impacts education outcomes. Although a high school female who becomes pregnant and drops out can return to school, these events, most of the time, reduce her likelihood of completing high school. While personal, social, and academic factors provide quantitative evidence that impact the educational outcomes of a pregnant or teen mother, what evidence may researchers gather from the perspectives of the students? The problem is Hispanic females are second largest population for teen pregnancy (NCPTP, 2006). The birth rates for Hispanic females’ ages 15-19 in 2000 was 93%. Seventy-three percent of Hispanic females are not married. The subsequent teen births for this population are 24% (NCPTP, 2006).

Many Hispanic students, upon entering the public school systems, are academically ill-prepared (Freeman, 2004). This is especially true for Hispanic females who are often overlooked and undervalued in the public school system. Consequently, these students do not pursue higher education. The reasons Hispanic females fail to move forward with their education include a lack of motivation, educational advisors, and school experience, coupled with the unique challenges they face (Unger-Palmer, 2003). Despite adverse challenges, unique cultural expectations, and obligations, some Hispanic females continue to thrive and achieve academic success. As resilient students, successful Hispanic females have the ability to recover from drastic, traumatic changes and/or misfortune in their lives. This study will examine the resilience and motivating factors that contribute to the academic success of Hispanic teen mothers while they are in
high school.

School policy makers should be taking the time to conduct qualitative research that explores the attitudes and perceptions of pregnant or teen mothers who stay and complete high school. By doing so, educational leaders can work towards creating appropriate programs and activities that assist pregnant or teen mothers to overcome economic challenges, and promote an improved quality of their personal lives so they can complete high school. Taking the time to hear the voice of the students through the use of interviews and focus group sessions allows the researcher to see the lived experiences of high school teen pregnancy.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the factors that contribute to the success of Hispanic pregnant or teen mothers who stay in high school. This qualitative hermeneutical phenomenological research will hear the voice of teen mothers who are enrolled in high school in an effort to understand the obstacles and challenges they face during their high school years. The qualitative study will occur through collecting and analyzing individual student interviews, focus group interviews, and follow-up interviews of selected Hispanic pregnant or parenting teen mothers enrolled in high school. Through the qualitative study, answers to questions such as the following will be answered: What observations, interventions and subsequent issues of parenthood might teen parents share about while they are in high school? What support and assistance could be provided by the education system to promote the participation of teen parents in school-related activities, assist teen parents to overcome economic challenges, and promote an improved quality of their personal lives so they complete high school?
Significance of the Study

The study will explore how personal, social, and academic characteristics impact Hispanic teenage mothers and their education. The study will also examine how individual characteristics and areas of involvement or lack thereof are related to persistence. There is a large need to understand the demands of teenage parenting in relation to staying in school.

Many studies documenting the effects of adolescent pregnancy on young female mothers are available to researchers (Kaufman, 1996; McCullough & Scherman, 1991; Stewart, 2003; Xie, Cairns, & Cairns, 2001). Various studies evaluating pregnancy prevention programs and their effects on adolescent pregnancy rates have also been conducted (Hockaday, Crase, Shelley & Stockdale, 2000; Manlove, 1998; Manlove, Terry-Humen, Papillo, Franzetta, Williams & Ryan, 2002; Stewart, 2003; Yampolskaya, Brown, & Vargo, 2004). Studies on career aspirations are numerous (Arbona & Novy, 1991; Khallad, 2000; Rojewski, 1996) with many focusing on regular education students, rural youth, or special needs students. However, few studies (Camarena, Minor, Melmer, & Ferrie, 1998; Drummond & Hansford, 1992; Hallenga, Aber, & Rhodes, 2002) exist on the career aspirations and educational successes of adolescent females who are pregnant or parenting.

According to Vives, (2001) report for the National Organization for Women, Hispanics are dropping out of school at a much higher rate than any other female group. Vives (2001) cited the reasons why Hispanics leave school: teenage pregnancy, marriage, cultural gender role obligations, stereotyping, familial demands, and economic status. Other contributing factors for the dropout rate increase are attitudes toward Hispanic
females by their teachers and peers, lack of positive role models, and peer pressure. According to the final report of the President’s Advisory Commission (2003), Mexican immigrants experience nearly twice the dropout rate (61%) compared to American Hispanic subgroups. Although both male and female Hispanic students face incredible challenges in the American school system, female Hispanic students face even greater challenges for several reasons. First, there is a difference in the treatment of Hispanic females throughout their educational experience that limits their potential academically, psychologically, emotionally, and economically, thus impacting possible future career choices. Second, Hispanic gender role expectations and stereotypes do not permit flexibility for Hispanic females to fully achieve their potential in and outside of the classroom setting. Because Hispanics are the largest growing segment of the U.S. population, it is important that research, such as this study, be conducted to determine what factors may contribute to the educational success of this group. Furthermore, this study will focus on Hispanic teen pregnancy and parenthood because they face even more roadblocks on their way to educational success than their female peers. As minority children, Hispanic teen parents are at a disadvantage. Freeman (2002) noted that minority children are more likely to live in low-income families. The author states Hispanic as the largest group participating in a free or reduced school lunch program. Hispanic and Black children are more likely than other racial groups to be concentrated in low-income schools where they are less likely to receive a quality education (Freeman, 2002). According to Freeman (2002), in cities, 64% of Hispanic children were in the highest-poverty schools. These numbers show that Hispanic students are at a disadvantage compared to other ethnic groups in America (Freeman, 2002).
A study on education conducted by the Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options (HCREO, 2001) found that Hispanics have the lowest rate of participation in early childhood development programs and 30% of United States Hispanics do not have a high school degree. The study also included that Hispanic dropout rates have remained between 30% over the past 25 years and are two point five times the rate for Blacks and almost four times the rate for White non-Hispanics. Finally, the study that Hispanic parents believe that overcrowded schools, lack of qualified teachers (for teaching Hispanic children), and lowered academic expectations discourage their children inclusive of school bureaucracies discouraging parental involvement.

This study will differ from other studies conducted in the area of teenage pregnancy because the focus will be on the lived experiences of Hispanic female teenage pregnancies or teenage parenting in an American educational system. The study, The Silent Epidemic: Perspective of High School Dropouts (Bridgeland et al., 2006) was conducted in order to “hear” the students’ version of the dropout problem. Within the report, it was conveyed that many of the dropouts blamed themselves for their decision-making and took full responsibility, while others pointed out what schools might have been able to do to help them complete their education. Because Hispanics are the largest growing segment of the U.S. population, it is important that research, such as this present study, be conducted to determine what factors may be involved in the educational successful of this group. This study will also focus on dropout risk factors Hispanic students’ face on their way to educational success. From these findings, educators can recognize the importance of self-efficacy and its effect on educational resilience. Therefore, the findings will clarify the necessity for incorporating curriculum beginning...
in kindergarten and extending through high school to increase self-efficacy in Hispanic females. Secondary programs can use these findings to develop tools for pregnancy prevention for females from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Educators, social workers, health professionals, and parents can use results of this study to create long-term secondary and community outreach programs aimed at providing academic and workforce skills to young Hispanic females to better prepare them for success in postsecondary education or with attaining their future career aspirations. Educational leaders may use the study as a guide towards future research.

Research Questions

The following questions will serve as a guide this study:

1. What factors influence Hispanic teen mothers to remain in high school through graduation?
2. What personal challenges are experienced by Hispanic pregnant teens or teen mothers that impact the completion of education?
3. What are the lived experiences and factors of persistence and resilience that contribute to Hispanic pregnant teens and teen mothers’ academic success?
4. What are the educational aspirations of pregnant or parenting Hispanic females?

Research Plan

The research study is to use qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological method to hear the voice of teen mothers who are enrolled in high school. This method will help understand the obstacles and challenges Hispanic teen mothers face during their high
school years. Through the qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological method, participants will be able to share their experiences affecting their choices to stay in school. Data for the study will be collected through extensive structured individual interviews and focus group interviews that will be audio taped. All interviews will be hand transcribed for accuracy. The questions used for the individual and focus groups interviews will be developed around Rumberger’s (1987) three categories of dropout reasons: school-related or academic, personal, and economic. In addition, a set of questions for the individual and focus group interviews will initially be developed by the researcher. Each question will be designed to understand the thinking and feelings of the participants. The initial questions will be justified in writing with a brief rationale as to the importance of each question.

The data will be analyzed and categorized. I will analyze and code all interviews in order to find commonalities, patterns, differences and themes (Esterberg, 2001; Seidman, 2006). Common themes will be recognized and emerging patterns will be the goal of the analysis, and provide reliability. Full transcriptions will be returned to the participants for review for accuracy, which assists in reliability and validity. Final interpretation of collected data and the implications of the results will begin once thematic saturation has been reached (Esterberg, 2001: Merriam, 2002; Seidman, 2006).
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review research of high school dropouts has an abundance of information as to why students drop out of school. However, less is known about why those “at-risk” who are involved as teen parents in high school might choose to remain in school. Furthermore, while there is some research that applies to the socio-cultural, resilience/persistence, and gender role expectation factors related to academic success, none is focused solely on Hispanic parenting females.

Research on Hispanic cultural values, attitudes and behaviors that influence sexual and contraceptive behavior has shown that sexuality is often a taboo subject and that parental communication regarding sexuality is often lacking in Hispanic homes (Driscoll, 2001). At the same time, Hispanic culture supports early and high fertility, as well as the belief that early motherhood and continued education are incompatible (Erickson, 1994). Hispanic culture does play an important role in understanding Hispanic teenage pregnancy, yet information about effective pregnancy prevention programs that are aligned with the cultural experiences and values of Hispanic youth is lacking.

This literature review, will examine the related literature concerning social, economic, and academic factors contributing to the high school dropout. The chapter will also provide the research on teen pregnancy and resiliency. The theoretical framework will shed the light on the theoretical foundations in which the study was designed.
Conceptual or Theoretical Framework

Erickson’s theory helps identify important social influences that will shape behavior in the development stages of youth. Many social influences shape youth behavior such as teenage pregnancy and high school dropout. The Social Cognitive Theory examines the development of career and academic interests, career choice, and performance outcomes (Albert & Luzzo, 1999; Gore Jr. & Leuwerke, 2000). This theory describes numerous personal variables and their interaction with other aspects of the individual and the environment to form the career development path (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000). A guiding theory for this study is the Social Cognitive Career Theory, as it provides an understanding of the formation of occupational choices (Lent, Hackett, & Brown, 1996).

Resiliency theory is about the ability to deal with “disruptive and stressful challenges, learning coping skills, and becoming more effective in dealing with life events in a way that promotes healthy well-being for everyone” (Henry & Milstein, 2004, p. 262). Resiliency focuses on students’ strengths, problem-solving skills and promotion of positive attitudes.

Erick Erickson’s theory. Many social influences will shape youth behavior such as teenage pregnancy and high school dropout. Erick Erickson’s psychoanalytic theory identified important social influences on development across the life span (Erickson, 1994; Miller, 2002). Adolescent mothers may either establish their identity and maturation or suffer identity diffusion. Physical maturation has personal and social responsibilities for each individual and involves new skills and the ability to meet
society’s increasing demands at each point of development (Miller, 2002). Various levels of maturation identified were parental care, schools, social organizations, and occupations. As an individual’s maturation level increases, their ability to adapt to the environment and establish identity also increases. Success at levels leads to maturation; however identity diffusion may form when individuals struggle with moral decisions. Teen parents may be the result of identity diffusion as most pregnancies are unplanned and considered accidental. Pregnancy may have stemmed from poor choices in relation to alcohol and drug usage and the influence of peers who are socially engaged in sexual activity.

Social cognitive theory. Bandura (1986) studied the period of adolescence and the life span into adulthood related to behavior modeling. Bandura (1986) believed that youth do not inherit tendencies but learn and imitate the behavior of others. Individuals learn by observational learning, the connection between environment-person-behavior, understanding acquired behavior as complex, and through self-efficacy (Miller, 2002). Self-efficacy is defined as a student’s perception of his/her competence to deal with his/her environment that ultimately may shape his/her behavior and situational outcomes. Self-efficacy is positively related to academic performance. Alfassi (2003) examined Bandura’s model on academic achievement with students at-risk in a remedial high school. The study evaluated role practices in self-efficacy beliefs to increase students’ academic achievement and confidence. Results revealed that students who participated in conventional remedial instruction programs suffered more with poor performance on achievement tests than students who participated in a structured academic program. The conclusion of the study suggested that students benefit more when educational efforts are
focused on raising students’ confidence levels. There has been a reported need to make use of the practical application of self-efficacy to aid in educational settings (Alfassi, 2003).

**Resiliency theory.** The Resiliency Theory framework will be examined in relation to teen parenthood: understanding students’ academic, social, and personal influences to enhance knowledge for educators, the community, and the family. Information will be gathered to explore why and what factors contribute to teenage parents who continued and graduated from high school. The expectation is that the students who continued have higher resilience and a different perception of their support factors than students who discontinued their academic pursuits.

Resiliency Theory is a developmental psychological perspective for viewing adversity and success (Gonzales, 2003; Brindis, Sattley, & Mamo, 2005). Bernard (2004) defined resilience as the capacity all youth have for healthy development and successful learning. According to Scott-Fisher and Cambell Forrester (2000) the existence of resilient children is a long-term developmental process that involves a systemic change in the family, school and community. There are three major variables; protective factors, risk factors and the resilient youth (Gonzales, 2003).

West & Verhaagen (n.d.) proposed that protective factors increase the likelihood of positive outcomes for youth, and the involvement of three or more risk factors may present a negative outcome. Risk factors are identified as stressful situations and adversity such as teenage pregnancy, chronic poverty, child abuse, neglect, marginality, divorce, violent environments, and prenatal stress. Risk factors can have potential external and internal barriers to student development and academic learning (West &
Verhaagen, n.d.). External factors serve as the primary causes for most learning, behavior, and emotional problems involving the neighborhood, family, school and peers.

The third variable is the resilient youth (Benard, 1991; Benard, 1995). Resilient youth show strong and positive characteristics of social competence, problem solving, independence, sense of purpose, motivation, and high realistic goals (Ormrod, 2006). Resilient youth also have identified support persons as family, peers, and teachers they trust and can discuss difficulties when needed. Chavkin and Gonzales (2000) identified five major protective factors for teens from peers, families, schools, and the community: (a) supportive relationships from adults and school personnel, (b) student characteristics such as self-esteem, motivation, and assumed parental responsibility, (c) family factors such as parental support and school involvement, (d) community involvement, and (e) academic success and social skills training. Teenage parents with greater support factors are more likely to remain in school despite problems with parenting, academia, and social environments. Resilient individuals have strong systemic support and positive internal factors (Bernard, 1995).

History is repetitive with stories of survivorship, stories such as the horrors of the Holocaust, enslavement of African-Americans’ ancestors, the Japanese internment camps, and relocation of Native American nations, as well as the boycott of the California grapes initiated by Hispanic migrant workers. Stories such as these all have one thing in common—the persons who survived learned to be resilient. Modern research has provided enough knowledge to develop and create a clear lens through which to view these stories. Bernard’s (1993) theoretical profile of a resilient child is defined as “one who works well, plays well, loves well and expects well”. Bernard and

Social competence requires qualities such as responsiveness and the ability to bring forth positive responses from others such as empathy, flexibility, caring, and a sense of humor. The second characteristic is problem-solving skills that include the ability to think abstractly and to reflect and find alternative solutions for both cognitive and social problems. The third characteristic, autonomy, is very dominant among resilient children. This characteristic allows them to have a sense of one’s own identity and the ability to act independently, as well as being able to detach oneself from distress and maintain outside pursuits and satisfactions. The final characteristic is a sense of purpose, such as goal setting, educational aspirations, persistence, hopefulness, and a sense of a great future, all of which are very deep-seated.

Bernard (1993) recommends avoiding suppressing budding resilient characteristics of students by schools nurturing a climate to help foster the development of resiliency. Many schools, families, and their communities protect those who are growing up in adverse situations by providing an environment that is caring and supportive, positive, and provides continuous opportunities for participation. These three characteristics are considered “protective factors” that are part of resilient students’ lives. With the multitude of familial stressors to which students are exposed every day, a caring environment within the school has become their protection against the daily uncertainty they are exposed to in a stressful world.

Bernard (1993) also found when schools establish high expectations for all
students and give them the support necessary to live up to them then the schools have incredibly high rates of academic success. First, when students are exposed to a curriculum that is rich in variety and encourages success in all areas, it helps communicate that students’ strengths are desired and valued.

Schools that are encouraging do not rely on standardized tests that assess only a few types of intelligence. Encouraging schools use multiple approaches such as self-reflection and authentic assessments, all of which help validate the different types of intelligences many resilient students possess (Bernard, 1993). Schools are the most important vehicle for students’ motivation and learning. By building upon successful promotion of resiliency, schools help build motivation and interests through varied curriculum that encourages cooperation rather than competition.

How schools group students in the classroom and within the school reflects upon the school’s student expectations. “An enormous body of research points to the consistent positive academic and social outcomes of heterogeneous, cooperative learning groups for all students, especially low achievers” (Bernard, 1993, p. 47). Finally, schools should provide students with the opportunities to get involved meaningfully and help encourage a sense of responsibility and high expectations within the school.

Resilience is the ability to thrive, mature, and increase competence in the face of adverse circumstances or obstacles. These circumstances may be severe and infrequent or chronic and consistent. In order to thrive, mature, and increase competence, a person must draw on all of their resources: biological, psychological, and environmental. Resilience, therefore, is a multifaceted phenomenon (Gordon-Rouse, 2001, p.461).
Dropout Crisis

The dropout crisis has received national attention as large numbers of dropouts are linked with devastating social costs and consequences to society (Hoyle & Collier, 2006). Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation warned our nation that is in the midst of a silent epidemic-- the dropout problem in America’s public high schools. Their study drew attention to dangers of the silent epidemic and implored educators and political leaders to heed the voice of dropouts themselves to explore a panacea for this national epidemic. Hoyle and Collier (2006) report that the dropout crisis is an American social tragedy with regard to economic global dominance as large percentage of dropouts are adversely impacting America’s ability to sustain the medical, educational, and overall social needs of its community. In addition, dropouts typically exhibit (a) higher rates of unemployment, (b) poorer physical and mental health, (c) dependence on government programs, (d) single parent status with children who also dropout, and (e) higher divorce rates (Sterns & Glennie, 2006).

Above and beyond income status of these individuals, early academic achievement, and having a learning disability, Blum (2005) proposed that a lack of solid adult/ student connection may lead students to lose interest in school. Blum advised that an unsafe, unsupportive school environment void of parental and community involvement, may contribute to overall school disengagement or a lack of connectedness. Students who were connected to at least one caring adult in school were less likely to become pregnant or use drugs.

The Gates study drew attention to emphasizing the need to pay close attention to the authentic voice and personal experiences of marginalized students (Creswell, 2005) to
obtain new knowledge from dropouts to search for new answers. In effect, French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (Benvenuto, 1986) introduced a deconstructive lens to search for new truth to understand the dropout crisis by considering new ways of looking at the same old thing to obtain new answers. Influenced by the processes of phenomenology, he actively listened to authentic voice of students without predetermined notions to gain new knowledge to solve the silent epidemic. Lacan presented a guide for the Gates study to answer questions about a former educational issue by exploring new circumstances revealed by student voices. It illuminated the aforementioned ethical considerations--primacy of student experience and voice and spoke to the possibility that the voice of dropouts themselves provided the best picture to understand why students quit school. Their main desire was to give dropouts’ stories and insights a voice through a phenomenological research study. This form of qualitative inquiry accentuated the essences to shared experience of being a high school dropout in America’s public schools (Merriam, 2002). Furthermore, Strike, Haller, and Soltis (2005) advised educators to embrace and explore ideas and beliefs resulting from student voice and permit them to be challenged in order to effectively solve problems in our educational system and refine and improve ideas.

To analyze the silent epidemic, Henry Louis Gates (Sim & Van Loon, 2005) proposed a poststructuralist-postmodernist lens to consider the importance of student voice and experience based on the theory of Black criticism. He offered an advocacy lens to gain insight into the African-American experience in America. There is a need to gain insight into the hidden experiences of minority people when seeking to design interventions to address the national dropout problem in America. Racial/cultural factors
propose ethnic and racial issues that may be contributing to the noteworthy percentage of students leaving school. When considering ethnic and racial issues, current statistics indicate significant findings regarding dropout rates. Nearly 40% of African-American and Latino students attend a high school in which the senior class is consistently less than 60% of the size of the freshmen class four years earlier (Balfanz & Legters, 2001), yet the federal government only budgets $1 million to monitor dropout rates (Orfield, 2004).

When analyzing these well-known statistics from the lens of Black or Latino criticism, do people have an awareness of embedded racism that is contributing to the silent epidemic?

**Familial Background**

Commonalities in background patterns exist within the teen parent population. Among them is poverty, sexual abuse, physical abuse, violence, generational teen pregnancies, and poor literacy skills or poor academic progress (Lerman, 1997/1998). Generational and situational poverty are important factors in determining the risk level of young teen females in relation to pregnancy. Payne (2003) defined generational poverty as “being in poverty for two generations or longer” (p. 10). In comparison, situational poverty is “a shorter time and is caused by circumstance” (Payne, 2003, p. 10). The National Center for Children in Poverty (as cited in Center for Assessment and Policy Development, 1999, Section II, para.4) reported, “forty-seven percent of all poor children under the age of six had an adolescent parent at birth.” Further data indicated the poverty level for an unwed teen mother without a high school education is 78% (Kids Count, 2004). In the United States, there are over 846,000 teenage mothers (Kids Count, 2004).

Predictors of early pregnancy may also include poor literacy skills, poor academic progress, and low self-esteem (Lerman, 1997/1998). Limited exposure to books and
cultural activities weaken literacy skills. Therefore, Lerman (1997/1998) encouraged
teen mothers to read to their babies on a regular basis. One way to begin closing the
achievement gap is to promote family literacy (Florida State University Center for
Prevention and Early Intervention Policy, 2002). To fill in the gap in the teen parent’s
background knowledge, teachers, caregivers, and support staff must be consistent in the
the connection between learning-disabled students who have low reading and writing
skills and the teen who consistently exhibits low academic achievement. Lerman’s
research indicated these young students were more apt to become teen parents and
embrace success with motherhood. An expert in the field of poverty and education, Ruby
Payne (2003) supported Lerman’s findings with students from impoverished
backgrounds.

Sexual abuse, physical abuse, and violence are additional indicators of adolescent
pregnancy. Albert, Brown, and Flanigan (2003) reported that “more than one in ten girls
who first have had sex before age 15 describe it as non-voluntary and many more
describe it as relatively unwanted” (p. 14). Ninety percent of sexually active youth
between the ages of 12 to 14 participated in delinquent behaviors, including violence

The effects of teen pregnancy on the children are staggering. It is estimated that
daughters born to a teen mother were 22% more likely to become teen mothers
themselves thus creating generational teen pregnancy, while the sons born to a teen
mother were 13% more likely to end up in prison (National Campaign to Prevent Teen
Pregnancy, 2002).
**Dropout Research**

Among high school dropout research, a high number of dropouts are teen parents. Educators as well as teen parents support the hypothesis that the majority of pregnant and parenting teens have histories of poor school attendance or non-attendance. This impedes academic performance as evidenced on standardized testing (Center for Assessment and Policy Development, 2004).

When Payne (2003) discussed the hidden rules among each social class, she examined the views and attitudes of the impoverished towards education, time, world-views, and motivation. While other educational experts searched for educational strategies to encourage students to remain in school, Payne sought to understand the links between behaviors, attitudes, and actions. Payne’s position dictated that education was respected but “not as reality” (Payne, 2003 p. 59). Furthermore, those in poverty made decisions based on the need to survive; relationships, and entertainment (Payne, 2003, p. 59). Understanding the power of poverty’s hidden rules on behaviors, attitudes, and actions allows educators and community members to come to concrete conclusions concerning the high dropout rate among pregnant and parenting teens. Teachers have the ability to provide structure and address cognitive deficiencies in students of poverty. However, based on Payne’s teachings, it would be illogical to expend effort encouraging teen parents to remain in school to increase earning potential and, therefore, be able to provide her child or children the opportunity to grow up in a financially stable environment. When the teen has only known poverty, she is unable to relate to such lofty goals. However, by making short-term connections, such as how current knowledge and skills are reflected in the amount of pay received in the workplace, the teen mother may
be more inclined to remain in school. Payne (2003) suggested schools provide a venue for impoverished students to learn about middle class culture and the hidden rules of the middle-class.

Conversely, Barton (2006) emphasized the direct correlation between grades and dropping out of school. His concern was with the increase in the number of students being retained in the 9th grade. Instead of relying on the U.S. Census data, Barton chose to rely on completion rate data. The census data included the Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED) with the regular high school diploma program within four years. Completion rates have been falling throughout the United States (Barton, 2006, p. 16). In 2003, there were 1.1 million dropouts between the ages of 16 to 19. Only 4% of these dropouts were actively employed (Barton, 2006, p. 16).

The connection between Barton’s discourse and Payne’s research is unmistakable. Students are dropping out of school at an earlier age, resulting from low academic achievement and social issues, including pregnancy. The cycle of generational poverty is difficult to break, and without an educational background to increase the level of workplace skills needed in our global society, situational poverty may very well become generational.

Author and teen parent researcher Evelyn Lerman (1997/1998) provides a reminder that the typical teen parent demonstrates a developmental language lag and is below grade level in reading ability. The combination of the two deficits results in the inability to articulate thoughts and feelings; therefore, the teen experiences difficulty in negotiating challenging situations and may become more physical in her behavior. The National School Boards Association (NSBA, 2000) supported Lerman’s findings and
described the typical teen parents as one who has experienced low academic success, has a history of poor school attendance, possesses low expectations of herself, and resides in transitional communities where the rates of poverty, single parenthood, and low educational levels are high.

For the teen parent, the discovery approach is more kinesthetic than auditory or visual. Lerman (1997/1998) asserted that right-brain activities assist in the retrieval of information stored in the left hemisphere of the brain. Such activities pull out reading, listening, and speaking skills. The use of tangible items, especially food, serves as a persuasive motivational and skill-building strategy. Imagery connects pictures to words. As students make real-world connections, vocabulary and comprehension are strengthened. Activities relevant to the lives of the teen parent increase school attendance, motivation, and active learning. Therefore, instructional and curriculum factors impact whether teen parents remain in school or dropout. These strategies are supported by Marzano’s four stages of the Cognitive System (Retrieval, Comprehension, Analysis, and Knowledge Utilization), whereby students remember information instead of focusing on where to find it (Marzano, 2004).

Marzano’s model directs instructional planning and permits the students to create and apply background knowledge. In this way, students increase understanding based on their individual experiences. Relevancy is a key issue to academic success for the at-risk student. Activities that students find relevant to their lives increase motivation and spark a desire to learn. The connection to background knowledge and the expansion of vocabulary through imagery and discussion address the reading comprehension (Marzano, 2003). The results in higher achievement within all content areas as teen
parents are able to transition to material from school to their personal lives. As achievement increases, the amount of teen parents who choose to leave school decreases. Factors that impact education are further discussed in this section.

**School factor research.** Schools can exert their influence on student outcomes in a variety of ways. School aspects take account of national and local school policies that may be significantly impacting the increasing number of students leaving school. National policies requiring high stakes testing might be pressuring students to quit school (Littky, 2002). According to Littky (2002), students that fail to pass high–stakes testing may quit school because once they get a low score on an aptitude test they may lose motivation to pass the tests. The high stakes testing dilemma is especially significant for school districts with large percentage of minority population. Furthermore, researchers Finn et al., (2005); Neild & Balfanz, (2001); Roderick (1993); Rumberger (1995) revealed that retention is a powerful factor to push students out of school. It is interesting to note that some large urban school systems are endorsing policies to use high-stakes tests to decide which students need to be held back in their current grade (Eaton, 2007). Though the No Child Left Behind legislation was to promote academic progress and improve graduation rates, policies resulting from the law to use the test to retain students may be further exacerbating the dropout problem. With the mandates from NCLB, school leaders are challenged to find a cure to the silent epidemic that is running rampant through the nation’s high schools.

Disciplinary policies and school factors as well may be discouraging students from continuing with their formal education (Stearns & Gleanie, 2006). Students who miss a certain number of days are sometimes suspended from school or taken to court
which may lead them to fall further behind. Consequently, students who fail to show up for school are often denied the opportunity to come to school. The disciplinary policy may send a confusing message to students regarding the importance of staying in school.

**Cultural factor research.** Racial/cultural factors propose ethnic and racial issues that may be contributing to the noteworthy percentage of students leaving school. When considering ethnic and racial issues, current statistics indicate significant findings regarding dropout rates. Researchers (Orfield, 2001; Singham, 2005; Murray & Naranjo, 2008) have consistently reported that high school graduation rates nationwide are approximately 75-78% for White students; 50-56% for Black students; and 54% for Hispanic students. Nearly 40% of Black and Hispanic students attend a high school in which the senior class is consistently less than 60% of the size of the freshman class four years earlier (Balfanz & Legter, 2001). In another study, Murray and Naranjo, (2008) reported startling findings that the lifetime earnings for African-American dropouts were estimated to be $100,000-$200,000 less than White dropouts. Black dropouts are often detached from the school culture and incapable of achieving an adequate level of comfort and success (Brooks-Williams, 1987). They also failed to view a quality education as a means to achieve greater mobility and success in the future (Richardson & Gerlach, 1980).

Ogbu (1992) distinguishes between an acceptance of behaviors oriented to school success among ethnic minorities that voluntarily migrated (e.g. Europeans and Asians) and a rejection of those behaviors by those who came to the U.S. involuntarily (e.g. Blacks and early Mexican immigrants because they were often perceived as threatening culture and/or identity). Rumberger notes the absence of empirical evidence supporting
Ogbu’s theory, but admits that cultural differences are evident. He refers to empirical evidence presented by Steinberg, Dornbusch and Brown (1992) demonstrating that “Asians are most successful in school than other ethnic groups because of two cultural beliefs: (1) a belief that not getting a good education will hurt their chances for future success (rather than a belief that a good education will hurt their chances); and (2) a belief that academic success comes from effort rather than ability” (Rumberger, 2001, p. 24-25). Rumberger goes on to argue that, “Other scholars have also found cultural differences in achievement motivation”, citing 1995 work by Kao and Tienda and a 1995 study by Suarez-Orozco.

The periods of withdrawal from school appear to raise the likelihood of dropping out again. Rumberger (2001) cites a study by Klerman and Karoly (1994) in which among 37 percent of males aged 25 to 32 in 1990 that had dropped out of high school for at least a three month period, 14 percent became permanent dropouts. They found that a high number of returning dropouts ultimately opt for alternative certification. One consequence of obtaining an equivalent education by certification is lower enrollment in post-secondary institutions and longer durations of unemployment than among high school graduates (Rumberger, 2001, p. 8).

Rumberger states that although Hispanics showed much higher dropout rates than non-Hispanic Whites or Blacks, those rates include the 40 percent of foreign-born that did not attend a U.S. high school. Although it is unknown what percent of the foreign born are still of high school age and if young foreign-born Hispanics expect to have a good life in the U.S., their level of educational attainment does matter to them, to the economy, to society or to the taxpayers. Rumberger also does not distinguish between...
Ogbu’s voluntary/involuntary migration theory as it affects attitudes and the effect of discrimination according to skin color on resources and attitudes.

In “returns to educations” research, which focuses on human capital, the cost of dropping out is generally measures in terms of lost wages or earnings. There is a broad consensus in the literature, largely based on empirical evidence, that dropping out of high school leads to higher unemployment and lower wages or lifetime earnings. Obtaining a GED in place of a high school diploma yields similar results (Rumberger and Lamb, 2003). Thus pursuing or obtaining a GED was considered equivalent to dropping out of high school until recently (2011). The state of Texas is now honoring the GED in order to allow students to continue higher education.

Personal factor research. Individual factors suggest that youth who leave school are pushed or pulled out of school (Stearns & Glennie, 2006). They do not typically make spur-of-the-moment decisions to drop out of school. Rather, from a developmental perspective, there is a clear and distinct pathway to leaving school (Finn, Gerber, & Boyd-Zaharias, 2005; Roderick, 1993; Stearns & Glennie, 2006). When closely analyzing individual push-out factors, Fine (1991) and Murray and Naranjo (2008) indicated that being poor was the greatest predictor of leaving school. Still, Roderick (1993), Rumberger (1995) and Neild and Balfanz (2001) and Finn et al., (2005) suggested that grade retention was the most single powerful “signal” of dropping out of school. They reported that retained students were more than three times more likely to quit school than students who never repeated a grade. For example, first-time freshmen who were not promoted to tenth grade exhibited a dropout rate close to 60%. Though there seemed to be widespread consensus among teachers that grade retention was an
effective intervention to improve the academic performance of students, Roderick (1993) found that youths with early grade retention performed no better than their peers who were placed in grade. In fact, he found that knowledge of being overage for grade during the adolescent years, adversely impacted students’ social emotional status and contributed to feelings of isolation, poor self-esteem, and poor attitudes towards school.

Kaplan, Peck, and Kaplan (1997) examined the significance of academia on self-esteem and dropout. Poor academic performance was found related to high school dropout. Quality of grades is an influential factor that affects student’s return to pursue academic aspirations. The study examined 1,195 seventh graders from 36 junior high schools. The factors examined were negative academic experiences, perceived rejection by teachers and peers, resistance toward school, motivation, and peer involvement. Negative academic experiences are positively related to self-esteem. As students experience a higher percentage of negative ordeals, their self-esteem is likely to suffer and become problematic. Students with negative academic experiences will likely feel rejected in the school environment and internalize these experiences by labeling themselves as “dysfunctional” or “abnormal”. Students who drop out are more likely to report feeling marginalized and alienated from their peers than students who persist.

Researchers have studied the cognitive levels of students in relation to resiliency (Gordon, 1996 as cited in Chavkin & Gonzales, 2000). Their findings suggested that resilient students had more faith in their cognitive abilities and excelled academically compared to their counterparts. The advantages for teens completing high school are increased personal power, further academic involvement, successful employment, and adequate income (Lewis, Ross, & Mirowsky, 1999). There have been numerous
promising programs to build resiliency that have helped youth, programs such as Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). Programs as AVID have resulted in higher college awareness and enrollment, increased support and academic scholarships, increased attendance rates, reduced teenage pregnancies, better test scores, and fewer disciplinary problems.

Behavior problems account for some dropouts (Hess, Lyons, Corsino, & Wells, 1989; Finn, 1989). The ability to conform and concentrate are important skills for success in school. Samuels (2008) reported that among all students nationally in 2002-2003, those with behavioral problems such as hyperactivity had lower high school completion rates than any other students with disabilities (including disabilities such as autism, deafness or blindness). When frustration leads to low self-esteem, behavioral problems arise. These behavioral problems interfere further with school success, creating a downward spiral leading to a voluntary dropout or expulsion (Finn, 1989). Drawing on Hess et al. (1989), Finn alternatively argues that weak participation (in the classroom, socially, or in extracurricular activities) itself leads to poor school performance and as alienation deepens, the risk of dropping out increases.

One indication of disengagement with school could be attendance levels. Students with poor attendance accounted for nearly half of all dropouts in Texas public schools in 1996-97. The rate was slightly lower for Hispanics (TEA, 1997). Truancy was the most cited reason for dropping out of school in Texas during in 1990s (TEA, 1995, 1997, 1999). Activities such as drug or alcohol use can contribute to poor attendance and eventually dropping out (Samuels, 2008). Focusing mainly on the 9th-10th grade results with dropout ages under 18-years old, Chaplin, Turner and Pape (2003)
concluded that students who only think in the short-run have greater likelihood of dropping out of school.

Pregnancy is another factor that can lead to dropping out of high school. Prior to the late 20th century, virtually all females still in high school who became pregnant left school. Often, a female found to be pregnant was expected to marry if she wanted to keep the baby. In some states and/or in earlier times, leaving school was required (by the school) until the baby was delivered or the pregnancy terminated (although abortion’s legality was decided on a state-by-state basis until the Roe vs. Wade decision of 1979; in Texas it was not legal prior to the landmark case). Beginning in the 1990s or slightly earlier, staying in school while pregnant became more socially acceptable.

**Teen Pregnancy**

A high percentage of school attendance does delay the start of sexual relations (O’Connor, 1998), which indirectly reduces the chance of pregnancy since becoming sexually active at an earlier age increases the likelihood of pregnancy. Although O’Connor (1998), did not find evidence that school reduced a sexually active female’s chance of becoming pregnant, he did define school influences as feeling connected to school (the “perception that teachers are fair, feeling close to people at school and feeling part of school”) and characteristics of the schools such as attendance rates (p. 97).

Family structure is considered a contributing factor to teen pregnancy and motherhood. Research has shown intercourse among adolescents is likely to occur during the day in homes where parents are at work and unable to provide supervision (McCullough & Sherman, 1991). Teachers who worked with pregnant teens reported the number of teen births increased significantly nine months after summer and Christmas
vacations, indicating that adolescents need structure and supervision within the family (Hymowitz, 1997). Research has revealed that strong family relationships and two-parent families help lower the incidence of teen pregnancy. Hymowitz (1997) claimed parental influence was the most significant variable in teen pregnancy prevention. She concluded the absence of a father was the primary factor in teen girls becoming pregnant. Households with both parents present, especially biological parents, were more capable of overseeing the behaviors of adolescent daughters and monitoring their exposure to risky situations (Hogan, Sun & Cornwell, 2000; Weisfeld & Woodward, 2004). In addition, Kirby (2001) noted that greater family attachment was related to later initiation of intercourse and fewer incidences of teen pregnancy and childbearing.

There were two factors that O’Connor (1998) investigated related to the timing of first sexual intercourse and pregnancy among seventh through twelfth graders showed that the family is important. Family factors include: how connected the female teen feels toward her parents; their time spent together in activities; the presence of a parent before and after school and at dinner and bedtime; parents’ expectations of performance in school; and a measure of distress in the family (O’Connor, 1998). Feeling connected to one’s family and having parents that disapprove of contraceptive use was related to waiting longer to engage in sexual intercourse and to reducing pregnancy among sexually active females ages fifteen and older.

**Goals**

Past evidence has suggested that many adolescent females became pregnant intentionally because they saw no other life goals within their reach (Winter, 1997). Usually adolescent females experienced academic difficulties in school or they attempted
to escape abusive home situations (Koshar, 2001). Many of these females viewed higher education as unattainable, and they possessed little awareness of their life options and career opportunities. They saw no future for themselves along with a lack of positive role models to follow. These adolescent females chose to become pregnant, as this decision appeared to be their best option (Brown & Barbosa, 2001; Rothenberg & Weissman, 2002). These teen mothers viewed childbearing as the one thing they could do that was socially responsible, gave meaning to their lives and offered hope for their futures (Rosen, 1997). Often the phenomenon of intentional pregnancy is limited to low income adolescents because they are more likely to perceive their future as bleak and motherhood as a better option (Davies, DiClemente, Wingwood, Person, Crosby & Harrington, 2004).

**Future of Teen Mothers**

Research has painted the future of young mothers with poor life scenarios and bleak impending prospects for educational and economic well-being (Maynard, 1996; Tonelli, 2004). Sarri and Phillips (2004) implied young mothers confront many years of social and economic disadvantages. Because of their lack of work experience, educational skills, and job training, their future employment levels and earnings are minimal.

Teen mothers often experience medical complications and health problems during pregnancy due to the lack of prenatal care (Sarri & Phillips, 2004). Children of teen mothers are more likely to achieve lower levels of education and become young, unmarried parents themselves (Faber, 2003). Adolescent mothers were found to spend a greater amount of their adult years as single parents. Research over the years has shown that most men responsible for children born to adolescent mothers provide little or no
child support (National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2002). As a result, a large number of adolescent mothers have remained disproportionately poor, depending on public assistance to support them economically.

One of the most important consequences surrounding teen pregnancy concerns educational attainment, as timing of family formation is critical in the amount of schooling a young girl obtains (Hofferth, Reid & Mott, 2001). Becoming an adolescent mother has been associated with less formal education, often leading to poverty (Meade & Ickovics, 2005). Teen pregnancy can pose major challenges to school attendance and graduation completion, and it is one of the reasons commonly cited by female secondary students for dropping out of high school (Hao & Cherlin, 2004).

Rothenberg and Weissman (2002) found that 7 out of 10 females who became adolescent mothers did not graduate from high school. Less than one-third of female adolescents who gave birth before age 18 completed high school. Additionally, for teen mothers experiencing a subsequent pregnancy within two years of their first delivery, the prospect of high school graduation is improbable (Meade & Ickovics, 2005; Hofferth, et al., 2001). Hofferth et al. (2001) found that adolescent childbearing was greatly associated with reduced chances of completing high school and attending college, thus leading the researchers to conclude that today’s adolescent mothers who are unable to obtain some form of higher education are at a disadvantage.

Koshar (2001) discovered that many adolescent females who became pregnant were already experiencing academic difficulties in school. Pursuing higher education or a career was not realistically within their reach, and they experienced feelings of hopelessness or helplessness regarding their future (Rothenberg & Weissman, 2002).
While many adolescent females on the verge of dropping out claimed becoming pregnant gave them the excuse to quit school, other adolescent females first dropped out of school and then became pregnant (Kreinin, 1998; School Board News, 1999). Yampolskaya, Brown & Vargo (2004) however, found that academic success and bonding to school have been associated with reduced adolescent pregnancy rates.

**Hispanic Pregnancy and Dropout Rates**

Hispanic female teens are twice as likely as black teens and four times as likely as white teens to drop out of high school; teen pregnancy is cited as a major reason for school dropout. In a national study, almost 40% of dropouts either had a child or were expecting one (Coley, 1995). Over half (54%) of Hispanic teen mothers do not complete high school, compared to 34% of all teen mothers (Perper & Manlove, 2010). Another study that suggested that, all Hispanic female teens who, drop out of high school between sophomore and senior year, 36% cited being pregnant or becoming a mother as a reason for dropping out (National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2007).

Traditional Hispanic culture emphasizes the important role of motherhood and marriage in young Latinas’ lives (Driscoll, Biggs, Brindis & Yankah, 2001). Compared with other pregnant teenagers, Hispanic are more likely to view pregnancy as an opportunity to build closer relationships with family members and their partner and to also be motivated by the relationship they will develop with their baby (Rosengard, Pollock, Weitzen, Meers, & Phipps, 2006). They are also more likely than teens of other racial/ethnic groups to choose partners who are significantly older, placing them at higher risk for early childbearing (Darroch, Landry, (Oslak, 1999). In addition, young Latino men and women are more likely than Black Americans and White teens to want to
become teen parents (Abma, Martinez, Mosher, & Dawson, 2004).

As for females, the Hispanic culture, particularly in Mexico, more rigidly defines their gender role. The female is wife, mother and caretaker whether or not she works, with less emphasis on obtaining an education than for males. A Latina’s quincenera (similar to a debutante ball in high–income Anglo culture) is her family’s public announcement that she has achieved womanhood and takes on such responsibilities. Furthermore, males display their virility by their “capacity to attract and dominate the opposite sex” (Napolitano 1997, p. 292), and by fathering many children and serving as family patriarch. Strong family ties are generally formed and all members of the family are expected to put family first.

Second or third generation Hispanic females native to the United States, particularly if they do not live in an ethnic neighborhood, are often described as showing signs of acculturation to the dominate United States culture. Studies of acculturation—such as those cited in Afable-Munsuz and Brindis (2006) literature review of Latinas, sexual behavior and acculturation—use measures such as duration in the U.S., language spoken in the home, place of residence, and place of birth. These studies conclude that because young Latinas show greater sexual risk-taking, earlier sexual initiation, and less use of contraceptives than immigrant Latinas, they have acculturated. Following this logic and evidence, acculturated Latinas/Hispanic females would be more likely to have a higher pregnancy rate than non-acculturated Hispanics. But a weakness of the acculturation-sexual behavior studies of Latinas is that they start with the assumption that the outcomes are structurally linked to acculturation as defined. Therefore the assumption drives the result. If Latinas were fully acculturated to the primarily-Anglo
dominant culture, they should have pregnancy and dropout rates more similar to Whites, yet they do not. According to Jonsson and Rendall (2004), not only does childbearing start at younger ages among U.S. born Hispanic women than among non-Hispanic women, but U.S.- born Hispanic women’s total fertility rates are higher than the population on average.

**Summary of Research**

The silent epidemic is running rampant through America’s schools. Its impact is so devastating to society that it is worthy of national attention. The mandates of NCLB have not helped increase the graduation rates. School leaders are especially challenged to find a cure to the silent epidemic. Research has predicted reasons why students depart from school and the devastating impact of individual, institutional, and racial/cultural factors transmitting the disease. As a result, there remains a need for further research regarding the dropout problem and strategies to encourage adolescents to remain in school regardless of their circumstances.

The literature review suggests the direct relationship between poverty and adolescent pregnancy with the implication of poor school attendance and low academic achievement. In a case study triangulating the environment, mother, and child or children, Rahimzaded (2002) argued poverty leads to “family instability, dependency on welfare, crime, abandoned housing as well as decreased educational performance” (p. 11). The research conducted by Payne (2003) echoed these findings. While every impoverished school or teenage female does not become pregnant, the statistics cannot be ignored. Under these circumstances, the teen mother and her child are destined for a bleak future, financially, physically, and socially.
The amount of support students receive from schools, family, and the environment plays an important role in motivation and academic achievement. While teen pregnancy carries multiple risk factors of dropping out, why do some remain in school? The review elaborated on the female Hispanic teen parent cultural and value conflicts.

While the literature review provided a great amount of information pertaining to why students drop out, what was not found was why those “at-risk,” as teen parents in high school might choose to remain in school. Dialogues with a group of students with one or more risk factors for dropping out, yet who remained in school, appeared to be the most efficient method of collecting the intended data. Conversations with the students would allow for personal issues which affected the students’ decisions to remain in school to be identified.

This study will provide a forum for the voices of Hispanic teen mothers to be heard. Hispanics are the largest growing minority group and over two-thirds of Hispanic teen mothers drop out of high school, compared to 58 percent of teen mothers overall. The relationship between education and teen pregnancy works both ways. That is, teen pregnancy often has a negative impact on education. However it is also the case that school achievement, attendance, and involvement help those “at-risk” and reduce teen pregnancy. Through the voice of Hispanic teen mothers, school and community leaders can help teen parents, successfully complete school despite their difficult circumstances. This study can be used to improve the quality of education of Hispanic teen mothers.
The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore how personal, social, and academic characteristics impacted the education of Hispanic teenage mothers through themes, patterns of perceptions, and lived experiences in a high school in South Texas. The study examined how individual characteristics and areas of involvement or lack thereof are related to persistence. Although dropping out is often discussed in relation to parental support and social behaviors, less is known about teen parenthood and resiliency. Therefore, there is a large need to understand the demands of teenage parenting in relation to staying in school.

A qualitative research design of the study was chosen in order to gain a better understanding about the motivations, experiences, and reflections of pregnant or teen mothers in high school. The methods of acquiring data were triangulated in an effort to ensure the depth and quality of the data gathered during the investigation phase (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh & Sorensen, 2006). The method for this research included gathering twelve participants through snowball sampling within the high school.

In order to capture the essence of the students’ characteristics, attitudes, and perceptions, a hermeneutic phenomenological research design was used. Individual student interviews and focus groups were used to gather data. In addition, participants were asked to write a personal reflection to their unborn or young child explaining their choice to stay in school.
Research Questions

The study, The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts (2006) by Melinda and Bill Gates Foundation applied a qualitative research design with phenomenological inquiry to obtain feedback from dropouts themselves adding to the research of understanding the dropout phenomenon. This hermeneutic phenomenology study was based on feedback from twelve Hispanic teen pregnant or mother participants who were recruited by the researcher. In order to understand the phenomena surrounding teenage pregnancy/motherhood and education attainment, I spent time exploring the following research questions:

**Research Question 1:** What factors influence Hispanic teen mothers to remain in high school through graduation?  
**Research Question 2:** What personal challenges are experienced by Hispanic pregnant teens and teen mothers that impact the completion of education?  
**Research Question 3:** What are the lived experiences and factors of persistence and resilience that contribute to Hispanic pregnant teens and teen mothers’ academic success?  
**Research Question 4:** What are educational aspirations of pregnant or parenting Hispanic females?

Design

Qualitative research is a comprehensive exploration of a problem based on an analysis of information provided by participants in their natural location (Creswell, 2005). Contrary to quantitative research, where variables are identified and measured, a
hypothesis is tested, and statistics provide evidence of findings, qualitative research is
descriptive in its approach, using the rich details of the contextual setting to shed light on
the phenomenon being investigated (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). According to Merriam
(2002), qualitative research designs have gained national attention over the past two
decades and are especially beneficial in the absences of a specific premise to explain an
extraordinary phenomenon such as the silent epidemic. Phenomenological research
explains the meaning and perspectives of individuals concerning an issue they have
experienced (Creswell, 2007). Merriam (2002) asserts that phenomenological research
designs are unique in that they emphasize the meaning or structure of a particular
experience shared by a group of individuals. With regard to the silent epidemic, a
phenomenological form of inquiry is optimal for this study to explore the unique
perspective of twelve Hispanic teen mothers and have first-hand knowledge of their
persistence to stay in school regardless of the risk factors for dropping out.

Phenomenology appropriately allowed a focus on Hispanic teen mothers in a
public high school system, and hermeneutic phenomenology provided a design that
focused on the view of the participants through open-ended questions allowing a wide
variety of answer possibilities and individual perspectives (Creswell, 2005, 2007, 2009;
Denzin & Guba, 1994; Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2006; Van Manen, 2002). According to Ary
et al (2007), “A phenomenological study is designed to describe and interpret an
experience by determining the meaning of the experience as perceived by the people who
have participated in it” (p. 461). Moustakas (1994) explained that examination of self-
experience shows how individuals explore, interact, create, and relate. Hermeneutic
strategies aided in the study of the phenomena, themes, constructs, attributes, actions,
perceptions, and interpretations of Hispanic teen mothers, and provided a broader understanding of the choices in life experiences that lead pregnant or teen mothers to stay in school regardless of the risk of dropping out. The researcher focused on the subjective experience of the teen mothers as their voice was heard through the research design. “Capturing the voice” of students is what Van Manen (1990) described as obtaining a “grasp of the very nature of the thing” (p. 177).

Martin Heidegger is famous for developing hermeneutic phenomenology. Hermeneutics was an approach to interpretation of phenomena. Hermeneutics, the word, is derived from the Greek word, “hermenuein: to interpret” (Odman, 1998). The Greek god Hermes, in mythology a winged messenger and interpreter for the mythological gods of ancient Greece, was thought to be responsible for changing the unknowable into the form that humans could understand. What had been a scholarly method for dealing with sacred texts when the meaning was obscure in the Bible and other texts became known as hermeneutics (Walsh, 1996), now it is known as both a philosophy and a method of interpretation, and it would seem that Heidegger believed that man’s existence in the realm of being was unavoidably hermeneutical (van Manen, 1990). It is as if Heidegger had a lens to view the world from the inside, with the help of all the senses, including intuition. To understand the world of teen pregnancy and have a picture of their lived experiences, one would have to listen to their stories without judgment and encourage the flow of their conversation, then attempt to put meaning to these stories. This is part of the role of the researcher in Heideggerian research.

Hermeneutic phenomenological methods as described by Denzin and Lincoln (2007) allow analysis of patterns for layers of meaning, theories, and interpretations
through the flow of answers given to open-ended questions. The use of hermeneutic phenomenology enables the exploration of participants’ experiences with interpretation by the researcher based on the researcher’s theoretical and personal knowledge. Hermeneutics adds the interpretive element to explicate meanings and assumptions in the participants’ text that participants themselves may have difficulty in articulating, for example, tacit practice knowledge (Crotty, 1998). Creswell (2007, 2009) summarized key elements for qualitative studies included settings and participants that will be appropriate to the study and will aid in better understanding of the topic. The voice of Hispanic teen pregnant/mothers enrolled in high schools will encourage reflection, description, clarification, and provide opportunities for the participants and readers of this research study to comprehend the meaning of these lived experiences in light of the data (Creswell, 2007; Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). Richards (2005) emphasized that the qualitative method does not seek to summarize and review answers from participants, but analyzes, describes, codes, interprets and constructs. Gibbs (2007) reminded researchers that computers can aid in analyzing data, but the human element engenders interpretations, explanations, and theories.

Data was collected for each of the research questions as follows:

**Research question 1. What factors influence Hispanic teen pregnant/mothers to remain in high school through graduation?** To address the first research question, I conducted individual interviews with participants, transcribed the audio recordings, and began identifying emerging themes. Before the first interview, the researcher explained the intent of the study and had consent forms signed. Interview questions included three categories, school-related factors, personal factors and economic factors.
Research question 2. *What personal challenges are expected by Hispanic pregnant teens and teen mothers that impact the completion of education?* Through individual interviews and focus group that were audio taped and transcribed for accuracy, the researcher coded and recoded as needed identified emerging themes.

Research question 3. *What are the lived experiences and factors of persistence and resilience that contribute to Hispanic pregnant teens and teen mothers’ academic success?* This question was answered through the focus group that was audio taped and transcribed for accuracy. The questions were open-ended and focused on the lived experiences’ of the teen mothers and their persistence to stay in school in spite of their risk factors.

Research question 4. *What are the educational aspirations of pregnant or parenting Hispanic females?* Listening to the participants lived experiences and voice during the individual interviews, focus group and personal written reflections I was able to identify the emerging themes that point out the educational aspirations. Individual interviews and focus group were audio taped and transcribed for accuracy with follow up interviews if need for clarification of information.

There is a large need to understand the demands of teenage parenting in relation to staying in school. The gap in the literature is that dropping out is often discussed in relation to parental support and social behaviors of teen parents but less is known about teen parenthood and resiliency. The central purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenology study will be to examine the lived experiences, resilience and motivating factors that contribute to the success of Hispanic female teen pregnant or mother that stay in high school.
The life experiences from 12 Hispanic teen pregnant or parenting females will fit with other qualitative research based on life stories (Atwater, 1997; Creswell, 2007, 2009). Barnett (2007) found stories had contributed significantly to arrangement with cross-media collaboration. Ulbricht (2007) determined stories, including personal reflection and social roles, enriched understanding of connections between a person’s visual and material cultures. McLean and Pratt (2006) completed a longitudinal study on identity and found meaning making in narratives led to life turning points in achievement and redemption.

In a study by Bell and Chase (1993), research on women in roles as educational leaders examined understandings based on male experiences, but ignored women’s experiences and understandings. Corkery (2005) examined life stories that helped students to overcome obstacles the culture engendered. Gremillion (2004) investigated feminist narratives and determined they provided insights into identity, cultures, and lived out consequences of choices that construct a person’s life. Snow (2009) explained the origins of phenomenology use experiences as a key to search for meaning in the life of an individual.

Researching Hispanic teen mothers through a hermeneutic analysis of lived experiences will provide an inside view of an underrepresented group (Bell & Chase, 1993; Halpern, 2005; Kaparou & Bush, 2007). Van Manen (2002) revealed interpretive analysis provides valuable evidence that can generate concepts beyond those immediately seen. Mueller-Vollmer (2006) expounded on the evolution of theory, practice, and the use of hermeneutics as an important avenue of social research. The theoretical appreciation of social sciences, narratives of lived experiences, and perceptions through
hermeneutic phenomenology established the foundation for the exploration of lived experiences and perception of Hispanic teen parenthood.

Setting/Site

A south Texas urban high school served as the site for the study. The total student population of the high school for the year 2010-2011 was 1,860 made of 97% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% Black students. The school district serves a student population that is 95% economically disadvantage and has two high schools, one alternative high school, four middle schools, and nine elementary schools. The high school has an intervention program for teen mothers coordinated by the school’s social worker. The school had 64 female pregnancies for the 2010-2011 school year and 23 teen parents.

The high school is a Title I School as are all the schools within the school district. The school as well as all other schools within the district, offer free breakfast and lunch to all students regardless of the socio-economic status. The school was chosen for the study because I work at the school and have established relationships with students which gave me cooperative environment in which to conduct the study. The high school implemented a high school redesign program funded through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to improve college and career pathway awareness. All students participant in one of the six career pathways offered while they are in high school. Each student has an advocate teacher which they meet on Wednesdays during advisory period. The advocate works with the student in making choices related to academics, staying in school and gearing up for college. The high school redesign program has been implemented for the past five years, and the school had the largest group of seniors
graduating for the 2010-2011 school year. During the 2009-2010, school year, 325 students graduated. In May 2011, 440 students graduated. It is due to the hard work and dedication of the school staff and its leadership team that the high school now serves as a model school for other high schools across the state of Texas.

Participants

Participants in the study included Hispanic female students who were identified as either pregnant or parent of a child and resilient students, showing academic success. To select 12 participants for the study, I conducted a purposeful and maximum variation sampling. I choose the participants to ensure that the overall voice of Hispanic teen mothers was heard through a purposeful and maximum variation sampling (Seidman, 2006). Creswell (2007) noted, “This means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposely inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p.125). For this study, academic success was defined as students who earned grades/credits to be promoted to the following grade in high school. A small study group of 12 were chosen to participate as a format to provide the participants’ messages verbatim in an attempt to capture the essence of their stories. The maximum variation sampling came from a list of students who were teen parents/or pregnant during the research study. The sampling group of pregnant/parent teens were contacted to seek their participation by the researcher. Participants were selected through the help of key informants such as the social worker or other students who had developed a relationship with the targeted participants and fit the study’s criteria. I, as an administrator of the school had reporting data of female pregnancies. The reporting data was used by to identify targeted participants. The sample selection involved contacting
potential participants through email, telephone, or in person. The initial contact established an interview schedule that was mutually agreeable to both parties.

After the initial meeting the final schedule of interview dates, were determined. Participants selected for the study were Hispanic female teen parents or pregnant female teens, ages 14-19 years and enrolled in grades 9th through 12th grade at the high school. Assent to participate forms were given to the participants at the start of the study (Appendices C&D). All female participants with permission to participate were selected for individual interviews and focus group interview using purposeful sampling procedures. The participants’ varying social, emotional, and academic levels and their unique experiences were considered.

Because I was studying the phenomena of pregnant/parenting Hispanic females who were successful in high school, the questions for the interviews were geared to provide insight into the lived experiences of the selected participants. This insight enabled me to provide a description of the hermeneutic phenomenological events and the factors that contributed to their high school success. I purposefully interviewed participants until data saturation was reached.

**Procedural Design**

The qualitative research design of the study was chosen in order to gain an understanding of the attitudes and perceptions that motivate a pregnant teen or teen mother to be persistence to stay in school in spite of their dropout risk factors. In order to capture the essence of the pregnant teen or teen mothers’ attitudes and perceptions, a hermeneutic phenomenological research design was used. In hermeneutic phenomenology the interviews serve very specific purposes. Interviews are used as a
way of exploring and gathering of stories (lived experiences). Secondly, interviews are a vehicle by which to develop a conversational relationship with the participants on the topic (van Manen, 1997). Individual student interviews and focus group interview were used to gather data. The interview questions were guided by the resiliency theory and Rumberger’s (1997) three categories of dropout reasons school-related or academic, personal, and economic. As mentioned earlier, Resiliency Theory is a development psychological perspective for viewing adversity and success (Gonzales, 2003; Brindis, Sattley, & Mamo, 2005). Bernard (2004) defined resilience as the capacity all youth have for healthy development and successful learning. The existence of resilient children is a long-term development process that involves a systemic change in the family, school, and community (Scott-Fisher & Cambell- Forrester, 2000). The interviews were an important part of this qualitative study because it helped the researcher gain insight into how each participant perceives resiliency to stay in school in spite of their risk factors of dropping out of high school. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) stated, “Good interviews produce rich data filled with words that reveal the respondents’ perspectives” (p.104). Therefore the researcher self-designed individual and focus group interview questions (Appendices A&B). The interview questions were open ended, allowing for a great amount of discussion.

**Selection criteria.** The respondent selection was based on the following criteria:

(a) that the participants were Mexican immigrants born in Mexico and residing in Weslaco, Texas, or (b) Mexican Americans, born in the United States and living in Weslaco, Texas. In order to identify participants for the study, the researcher sought guidance from the school social worker and the homebound teacher of teen pregnancy. I
met with the potential participants individually, in which the purpose of the study was explained and how their high school experiences would help researchers, educators, other Hispanic teen mothers and teen pregnancy. After this introductory phase, the potential participants were selected. Since I was studying the phenomena of successful high school Hispanic pregnant/teen mothers, questions were geared to provide insight into the lived experiences of the selected participants. This insight enabled to provide a thorough description of the lived experiences and the factors that contribute to their success in high school.

**Protection of human subjects.** I followed a set of guidelines for research involving human subjects regulated by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Liberty University. Twelve Hispanic female participants who met the above stated criteria were selected for this qualitative study. Each participant was given a letter of invitation and pseudonyms in order to help preserve confidentiality (Appendices C&D). The consent forms were stored separately from interview data. All taped recordings and taped transcriptions were stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s office. Computer files were stored on my computer with password protection. Data files were not transferred nor submitted via email or Internet. All data was coded and the coded data was stored separately.

**IRB approval.** Before collecting data, I gained approval from Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB), (Appendix E). IRBs are committees that review research on human subjects at colleges, universities, and other places where research takes place (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I also gained approval from the superintendent of the schools to conduct the study. After gaining IRB approval and district approval, the
process of collecting data began.

**Data Collection**

Data for the study was collected using several instruments, including extensive, in-depth phenomenological, structured individual interviews and a focus group interview that were audio taped. The purpose of interviews is to “capture how those being interviewed view their world, learn their terminology and judgments, and to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences” (Patton, 2002, p.348). Data collected by “qualitative interview studies have provided descriptions of phenomena that could have been learned about in no other way” (Weiss, 1994, p.12). The questions used for the individual and focus group interview were developed around Rumberger’s (1987) three categories of dropout reasons: school-related or academic, personal, and economic. I initially developed a set of questions for the individual and focus group interview. Each question was designed to understand the thinking and feelings of the participants. The initial questions were justified in writing with a brief rationale as to the importance of each question. All interviews were hand transcribed for accuracy. Mapp (2008) points out the importance of audio taping in phenomenological interviews as “nuances of description may be missed if the interviewer is hand writing the notes of the interview while the interview occurring” (p. 310). All collected data was then coded in order to gain insights and allow themes to emerge. Lofland and Lofland (1995) suggested a two-step coding process that involves an initial read-through and coding that is uncategorized, followed by a second focused coding designed to recognize emerging themes.

**Written personal reflection.** Teen mothers selected for the study were asked to write a letter to their born or unborn child expressing their resiliency to stay in school in
spite of any risk factors. New forms of qualitative data continually emerge (Creswell, 2003) such as interviews, documents and audiovisual materials. Creswell (2007) encourages researchers in qualitative studies to include new and creative data collection methods that will encourage readers to examine their study. Pink (2001) suggest research needs to include living stories, metaphorical visual narratives, and digital archives. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest collecting field text through an array of sources, autobiography, journal, letters and stories. Writing a personal reflection is a qualitative interviewing technique that allows participants to express their reasons in written form. Because participants were asked to refrain from discussing any sensitive subject matter during the focus group interview, this form of inquiry permitted students to write about any delicate issues that might have caused them to feel uncomfortable in the presence of the researcher or their peers.

**Individual interviews.** Individual interviews were conducted and audio taped. Students were assessed by examining the reason for staying in school. The interviews will served three purposes: to explore and gather narratives of lived experiences, to allow participants to share their stories, and to develop a conversational relationship where reflection occurred. The interviews also helped examine the risk and protective factors of teenage parents. Students were asked various questions and the data was transcribed. Interview questions were developed to include consideration of the challenges and obstacles throughout the participants’ high school years as teen parents or pregnant teens. The interviews were audio taped, reviewed, and discussed with the participants to ensure validity and clarity of each interview.

**Focus group interview.** All participants were invited to attend a structured focus
group interview. An open discussion sought the participants’ responses to twelve open-ended questions. This meeting allowed participants to verbally express their ideas as a group. The intention of this format was to provide a thicker, more in-depth portrayal (Merriam, 2002) of reasons and the benefits for staying in school. The format also allowed the researcher to look at the positive support factors teen parents have to staying in school. The focus group interview was audio taped. Face and content validity was checked by discussing and reviewing focus group audio taped interview with focus group participants.

**Data Analysis**

Creswell (2007) suggested that a study draws upon various sources of information including observations, interviews, documents, and audiotapes to note in depth descriptions of a particular case. Merriam (2002) further asserted that themes arise after the researcher’s initial observations are refined and endlessly shaped into categories to describe a phenomenon based on people’s experiences. The data is analyzed using open coding. Open coding is appropriate when one is searching for common themes within the interviews and journaling (Creswell, 2007). Memoing is used in order to gain an understanding of the data. Feedback is retrieved and reviewed to ensure data credibility. Rich data is used by sharing quotes and stories of the students (Creswell, 2007). Member checking is used to ensure data accuracy. First a listing of significant statements about how individuals experienced the phenomenon were recorded, in which, I later transcribed, word-for-word. Each statement from participants had equal value and treatment. Information was formulated to relate meaning with close examination and careful coding in order to find emergent themes and deep meaning. The statements were
then clustered into themes. A description of “what” and “how” of the phenomenon experiences were written from the gathered information of the focus group interview, individual interviews, and the written personal reflection. This process allowed the ability to remove overlapping and repetitive statements. The text was searched for recurring words or phrases indicative of thematic aspects of the phenomenon of teen pregnancy and proceeded to line-by-line coding to ascertain what each sentence revealed about the phenomenon being described (van Manen, 1990). I used a color coding system to identify significant words and phrases in the transcripts. The color-coded words or phrases were analyzed for emerging themes. Themes that emerged from the data reflected the lived experiences of the teen pregnancy. An audit trail method was utilized in order to demonstrate the raw data as well as the decision-making process along the course of the research. According to Johnson and Waterfield (2004), the reliability of qualitative findings is enhanced by an audit trial that clarifies the reasons for the theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices for the study. “The trustworthiness of a study is enhanced by a satisfactory audit of the process by which its findings have been achieved as well as the end products: data, interpretations, and recommendations” (Johnson & Waterfield, 2004, p.127). Finally, a composite description, the “essence” of the experience, was written as all data was analyzed and compiled for the findings of the study. The hermeneutic approach provided a lens by which the experiences of the participants may be viewed and interpreted. In order that, the participants’ experience may be understood thoroughly, the hermeneutic circle, an analytical process in which the parts are related to the whole and the whole to the parts was incorporated in the research (Patton, 2002). So, within the hermeneutic circle, the
whole can be understood by study of the particular, and the particular with reference to
the whole. Phenomenological descriptions are rich and evocative, invoking in readers the
phenomenological nod in recognition of a phenomenon so richly described that they too
may have experienced (van Manen, p. 27). Phenomenological themes may be understood
as structures of experience and offer a thick description of phenomena (van Manen). A
rich data approach was utilized to allow the reader to vividly visualize the research
process in order to better understand the phenomenon of teen pregnancy/ motherhood and
school attainment. Quotes from the individual interviews and focus group interview
contributed to the rich description of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002: van Manen, 1997).
My initial observations were refined and shaped into categories to describe the
phenomenon.

Transcription. I transcribed the individual interviews to ensure credibility so
that information would not be omitted. Accuracy of transcription was checked by
utilizing member checking. I listened to audio recordings and read the transcripts
repeatedly in order to determine emerging themes.

Memoing. Creswell (2007) stated, “The theory emerges with help from the
process of memoing, a process in which the researcher writes down any ideas about the
evolving theory throughout the process of open, axial, and selective coding” (p. 67).
Memos allow the researcher to check thoughts. The use of different types of memos
helps identify bias (Creswell, 2007).

Open coding. Open coding is used when a researcher looks for themes within the
data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Repeatedly reading and listening to the transcripts will
help achieve understanding. The research questions are considered when reviewing for
patterns, themes, and repeated phrases (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

**Credibility and Trustworthiness**

Credibility refers to the faithfulness of the description to the phenomena or trustworthiness of the findings of the research. I ensured that the voices of the participants are evident in the text to enhance authenticity. Credibility and trustworthiness were achieved by the use of rich description and allowing the words of the participants to speak for themselves. Therefore I was obligated to “demonstrate that the methods used were reproducible and consistent, that the approach and procedures used were appropriate for the context and could be documented, and that external evidence could be used to test conclusions” (Ary et al. p. 509). The information gathered provided a rationale for the qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological research design, the data sources used, as well as the process for collecting and analyzing data.

**Rich Data.** Rich data means providing data with enough detail to gain a clear picture of what is going on (Maxwell, 1996). Rich data will be achieved by the thorough and open ended nature of the interview process.

**Member checking.** Member checking is an important technique in data collection because it ensures that the data is accurate and credible according to the participants (Maxwell, 1996). Member checking is another way for the researcher to confirm the data is exact (Creswell, 2007) and rules out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what the participants say and the perception had on what is going on (Maxwell, 1996).

**Triangulation.** Triangulation is obtained to ensure credibility of the study. When multiple data collection sources and numerous data analysis procedures are used,
triangulation occurs (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Triangulation in this study was achieved by participants’ written personal reflection, individual interviews, and focus group interview. Collecting multiple sources of data gives a deeper knowledge of the phenomena of the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). More than one source of information to determine facts and gain a full understanding of the phenomenon of teen pregnancy and their academic successes was used. Multiple data analysis procedures, such as memoing, open coding, rich data, and feedback were also used.

**Ethical Considerations**

There are several important ethical issues to consider when conducting a hermeneutic phenomenological study. A qualitative researcher will always face a number of issues that arise at different junctures in the process, such as data collection, data analysis, and data sharing. First, protection and confidentiality will be outlined with the researcher’s intentions to protect participants’ identities and store all data, tapes, and information in a locked area to which only the researcher has access. I must protect the anonymity of the participants and must obtain written permission from the participants and their parents or guardian if they are minors. The second issue pertains to bracketing and phenomenological reduction. As per Merriam (2002), these strategies challenge researchers to analyze any personal biases or assumptions and set them aside when conducting qualitative studies. I must set aside personal views and opinions about teen pregnancy. The third ethical issue pertains to equal value and respect (Strike, Haller, & Soltis). I regarded all participants as valuable assets possessing significant worth and value to understand teen pregnancy and treated participants with utmost respect. As these participants were the focus of the research, careful measures were taken to respect their
privacy and confidentiality. Fontana and Frey (1994) pointed out that great care must be taken to ensure that each participant has been provided with informed consent, the right to privacy, and protection from physical, emotional, or any other kind of harm. Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures were followed as human subjects are involved in the study. Pseudonyms were used in the place of real names and participants were given opportunities to review interview responses for accuracy before any data was reported.

**Researcher’s Role / Personal Biography**

I was born in Harlingen, TX to Leo Estrada and Maria Maldonado Estrada, I lived with my parents, five brothers and four sisters in Harlingen, TX, Scottsbluff, NB, Jackson, MI and numerous states in the United States as my family migrated to seasonal jobs in the fields. Among a family of ten, I was the sixth child. I graduated from Harlingen High School in Harlingen, TX, where I earned recognition for her athletic ability in track. Within my Hispanic family, I was the first female to graduate from high school. Upon graduation from high school I entered Pan American University now known as University of Texas at Pan American in Edinburg, Tex, to study bilingual education. I studied to be a bilingual teacher.

Throughout the ensuing years that I pursued a bachelor’s degree of education, I worked at a local department store to support my education. I took summers off from her studies to migrate with my family in the fields. During my childhood and teen years, I contributed to helping the family’s financial needs by picking cherries, cucumbers, and onions. Looking back at those years, it gives me great comfort to have had loving, supportive parents that strongly believed that education always came first. An education
is what my parents wanted for their children, a better life.

My Hispanic family culture belief is having strong family values of caring and loving for one another. At a very young age I was taught to look to God first for everything: She grew up in a Christian home where every Sunday and Wednesday was a day of worship and prayer. Prayer was included before every meal and before going to bed each night. My family attended Avondale Baptist Church where I was baptized and where I continued attending up to her adulthood. I remember as a teenager not being able to attend dances because of the family’s Christian values. I thank God that because of my parents’ strong will in Christianity, I was able to make the right choices in my life along with God’s guidance.

Today, my family (brothers and sisters) carry the traditions that was taught by our beloved parents, to love one another and always put God first in everything we do. The family often gets together to have prayer meetings and talk about the younger years. My parents would be pleased to see their children together. While none of my family members were parents as adolescents, I work in a school environment where it is a growing concern for educators as students are taught about college awareness. I work as a high school administrator and have been an educator for 25 years. She taught ten years before going into administration at the middle school level and now at the high school for the past six years. I have served in many leadership roles during my tenure as a teacher and administrator at the campus and district levels. My strong love for God helps me deeply care for others, especially children and their education. My responsibility as I gather and view data during the study is to protect those individuals involved. I must put any personal biases or assumptions aside and have equal value and respect for all
participants.

My desire for this study was to interpret the phenomena, rather than just describe it, so hermeneutic phenomenology is the right choice. I knew it would be a difficult task to completely “bracket out” my interpretation of a phenomenon, so I separated my beliefs and experiences, and that of the participants. I kept in mind what van Manen (1997) referred to as hermeneutic alertness, which occurs in situations where the researcher steps back to reflect on the meanings of a situation rather than accepting my own conception and interpretation at face value. Throughout the research, thoughtful analysis of the research experience, and the relationship between me, participants, and the research were viewed carefully into the research process.

**Summary of Methodology**

Hispanic teen pregnant and teen mothers’ voices were examined through a qualitative study using a hermeneutic phenomenological method of inquiry. I selected twelve participants from a potential list developed with the help of the school’s social worker and homebound teacher for pregnant teens. I used individual interviews and focus group interview to gain perspectives of the participants’ educational attainment.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the factors that contribute to the success of Hispanic pregnant or teen mothers who stay in high school. The study was driven by the following research questions:

1. What factors influence Hispanic teen mothers to remain in high school through graduation?

2. What personal challenges are experienced by Hispanic pregnant teens or teen mothers that impact the completion of education?

3. What are the lived experiences and factors of persistence and resilience that contribute to Hispanic pregnant teens and teen mothers’ academic success?

4. What are the educational aspirations of pregnant or parenting Hispanic females?

To capture the participants’ experiences as they are lived (Berndtsson, Cleesson, Friberg, & Ohlen, 2007), the method of individual interviews, focus group interview and a written reflection were used to acquire the data. Data was then organized into categories and themes that captured the general consistencies of participants during the study. Using thematic analysis and using van Manen’s (1997) hermeneutic phenomenological method of qualitative research as a guide, I was able to capture the lived experience of Hispanic teenage pregnancy and enhance the complex social phenomenon. Using Rumberger’s
(1987) categories of dropout reasons; school related, personal, and economic, I focused specifically on the lived experiences of 12 Hispanic teen pregnant/mothers’ expressed means for staying in school and wanting or earning a high school diploma. As these categories were carefully analyzed into themes, I took note of which categories of dropout reasons were also identified as positive reinforcements towards the participants’ retention in school. Data collected was from 19 interview questions, a focus group with 10 open-ended questions and a written reflection paper. Interviews were transcribed to assure credibility. Open coding was used to determine emerging themes in the interviews and written reflections. Data collected was highlighted and sorted into color-coded categories to facilitate the data analysis process. Words and phrases or “meaning units” (Creswell, 1998, p.150; Hatch, 2002, p. 163; Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 35) were coded with the same color and listed separately. The emerging of the meaning units are represented in Figure 1. Themes that emerged from the data reflected the lived experiences of the participants. Memoing was also used in order to determine the developing themes. Member checking with participants was used to confirm the accuracy of the data. I also asked two professionals to review the data and provide feedback to enhance credibility.
Voices of Hispanic Teen Pregnancy

Theme 1
Relationship Support
- Family Support
- Boyfriend Support
- Teacher Support

Theme 2
Education Aspirations
- School
- Teachers
- Goals
- Academic Success
- Challenges
- Influences
- Motivations

Theme 3
Personal Transformation
- Family History of Teenage Pregnancy
- Parents' Education
- Family's Income
- Culture
- View of Self Past and Present
- Advice to other Teens

Theme 4
Household Continuity

Theme 5
Life Experiences

Figure 1: Emerging of meaning units into themes.
Participants

Twelve Hispanic teen pregnant or teen mothers were selected to participate in the study. The eligibility requirements required participants to be pregnant or a teen mother while enrolled in high school. Seven of the participants were pregnant during the time of the individual interviews and five were mothers of one child. Each participant was recruited by a personal and oral invitation. During the invitation, each participant was assured that the information gathered for the study would be kept confidential and that no personal information would be used to identify the data. Prior to the individual interview, the participants and their parents received a written consent form that explained the nature of the research. The written consent assured the participant and her parents of confidentiality of the information gathered.

The participants were identified by the pseudonyms Bianca, Carla, Cris, Caroline, Jada, Jacky, Neomi, Rosie, Sylvia, Sarah, Virginia, and Valerie. Cris, Caroline, Jada, Jacky, Sylvia, and Virginia were pregnant during the individual interview. Bianca, Carla, Neomi, Rosie, Sarah, and Valerie were mothers during the individual interview and had become pregnant sometime during their high school years. The participants ranged in age from 15 to 18. Common factors among the participants were low socioeconomic family background and residence in a rural area.
Table 1

*Overview of Participants 2010-2011 School Year*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Female Students</th>
<th>Pregnant</th>
<th>Mother</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th</td>
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</tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

The following table indicates the pseudonyms of the participants and their graduating year from high school. Caroline was accounted as a senior due to her graduating a year earlier. As a pregnant teen, she chose to graduate a year earlier to spend more time with her baby. Individual interviews and focus group were conducted between October and November of 2011 when participants had completed the classified year. The pregnant/mother column is based on the 2010-2011 school year and may differ from the time data was collected.

Table 2

*Participants based on 2010-2011 school year*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Graduating Year</th>
<th>Pregnant/Mother</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bianca</td>
<td>freshman</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carla</td>
<td>freshman</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cris</td>
<td>senior</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caroline</td>
<td>senior</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jada</td>
<td>sophomore</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Themes

During the course of the data collection process, five themes emerged from the detailed coding categories. These themes became consistent throughout the individual interviews and the focus group interview with the 12 participants, as well as to some degree the written letter to their unborn or born child. “A thematic phrase only serves to point at, to allude to, or to hint at, an aspect of a phenomenon” (van Manen, 1990, p.92). The thematic structure is presented in Figure 2. These themes are as follows:

1. Relationship Support
2. Education Aspirations
3. Personal Transformation
4. Household Continuity
5. Life Experiences
Relationship Support. The importance of strong supportive relationships with the participants’ family members, the father of the baby, and teachers were common among all participants. While not all participants lived with the father of the baby, they spoke positively about the continuous relationship. Relationship support was a positive indicator for all the participants’ school retention.

Family Support. All 12 participants spoke positively about the support they got from one or more family member. The majority indicated their mother played a major role in supporting them to remain in school. Carla felt her mom gave her the motivation to come to school. “My mom motivates me to keep coming to school. She tells me that now I have a responsibility to take care of my baby. She tells me that when I get out of school she is no longer going to help me. She reminds me that I will have to support the
baby.” Jada also felt her mother, while strict, she was her greatest motivation. “My mom motivates me to try hard to keep up with school. If I want her support, I have to do what she tells me. She is very supportive as long as I stay motivated to come to school.”

Rosie commented on how her mom was supportive because she was a teen mom herself. “She is supportive since she was a teen mom, so she understood. She told me she wasn’t going to kick me out or anything, just for me to keep going to school. My brothers and sisters would tell me stuff, but she would tell me not to listen to them.” Valerie gave her stepmother credit for the support she received while pregnant. “My step mom was shocked and was very emotional about it. She helped me a lot because I was really scared. She became very supportive and has always been there for me.” While Cris gave her mom and boyfriend credit for their support while she finished high school, she spoke of her brother’s support. “My brother graduated from UT Austin and is an administrator there. I always look up to him, he’s the person I would go to and he is more experienced in life and he always telling me to keep going and I need to graduate. He is always real supportive and pushes me. He would call me and tell me if I was keeping up with classes and what I needed to do to get into college. He really helped me a lot during my senior year. He would email me scholarships online so that I could apply.” When asked during the individual interview or group interview, “Who do you believe influenced you the most during high school?” or “Who has helped you become a successful student?” the following were the responses from the participants:

**Bianca:** My baby, I need to get my education to support him. I need to come to school for him.

**Carla:** My daughter makes me want to stay in school. Because of her I want to graduate from high school. She is going to need lots of things and
I want to be able to get them for her. I want to support her.

Cris: My mom was always here and pushes me to go to class when I would miss.

Caroline: I would have to say the support of my boyfriend and his family. He told me I needed to continue school even though he wanted to drop out. I told him, no, he needed to continue in school because I wanted him to be successful.

Jada: I think my mom wants a better life for us than what she had so she tries to give us everything. All she asks for us to be in school and she takes care of us.

Jacky: That would be my mom. My mom is a striving woman. She will work very hard even worked three jobs just to give us a decent meal.

Neomi: My mom calls me every day to make sure I come to school. She is always pushing me.

Rosie: My mom and my baby. My mom would tell me every morning, "Think of the baby." She would say, "Hechale ganas," there are no more friends. She would tell me to do good, finish high school.

Sylvia: My boyfriend because being a guy not being pregnant he struggled through school. He barely graduated. He got through because he had his sister helping him. Now he doesn't want me to struggle so he tells me, "You better get to school, if you need to take the car take it! If you have homework, get it done." He is 20 years old.

Sarah: My baby and when I was pregnant it was all about me but now he is the one. I didn't have a good lifestyle but I want my son to have more than what I had growing up. Julius, my baby, is my biggest influence.

Virginia: My sister Belinda has always been there for me. When I didn't want to go to school she would talk to me and then go drop me off at school. She graduated from high school, the only one so far who has graduated. So she is my role model, she has influenced me the most.

Valerie: I would say me but the girls who have dropped out due to their pregnancy have a big part on this because I don't want to end up like them.

**Boyfriend Support.** Bianca is one of the girls who still lives with the father of her child. She commented, "He was very supportive through the pregnancy. He was there when I went into labor. He's really emotional; he started to cry. He was attending
Progreso High School but he moved here to be with me. He helps with the baby every day.” Caroline feels her boyfriend is her biggest support and said, “I would have to say the support of my boyfriend and his family is what helps me the most to stay in school. He told me I needed to continue school even though he wanted to drop out. I told him no- he needed to continue in school because I wanted him to be successful.” Jacky also lives with the father of her unborn child and said the following when asked about how he reacted to her pregnancy, “It was a shock to him. It was a wake-up call to him and me but mainly him because he has a bigger responsibility. It took time away from his friends, from doing his shenanigans. He has to be able to support the baby and get a good education including college. He graduated from high school and now he is saving money to be able to support the baby. He is preparing for a few months away and then when I graduate he intends to join me in college. He plans to support the baby and we plan to stay in the house we are in and my step-mom can watch over the baby while we go to school.” Rosie thought she also would be together with the father of her baby, but then he was put in jail and that changed everything for her. “He was excited that I was pregnant. He would tell me he was going to be there for me, we would be together and be a family. But then he got locked up. It was really hard since I would see other girls with the baby's daddy but I was alone.” Sarah has had her ups and downs with her boyfriend but felt he was a hard worker and wanted the best for their son. She said the following about him, “When I told him over the phone, he said OK. Then I didn't see him until Monday at school. He was kind of excited because he wanted a boy. He told all of his friends and his teachers. He had to tell his baseball coach because he could no longer play because he had to work. His coach didn't want him to quit nor did his mom,
but he had to work. He was just kind of excited. When he found out it was a boy he was even more excited. He kept telling me, "I have to work." He was just working a lot.”

Virginia was the only pregnant teen that said the pregnancy was planned. She said, “He was excited and happy because we have been together for 2 years. We had already planned to have a baby. That's what we both wanted.

**Carla:** He was very happy and he started crying. He was very sentimental. He told me he would help me support the baby. He calls me every day from New York to check on the baby.

**Cris:** He thought I was joking because he had an accident and doctors told him he wouldn't be able to have kids. I was on birth control and I never missed a day so he was like, “How could you be if they told me I couldn't and you were on birth control?” But I took him to my second doctor appointment and they did a sonogram and he was like, “Oh you are.” He was really happy! He has been there.

**Jada:** I was so mad because he reacted really happy or like not happy but he was laughing. So I thought it was mean because he was already graduating and is now graduated. He had all his credits and he didn't have anything to worry about like school getting in the way. I was so angry I couldn't even look at him. Ever since we started dating I guess his goal was to get me pregnant. I don't know why. I guess he just wanted a kid really bad.

**Neomi:** He was actually happy. Everyone in his family knew and his mom would tell me to tell my mom. He even said he would go and tell her.

**Sylvia:** He said, "Well what do you want to do?" He wasn't mean about it but he was excited. He likes kids. When he found out it was going to be a boy he was really excited. He is the only boy, all his aunts have nothing but girls.

**Valerie:** Even though he was shocked, he took it very well. At first I was scared because I was thinking, “What am I going to do with the baby?” But he was very supportive. I think he was the best teen dad. Even though he is not here right now, we communicate and I send him lots of pictures of the baby.
**Teacher Support.** All 12 participants had good teacher/student relationships and said that teachers were supportive to their academics at one time or other as teen mothers. Cris stated, “One of my teachers was always supportive. She would tell me of scholarships and asked if I needed letters of recommendation or reference letter. My counselor was very supportive and helped get my papers ready for STC (South Texas College) done. He would remind me to turn in my paperwork like scholarships, transcripts. My first period teacher understood, he would tell me if I need to walk out of class to go ahead when I felt sick. Most teachers were really good.” Caroline, who was trying to graduate as a junior after she became pregnant, commented on the support she received from her teachers, “All my teachers were really supportive. I was out a whole month and was given a lot of make-up work to do when I came back. But some of the teachers gave me extra time to do the work. For those teachers that did not give me extra time I stayed after school and went to credit recovery to get my credits.” Rosie’s experience with teachers, “My teachers were there. They were supportive but some that didn't care if I was pregnant, they treated me the same. Some would look at me weird because I was pregnant, but most were supportive. They would help me out if I needed anything or if I felt bad. Some would open up to me and offer their help. If I needed to talk to them they were there to listen. I never felt comfortable enough to open up to them.” Sarah remembers the help of her teachers, “They helped me after school with work so that I could pass. My junior year the first semester I was homebound, but [during] the first two weeks of school my teachers helped me a lot after school. One time I missed a whole week because my baby was in the hospital. I told my teachers and they helped me one to one after school. I made up everything.” Valerie commented about her
teachers, “She (Valerie’s teacher) was always, always real helpful. The nurse helped me a lot, she was supportive and I went to her a lot. When I was pregnant I had very supportive teachers, they were always there for me. I went from being a cheerleader being thrown up in the air to now staying in the ground. That was very hard for me and having supportive teachers helped with that. It made it much easier for me to overcome. Sylvia commented, “They help me out a lot. They treat me no different just as a normal student but they do help me. The nurses they check on me all the time my counselor has been helping me with my financial aid in getting into college. One of my teachers would talk to me and tell me everything will be OK. He was like a friend.” Neomi was set at ease when her social worker told her she would have a good delivery. The social worker was real supportive. Jada also commented on the support from her teachers, “All my teachers are helpful. They help me a lot even more than the other students. I mean they help everyone but they are always asking me if everything is all right or how I’m feeling.” Carla stated, “My teachers, they would send work home when I missed school so that I could catch up. That helped me.” Neither Bianca nor Virginia made comments about teachers.

**Education Aspirations.** Virtually all participants agreed that their education aspirations to stay in school and graduate were key components towards their success in high school. The following 4 commonalities appeared during the individual interviews and focus group. Teachers appear again, signifying their importance in the participants’ lived experience.

**School.** Getting through high school became an accelerated force once the participant became pregnant. All participants felt that finishing school was in the best
interest for their future and the baby. Bianca commented, “I was on top of the class in middle school, but when I entered high school I lowered my standards. I feel it’s a good thing I am still coming to school because right now that I'm going to have a baby I need to have a better education to earn more money so I can support him.” Carla added, “My daughter makes me want to stay in school. Because of her I want to graduate from high school. She is going to need lots of things and I want to be able to get them for her. I want to support her.” Cris pointed out, “I put myself in my daughter’s position and I think I want her to have more than what I had. That’s why I need to go to school and get my education, so I can have a good job and get her everything she needs. Before I was pregnant, I was more like, ‘I am just going to go through high school’. ” Neomi summarized, “Everything changes when you get pregnant. Now it’s just not about me it’s also about my daughter so I have to finish high school and go to college.” All participants offered similar reflections regarding staying in school for the purpose of caring and providing for their child in the future but, as discussed during the focus group interview, being pregnant and a teen mother in high school is not easy. Jada commented, “As a teen mother, I have experienced a lot of things. It puts a whole stop to your life to start another one. Not only do I have my mom pushing me to graduate but now I have him. I'm a junior now but I was pregnant as a sophomore. When I found out I was pregnant, I missed a lot of school because I didn't want anyone to know. It's hard because it’s almost time for me to come back to school and I don't want to leave him.” Jada was still on home-based schooling during the focus group interview. Valerie is a teen mom and enrolled in AP courses and said the following, “I was pregnant as a sophomore. Things changed a lot, I would get tired and not want to do homework and I had to keep in
mind that I was going to have a baby. Coming to school every day and being tired, the
pains, back aches are something I had to overcome. Now, as a mom, it is harder. I
missed a lot of school and I have AP classes and trying to graduate as a junior, going to
night school and still having her in the back of my mind all the time is hard.” While all
participants struggled through the aches and pains of pregnancy and the sleepless nights
while learning to be a teen mom, all echoed Caroline’s feeling of never regretting having
their child or carrying out their pregnancy.

**Teachers.** Having caring and helpful educators that encouraged the participants
to keep going was part of their success in school. The teachers the participants spoke
about allowed them to make up work and spent quality time after school teaching them
when absent from class. While none of the participants comment in receiving special
treatment from teachers, they felt teachers played a major role in encouraging them to
stay in school. Jacky pointed out, “This pregnancy has given me the boost to say, ‘I'm
going to get this done,’ and the teachers are there for me to provide what I need.”

**Goals.** All participants had the same goal of graduating from high school and the
dream of going to college someday, but mostly getting a job to support their child.
Caroline remarks how her plans changed after her pregnancy, “I was planning to go to a
four year university to become a psychologist, but now the baby comes first and it is
pretty hard. My goals were to graduate and look for a job.” Jada also finds her plans
changing after high school to going to a local college instead of the University of Texas.
Jacky comments, “My goals needed to be set higher and I had to strive harder and
dedicate more than any other student that takes their school casually.” The following are
the individual goals of the other participants as the researcher felt it was equally
important to report each comment.

**Bianca:** My goals are to get as much education I can so I can get a good job and earn enough money to support my baby. My goals didn't change. The only thing that changed was that I had a baby. I still plan on graduating from high school and going to college. Now I have to push more since I have a baby. I want to study business or accounting.

**Carla:** My goals did not change when I had my daughter. I still see myself finishing high school and going to college to become a nurse. I also want to work as I go to college. I know my mom will help me with the baby.

**Cris:** I was looking to go into RN at STC but now I'm looking into physical therapy or speech therapy. I put myself in my daughter's position and I think I want her to have more than what I had. That's why I need to go to school and get my education, so I can have a good job and get her everything she needs. Before I was pregnant, I was more like, “I am just going to go through high school. And if I go to college, I'll eventually go.” Now I have to do it because I have someone depending on me. I'm going to have someone telling me, "Hey I want this or I want that," and I don't want to make excuses.

**Neomi:** At first, I just wanted to get through high school but now I want to go to college. Everything changes, now it's just not about me it's also about my daughter. I really want to go to college so I can have an education. I want to show her how I did it and how I went on with her, as a young mother.

**Rosie:** My goal is to continue school and be somebody in life. To do something with my life, not just to work in a fast food restaurant and just stay there. No, I wanted to go to college and get a degree in something I liked. I always thought I would go to college and enjoy my college years. But after I got pregnant I still want to go to college but for something fast, so I won't take a long time since I need to take care of the baby. I want to start working for me and my baby. I want to finish school fast so I can study in what I will work in and get a good paying job, so my baby could have anything he wanted and he wouldn't be missing anything.

**Sarah:** My goals are still the same but now I have to think about how expensive things are because I have to think there are 2 of us now. I have to provide for him, not just me. So goals haven't changed I just can't go like out of state until I have a real good job. I know up north it is more expensive. My family is down here, I have to wait until he is at school. I could work while he is in school. I would just need to provide for both of us. My goals haven't changed, I just have to think about him wherever I am going to go.

**Sylvia:** Before, it was you needed to go to college after high school and now it is a must because that is the way my family is- we always have to do better for
ourselves and our kids. My parents got me everything and I want to give everything to my baby.

**Virginia:** My goal is to finish school and get a good job. I don't know if I want to go to college but right now my biggest concern is to pass all my classes and graduate.

**Valerie:** I have always had high goals. The only thing is now I have to think how I'm going to do it with my baby. It will be hard, but I know I can do it. I want to accomplish my goals and I want to do good for her too. I not only have to provide for myself but for her and I don't want her to give up later in life. I want to do good for her. I want her to know, "Oh my mom tried."

**Academic Success.** Participants were asked to define success during the focus group interview. Each participant included her experience as a pregnant teen or teen mother and the internal drive to stay on top. Bianca commented, “I think the academic success is not only coming to school, yes others that aren't pregnant, they come to school but they don't make it a point to pass the class or do the work, they just come. But us who have a child or are going to have a child, we think about it and do our best to pass it or do what we can. That’s what makes us academically successful, or to get in better colleges or accept you or get scholarships, because we already have to spend money on diapers and formula, so we have to add more. If you get a chance to get scholarships, take it. Not everyone is economically stable. Last year, most of all my classes were Pre-AP except Spanish. This year, Pre-Cal was concurrent, but I dropped it because I was absent due to my son. So I felt, “Why I am going to ruin my transcripts and get F's for college credit class and it’s going to go to college?” Right now, I have two concurrent classes and I will earn college credit. I also have Spanish 3 because I want to graduate with Honors.” Jacky remembers, “I once bought a little calendar that had cute little quotes on them. One day it said “There is always an easy way out but there is always the right way to do things.” There is always the easy path and there is always the right way to
do it, and it gets you to think. Yeah, there are many teen mothers that do drop out. They
decided to take the easy way out but I'm not going to do that. Yes, it might be simpler or
easier but there is a right way to do it. I'm going to stay in school, for that reason my
baby will have a better life. Academically, I have been a success because I was always a
B student, now A/B, but I'm trying to stay all A's but that is really what caused me to
think, just that one simple thought.” Sarah supported her decision to stay in school and
be academically successful with the following statement, “To me, I think there is no
reason for anyone to drop out. As soon as you find out, yes, you will wake up in the
morning with morning sickness but if you don't want the struggle with family and you
don't want that for your kid, and then there is no reason to drop out. I have always had
good grades, and whenever I found out I was pregnant, my dad told me he didn't want to
think I wasn't going to graduate. My sister dropped out and everyone I know who has
been pregnant has dropped out. So I want to be the first one and I really want to prove to
my dad that he is wrong. When he told me that I knew I really needed to graduate.”

Some of the participants like Valerie owed their academic success to the support
they get from their family. Valerie stated, “Right now, I manage to be academically
successful because of the support that I have. There are times when I am doing
homework from the time I get home until 1 or 2 in the morning. It is just the push from
my parents and my daughter because they all tell me I can. My dad, especially, is really
proud of me. At first he was upset but he is always pushing me. I don't see him a lot but
once or twice a month. My mom is constantly helping me with watching my daughter.
Sometimes she sees her until 7 or if I have a lot of homework she takes care of her. Just
[thinking] I am almost done with high school keeps me in line.” Jada’s motivation comes
from her sister dropping out of school. “My motivation to be academically successful is my sister because she was a dropout her sophomore year and she already had her credits to be a junior and now that she struggles she went back to school. She tells me to stay in school because in the long run I am going to be struggling with him, with getting what he needs.” Virginia echoes a similar situation, “My sister was a young teen mother around 14 or 15; she dropped out of school around 9th grade. Only one of my sisters graduated from high school. The oldest one also dropped out in 9th grade, so I want to follow the footsteps of my sister and graduate. I don’t think teen moms should drop out; they should accomplish what they want to do. I don’t want to miss any school, I want to pass all my classes, I don’t always pass all my classes but I want to try my hardest and pass. I look forward to graduating this year. Carla, Cris, Neomi, Rosie, and Sylvia gave credit to the support they received from their moms to stay in school. Caroline’s family relationship was not as supportive as evidenced by her remarks, “Last year I can say was more of a reason to prove my family wrong. I wanted to prove to them that I can graduate and go to college, even though I have a child. I got one part done, I will graduate from high school and now my challenge is to go to college when I have a baby. I can say I can manage it and like they say there is no reason to drop out. There is a lot of help out there now, that is just an excuse to drop out of school.”

**Personal Transformation.** During the individual interviews and focus group, the participants delivered personal details about their challenges and motivations that kept them going. A transformation from the interviews that emerged into the following commonalities; challenges: physical and mental emotions, motivations and person of influence. It became apparent that somewhere between the discovery of the pregnancy or
motherhood, a transformation occurred within each participant.

**Challenges: Physical and Mental Emotions/Stress.** Bianca sees the challenges she will face ahead staying in school a sophomore and needing to provide for her baby. She comments, “Right now, I would like to have a job to be earning money. I feel I depend too much on my parents. When I need something for my baby, they provide it. Lately they only provide the formula; my boyfriend and I buy the baby wipes, diapers and clothes.” Caroline was an AP student feeling the stress from her classes as a junior and decided to graduate early by dropping out of AP classes and enrolling in A+, a credit recovery class so that she could graduate earlier once she found she was pregnant. At that time, she was living with her grandmother since her mom lived in Dallas, Texas. Her emotional challenges were not having her mom with her and her grandmother’s rejection of her pregnancy. Feeling physically and mentally stressed, she went to live with her boyfriend’s family. She commented, “I felt very frustrated because I had AP courses, they don't give you little work in AP courses, so I found myself letting go of all of that so that I could graduate. They put me in A+ credit so that I could finish. With my family they kind of lost communication with me for some time. They were upset, they had to be upset but they got over it and had to accept it. My grandma took it very hard because I lived with her, I didn't live with my parents. To her, it was a shock like ‘What? ‘You are pregnant’! My sister, she was surprised because she thought I would have learned from her mistake, but still I got pregnant. My grandmother’s reaction was, ‘I don't want her here. I don't want her here’. My mom said, ‘OK, I can take her with me or she can stay with the father of the baby’. So I went to live with my boyfriend’s family.” Jada has a big challenge of proving to her family that as a junior, pregnant and
recently a mother she will stay in school and graduate. Jada, like Caroline, was enrolled in AP classes and dropped to less challenging classes in order to make the grades to pass. Jada expressed, “My uncles and aunts were very mad because my boyfriend is older than me so I didn't want to tell them. My family is very protective with the girls. My mom was always warning me to tell her when I was being sexually active but I could not tell her. My uncles and aunts took it bad because they never expected this out of me. Like my sister, she was different-- always hanging around bad people and my family didn't expect that out of me. I tell them I will still be successful and they tell me they don't want to hear it until they see it. Those were not my intentions, like I didn't even care for kids. I just wanted to be in school and take care of my mom just like she took care of us. My goals were to go anywhere I wanted without any responsibility. I guess they have changed now.” Jacky explains the challenges she faces as a junior and pregnant, “It was challenging. The emotional breakdowns, the first weeks from nausea, headaches-- nothing felt good. Nothing good for me at the end of my junior year that’s when I became pregnant. But I had support from friends, family to teachers. One of my teachers told me it was going to a bumpy road and that it would be completely different from now on. My goals needed to be set higher and I had to strive harder and dedicate more than any other student that takes their school casually. My last 3 months when I became pregnant in my junior year, it was hard. I was excused so many times from class because of the vomiting. I felt sick, I didn’t want to get up but I had my boyfriend there who would nudge me every morning to keep me going to finish. I felt so horrible sometimes but I showed dedication to school. During TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) week for the juniors I really felt bad but I thought, ‘I have never failed TAKS
since 3rd grade’. Yes, academic obstacles academic-wise it is pretty tough to keep up with other students. My pregnancy in a way does get in the way because I have to keep up with my doctor appointments and if I'm sick I fall behind another day again. Every day I miss it's another day I get behind. It was hard at first living with my boyfriend's family because at first I was very quiet and timid. I felt awkward but now we all connect and there is a certain bond. I'm not gonna end up being just a housewife, I'm not going to do that because mom showed me that it is really hard. It is really hard and it is not something you should take lightly. Your education matters more than anything. And even now it is more important now that I will have a baby because it is not only me. I see probably more challenges for this school year. It’s a bit rough. The whole pregnancy is new to me and attending school and being pregnant.” In the Hispanic culture it is always very hard telling their family when something is wrong as Neomi found herself pregnant in her freshmen year and unable to tell her mom until she was almost due. She is currently a sophomore. Neomi speaks about her challenges, “In classes I wouldn't pay attention or I would get sleepy which led me to fail classes and lack credits. But no one knew I was pregnant so I had to do my work. I didn't want them to know because I thought they would look at me different. I was young I didn't want them thinking bad things of me. I never had doctor appointment since my mom didn't find out I was pregnant until I was almost due. My boyfriend and I actually have problems but the best solution [is] when I'm mad he leaves me alone and later we are all happy. We actually try to solve our own problems and not to include our parents. When I need to go to the store, sometimes I will ask him to watch her and he makes excuses that he can't because he's working with his dad. That gets me upset, so I will just take her.”
The research participants did not imagine themselves pregnant in high school. They had goals of maybe having a family once out of high school. The life happening of becoming pregnant in high school made each participant work harder at completing or getting through high school years. Rosie was a senior when she got pregnant. Rosie explains, “I never thought I would get pregnant. I wouldn't have thought I would get pregnant during my high school years. I would see other girls pregnant and see it was really hard. And then when it happened to me, I was like, ‘Now I'm one of those girls walking around while pregnant’.” I always said I wouldn't get pregnant but I ended up pregnant. After I became pregnant, anything I did was for my baby, I put him first. I had to get up and push through high school because I had to graduate and get my diploma. I always thought, if I don't get my diploma my baby will grow up and say, ‘My mom didn't finish high school then why do I have to finish high school?’ He's going to want to drop out so I want to be a good example.” Like Rosie, Sylvia finds herself working through her challenges of being a good example for her unborn child. Sylvia, a senior, offers the following, “It's not about me anymore. I am going to have a child and I need to have a future. It's not about if I want to or not and I have to be supportive. So a month after I found out I was pregnant, I had all these appointments and I was missing school. I had to make up all this work. I worked harder and I had to get all this WIC and other stuff. It was hard but my mom and boyfriend helped me get everything done. I was pretty good in keeping track of all my work. Last year I kind of slacked off and now it is hard because I could have had a period off but I can't because I failed a class. Now I have to push myself hard to get it done and finish that class.” Sarah is a very emotional participant with big dream to become a homicide detective in law enforcement in spite of
the challenges of teen motherhood. She is a senior with outstanding ranking on the top fifty students and an athlete. Sarah shares, “When I got pregnant it really didn't change. The only thing is now I have to see how far I can go. I can't go far up north as I wanted to and right now my goals are to graduate high school and I want to go to Sam Houston University in Huntsville. I want to do something in law enforcement. I want to be a homicide detective. But now that I have a kid, this is kind of iffy because that job they call you at 3 in the morning and you have to go and I have a kid I can't just leave him. My goals are still the same, but now I have to think about how expensive things are because I have to think there are two of us now. I have to provide for him not just me. So goals haven't changed; I just can't go like out of state until I have a real good job. I know up north it is more expensive.”

Valerie, another high-achieving junior, is managing to stay enrolled in her AP classes. She accepts the challenges that come because she wants to prove to everyone that as a teen mother she will succeed. Valerie explains, “I am trying really, really trying hard. I am trying to get out of what they say, ‘She is a teen mom, she became pregnant therefore she is going to drop out.’ I am trying to prove that completely wrong. I have always had high goals the only thing is now I have to think how I'm going to do it with my baby. It will be hard but I know I can do it. This year, I really want to work hard. I don't want to be making up hours. I want to get through my AP courses and then I want to start college right away. I plan to go to A&M University and it's going to take a while but I want to become a doctor. First, I want to get a nursing degree. When I'm done with college, my daughter will be older and then I want to be an army nurse. I know it will take a while but that's why I want to start right away.” Cris, a graduate, was a senior last
school year (2011), when she became pregnant. Before her pregnancy, school was about getting by until graduation time came, but her transformation came when she ended up pregnant the second semester. Cris had a challenge to get her credits completed before graduation. Cris explains what happened, “Before I was pregnant, I was just trying to settle with graduating. Then, when I got pregnant, I needed to try harder and do better by keeping my grades up so I can get into a school. I could go to college and try to provide for the baby. It changed everything. I was trying to get to class on time and finish everything faster so I could have time to go to another class and catch up on my work or make up credit hours that I missed during my first semester since I got pregnant during my second semester. Before I didn't care if I finished; I would just wait for the last month to try and catch up. I would do everything last minute, but after getting pregnant I needed to finish it right now in order that I would have time to catch up. It was already second semester, I wasn’t going to just drop out. I've gone for three years and one semester of my senior year so another four or five months wasn’t going to hurt me. I tried to keep going to classes and getting there on time and not leave early. Just trying to finish everything on time so I could get my hours straight, since I had some I owed but I went to credit recovery. I did it because I didn't want to let down my parents, so I tried to do my best to finish high school.” Carla became pregnant during her freshman year. She is now a sophomore struggling with the challenges of school work and coming to school but, as she comments, she does it for her daughter. Carla points out, “When I was pregnant last year, I missed a lot of school but I would ask for my missed work and do it at home. I lost credit the first semester but now I am taking credit recovery to gain credit for those classes. I want to become a junior before the end of this semester. My daughter makes
me want to stay in school. It is because of her I want to graduate from high school. She is going to need lots of things and I want to be able to get them for her. I want to support her.” Virginia, like Carla, stayed in school, doing everything possible to survive and pass her classes. Virginia tells, “My unborn daughter makes me feel good and wanting to come to school. Towards the end-of-school last year, when I became pregnant, I started staying after school to finish all my work from all my classes. I did a lot of end of the year projects, in one class I had to make a project and then present it to the class. I also did a biography of myself. I did a lot of extra credit work so that I could pass my classes.

During the focus group the participants were asked to elaborate in their greatest challenge as a pregnant or teen mother. Their responses are provided below.

Valerie: My greatest challenge right now is staying in school. I have a goal of graduating this year as a junior, but it is really, really hard. Especially with my mom working because she is the one who watches my daughter. I did apply for child care but it’s taking a little bit of time and that’s my main challenge right now. The difficulties I am having [are] with her dad and the expenses of diapers and things that she needs. I don’t work right now because I come to school from 8:10 to 7 o’clock at night, 3 times a week and the rest until 4 but that has to be the biggest challenge is coming to school and telling yourself, “You can do it and you’re going to get through it.” It gets really hard, I get tons of homework and I get a lot of stress but I have to keep coming because I have to.

Jada: Right now it has been really easy because I have a lot of support. My baby's dad is hardly with me because he works a lot, from 8 in the morning to 9 at night. My mom doesn't want me to get settled because my boyfriend just took the Border Patrol test so he is going to leave. So she doesn't want me to stay alone. I'm not really settled with him yet but it’s hard because he gets mad that my mom doesn’t want me to get married yet. That’s the biggest challenge right now is dealing with him and getting my mom involved between us.

Virginia: My greatest challenge as a teen mother is taking care of my baby. My mom helps me most of the time and I struggle a lot. My husband, I'm not married but he lives with me, he struggles with work a lot and we might get kicked out of where we live, so he doesn't find work very often so it is hard for me and my baby. I want to know we will be OK. My mom doesn't work and doesn't get money, he doesn't have money and I don't have money so it is really hard for me
Carla: My greatest challenge right now is to come to school for my daughter and go to college and do what I have to do. My mom helps me a lot.

Neomi: My greatest challenge is school. I have a lot of help from my mother-in-law, my mother. My mother can't right now because she had surgery and my mother-in-law has to work. I applied for child care but it is taking time, so my mother has to take care of her even if she doesn't want to. But I have to come to school because I have been missing a lot, and I can't miss school anymore because they'll send my mom to court.

Caroline: My greatest challenge right now is trying to start college. It is difficult because I also need someone to be able to take care of my baby and, economically, we need money coming in because diapers are really expensive and the milk. It’s difficult for me. It would be easier for me if my boyfriend would graduate and he would have a more stable job. But he can't because he has to graduate to get a better life. I also need to go to college to get us a better life too. It's kind of difficult because I don't want to leave her, but at the same time I know I have to do something of myself. I need to be a good role model.

Bianca: What is most difficult is coming to school. When I wake up, my baby is already awake and I get ready and try to spend time with him, it makes me not want to come to school and spend the day with him. Sometimes I do. Just seeing him makes me not want to come to school but I think about it and I have to come to school to give him something, to give him whatever he wants. My boyfriend comes to school also; he has been helping us out. Everything we need, we get or our parents’ help sometimes and that's what makes it easier on us.

Jacky: My greatest challenge right now that I am pregnant is the whole concept of becoming a mother. It takes a toll on someone; it gets you in a knot of frustration and confusion, doubt and every other emotion you can possibly think of. Now the challenge that I have is the fact that I can have a pre-mature baby because it runs in the family. I get nervous about it; I don't want to think about it, but it's possible. I have to stay calm, I have to watch out with my nerves because I have anxiety and I was diagnosed with bipolar symptoms and depression. So that all gets in the way because I can't be depressed, especially now because my baby girl has the umbilical cord next to her face and neck so if anything happens, like if I get too excited, too depressed she can easily get it wrapped around her neck. It’s a fear I have, because if that happens I will have to go in and get a C-section. It’s a scary thought and hope is what I try and keep--just that thought that she is going to be fine and everything is going to be ok. That is the only thing I fear and is a challenge right now that I am going to be a mother.

Sarah: My greatest challenge right now (sorry if I cry), is really is just everything. The main thing is me and my baby’s daddy broke up and they were the only ones I had. Neither one of my parents live here and I'm living with my
sister. I don't really have anyone else but my baby. I don't get to spend a lot of time with him because I come to school and I work. And now that I don't live with the dad anymore, he stays with him and then with me so we have been back and forth. I didn't want that for him and since I have to stay after school and make up everything, take away more time from being with my baby. At work I don't get a lot of hours so I don't have a lot of money. Just everything right now is hard, I wanted to graduate in December, but I don't know if it's too late or not, I need to work more. I prefer to just have a job than to come to school but I'm still going to need to go to college. I don't know. I think everything for me is a challenge.

**Sylvia:** My biggest challenge is getting all my credits to graduate. It is hard because I could have had a period off but I can't because I failed a class. Now I have to push myself hard to get it done and finish that class. I am taking a credit recovery class that is helping me with Algebra 2. The teacher there is really working with me to make the grade so that I can finish. I also need to pass my Science TAKS in order to graduate.

**Cris:** My biggest challenge is putting myself in my daughter’s position and wanting her to have more than what I had. That’s why I need to go to school and get my education, so I can have a good job and get her everything she needs. Before I was pregnant, I was more like, ‘I am just going to go through high school and if I go to college I'll go.’ Now I have to do it because I have someone depending on me. I'm going to have someone telling me “Hey I want this or I want that” and I don't want to make excuses. My parents provided for me and I want to provide for my daughter without the struggles my parents had. This will not be easy, but I have my parents’ support.

**Rosie:** I want to start working for me and my baby. Now that I have finished high school I want to go to college and study in what I would work in and they could pay me good. I want to provide my baby anything he wants and so he wouldn't be missing anything. This is a big challenge, but I know I can do it.

**Influences.** The power to affect others is the definition of influence in Webster’s New World Dictionary. All participants had at least one individual influencing them to keep going no matter the circumstances. Carla, Jada, Jacky, Neomi, and Rosie all agreed their moms were the most influential in making decisions about school and personal relationships. Jada comments, “I will be the first one from her kids to graduate so I want her to be very happy and I want to keep my mom happy. She is the one who has influenced me the most. She pushes me to go to school a lot and she didn't do that to my
sister so I am very thankful.” Jacky recalls the hard life of her mom, “My mom is a striving woman like she will work very hard even worked 3 jobs just to give us a decent meal. When my dad left, my mom worked 3 jobs to support us. That's what changed my point of view about her since I used to be very bratty. When I listened to all her issues before, I didn't think her issues were bigger than mine. It made me cry because I realized I was treating her like this and she was doing everything for us. We were not treating her like the mom who had done so much. After that, I thought I needed to finish college, I needed to show her that I was going to get a good education and job.” Rosie gives credit to her mom and baby, “My mom and my baby. My mom would tell me every morning, “Think of the baby.” She would say "Hechale ganas," there are no more friends. She would tell me to do good, finish high school.”

The other participants saw either their babies or their boyfriends as the one providing the most influence with the exception of Cris who had 3 persons in her family giving that support and Virginia who saw her older sister as her influence. She said, “My sister Belinda has always been there for me. When I didn't want to go to school, she would talk to me and then go drop me off at school. She graduated from high school, the only one so far who has graduated. So she is my role model; she has influenced me the most.” Bianca and Sarah saw their babies as their influence and Sylvia and Caroline saw their boyfriends consistently supporting them. Valerie felt the dropout research partially influenced her. She said, “I would say I am my biggest influence, but the girls who have dropped out due to their pregnancy have a big part on this because I don't want to end up like them.”

**Motivation.** During the focus group, a question regarding motivation was
What motivates you to stay in high school and graduate? The following are the participants’ responses.

**Valerie:** Right now, what are mainly motivating me are my daughter and the problems I am going through right now because I don't want to have them for the rest of my life. I want to be able to know that I am not going to be having to worry about next month’s rent and the bills I am going to have to pay. Or to think of how am I going to do this or do that. I want to stay in high school and graduate and go to college and follow with everything I want to do. That way I won't be having the problems I am having right now. It’s an ugly feeling when you’re thinking, “How am I going to get her formula or how is she going to eat, or what she is going to wear as far as diapers?” That is what motivates me right now.

**Jada:** My motivation to stay in high school and graduate are my son and my mom. If I quit or drop out of high school, I don't have my mom’s support and then I would be a bad role model to him. Because later on in life he is going to be like, “Well, you dropped out” and that might be his reason to drop out, if that is going to be his decision. I don't want to be the parent who dropped out and my boyfriend to be the one who graduated, then that is going to make me feel dumb.

**Virginia:** What motivates me to stay in high school and graduate is also my daughter. It’s difficult for me right now because if I don't finish high school, which I am very, very close to doing, it's going to be like something I didn't accomplish because my sisters told me I needed to finish high school and I needed to go to college but right now I don't know if I want to go. I am thinking about it and changing my mind because if you go to college you can study to be something and if you study to be something you can make your own money and a lot of money. That is what I would like to do for my daughter because right now, like I said, I don't have any money and my mom or my husband don't and it’s really hard for all of us. My sisters help me out with anything they can but what motivates me more is my daughter.

**Sylvia:** My boyfriend motivates me because being a guy not being pregnant he struggled through school. He barely graduated. He got through because he had his sister helping him. Now he doesn't want me to struggle so he tells me, “You better get to school, if you need to take the car, take it! If you have homework get it done.” He is 20 years old.

**Carla:** What motivates me to stay in high school and graduate is my daughter. I'm not with my baby's daddy so it’s hard, really bad.

**Neomi:** What motivates me to come to school is my mom calling me every day to get up and go to school. My mom is the one pushing me to finish school and my daughter too because I want to give her a better life. My parents didn't finish school so I don't want that too, for my daughter to see that I dropped out too or
that I didn't finish school. So if I finish school, it's because of my mom who is pushing me.

**Caroline:** What motivated me to graduate last year was my baby because I wanted to offer her something I never had. So she won't live what I lived through when I was small because we struggled sometimes. I don't want her to live like that; I want her to experience a good life, not to have to worry about if we are ever going to have money to pay bills or something, because I also wouldn't want her to say, “Oh you dropped out of school and got pregnant so why can't I?” I don't want her to follow in my footsteps; I want her to follow my good footsteps.

**Bianca:** My motivation to come to school is my son. I see him and think about the bad stuff, [such as] what if I didn't have enough money to buy him diapers or clothes? Just seeing him motivates me to come. [Also,] my parents because if I dropped out of school all the burden will be on them and they will have to buy him all the stuff. My dad is always getting after me every time I miss school and he is always telling me I am so close to finishing, “You’ve already spent most your life in school you just have 1 more year. You have gone so far why stop now?”

**Rosie:** My mom and my baby motivate me. My mom would tell me every morning, “Think of the baby.” That’s what got me through school and graduated. My baby now motivates to work hard and continue into college.

**Jacky:** What motivates me in staying in school and graduating is my baby. I believe all of us have a motivation because of our children. It is because I want to give her a better life. My life wasn't perfect, I have gone through so [many] that I have experienced so much things and it’s horrible because the world isn't like that. I don't want my baby to be born and only see the bright side of things and never go through those troubles that I went through. Dropping out of high school will not fix that. My unborn motivates me so much because I want to give it everything I couldn't have. So does my fiancé, he motivates me so much. Every morning he's the one who wakes me up he's like “Babe get up, go to school” and I am like, "No!" He is always pushing me because he graduated last year, and he is always saying I need to graduate. I love him for that too because I know a bunch of people that don't have the father helping, or they abandon the mother and child. It's a bad situation but they can go through it.

**Sarah:** What motivates me is, well, before I even got pregnant I knew I wanted to graduate and go to college because of the way we grew up. My mom would struggle a lot but once I found out I was pregnant, my son motivated me even more. I don't want him at all to go through the struggles I went through when I was small. I want to go to college and I know it is four more years and I still have this year but it's going to be worth it all to get the job I want and to have enough money. If he comes home from school and says I need $20 for school tomorrow, I can just give it to him, instead of saying, “You should have told me earlier so I could have saved it.” I want him to have way, way more than I had.
Cris: My mom always motivated me and pushed me to go to class when I would miss. My boyfriend would tell me to keep going and I need to go to school because he needs help providing. He would offer to bring me to school when I needed a ride. Now that I have graduated I am thankful to them but I still need their help with the baby and they are always there. My baby now motivates me to continue with working and going to college with my mom’s help.

Household Continuity. Four commonalities emerged from the household continuity: Family history of teen pregnancy, parents’ education and family’s income are important units on the life experience of the teen mother. As noted in the literature review, residing in transitional communities where the rates of poverty, single parenthood, and low educational levels are related to teen pregnancy.

Family History of Teen Pregnancy. Ten of the twelve participants had a history of teen pregnancies in their immediate families. Three of the 10 had a mother that was a teen mother with the rest having one or more sisters up to three sisters as teen mothers. Bianca mentioned that her younger sister had a baby while in middle school. Neomi pointed out, “My sister had a baby when she was 15. My mom got pregnant when she was 17 and dropped out junior year because my Grandma told her she needed to stay home and be a mom and get married.” Virginia had 3 sisters that were teen mothers. She comments, “My 3 sisters were teen mothers. One got pregnant when she was 16 years old and dropped out of school. My other sister, who also dropped out when she became pregnant, has 5 kids. My mom was also a teen mom, she had 4 girls. My sister Belinda she was a teen mom but she did graduate.” Cris and Valerie reported no family history of teen pregnancies.

Parents’ Education. In order to understand the economic background of the participants, I reported each participant’s entry.
Bianca: My mom didn't finish her senior year. She dropped out and my father graduated.

Carla: My mom dropped out of school but then got her GED. My father, I don't know him.

Cris: My dad graduated from high school and college in Mexico. My mom didn't get to get to 6th or 7th grade level because she had to start working to help her brothers and sisters.

Caroline: My mom went to school until 10th grade and then she dropped out. My father, I don't think got an education. He came from Mexico.

Jada: My mom didn't graduate from high school. She didn't go to school here, only in Mexico up to 4th grade. But now she finished UCAS. My dad graduated from high school and he is now a truck driver.

Jacky: My mother got an associate’s degree from Mexico. My step-father finished high school.

Neomi: My mom dropped out when she was a junior and my dad dropped out when he lived in Mexico. My grandma needed help with the animals in the ranch and told him to drop out.

Rosie: My mom went up to 6th grade in Mexico and my dad dropped out in high school around 10th grade in Mexico.

Sylvia: My father dropped out of school when he had a baby and started working. My mom didn't finish school either. She dropped out and then 4 years ago decided to go to college [to be a] dental assistant. She would work then go to night school. She would come home feed us and then go to school. She might go back to school now to become a dentist.

Sarah: My mom dropped out her junior year. My dad dropped out his sophomore year.

Virginia: My mother went up to 9th grade but in Mexico. My father did not finish school. He was an alcoholic and my mom divorced him.

Valerie: My mom graduated from high school and has some college. My dad graduated from high school.

Family’s Income. The following participants’ entries indicate their parents’ income. In some cases, the participant did not live with the parents. Again I felt it was important that the reader understood the economic status of each participant. As reported in the literature review, low socioeconomic status is sometimes a related to teenage
pregnancy.

Bianca:  I live with both my parents, my sister and her baby, my brother, older sister and my baby. My dad also has custody of five of my cousins who live with us. My mother works as a provider and my father is a self-employed mechanic. My older brother works at the mall. My parents own their own home. It used to be a trailer, but they kept adding on to it. It has six rooms. Yes, we receive food stamps and Medicaid. My sister with the baby receives it too, including my siblings and cousins.

Carla: My mom is the only one working. My mom owns the mobile home we live in. We are not rich but mom provides for us. We get food stamps and Medicaid for all the children.

Cris: I live with my mom and dad. My dad gets a social security check for his back that is broken and my mom she works with the school so she pays the house and whatever stuff we need. My boyfriend doesn't live with me but he sends my mom money for whatever I need. He's working two jobs. He is an EMT and medical assistant. He gives two or three hundred a month to help us. My mom doesn't have a lot of bills just like the house, bills and credit cards. I was working at HEB but my doctor advised for me to quit because I could be at-risk, so my boyfriend pays what I was paying my parents. I get WIC which helps me a lot and I also get Medicaid and food stamps.

Caroline: I live with my boyfriend's parents and it's not a luxury home but a home. They can't afford much, but it's O.K. I receive food stamps, so I help them with some groceries. Right now, I receive Medicaid for my doctor appointments, food stamps and WIC.

Jada: My mom just finished paying for our OBRA home. My mom works at a beauty salon. She has just finished UCAS beauty training. And she is going to open her own salon. That is the only income we get.

Jacky: I lived with my mom and 6 other family members in a trailer. My mom works 2 jobs right now to support my family. My mom got us all on Medicaid.

Neomi: My dad works as a janitor in schools and my mom is a stay at home mom. They own their own house. I live with my boyfriend’s family. They rent to own. Both my boyfriend’s parents work. His mom cleans houses. I live with his parents, my boyfriend and his little brother. My mom receives food stamps and Medicaid for my older brother. My boyfriend's parents receive the same.

Rosie: My parents don't have document papers. They crossed the border to live over here. They sell tamales, so they don't get a lot of money. My mom cooks them and sells only on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, but this is the only income. My family receives food stamps for me and my baby. I receive Medicaid for my baby. Not all my brothers and sisters have document papers from here because
some were born in Mexico.

**Sylvia:** My parents provide and own their own home. My dad really works very hard. He is a sales representative for Auto Zone and he works very hard to provide for us. My mother is a dental assistant. They provide everything. Sometimes we get mad cause we don't get everything but then there are a lot of kids that don't have what we have. I get WIC which is like food stamps but not everything. I get the healthy foods for me. I get Medicaid while I am pregnant and then only the baby will get it.

**Sarah:** When I was younger, when my parents were still together, we lived in Dallas and we had everything. When they got separated, my dad was struggling and my mom was struggling and neither worked. We didn't have everything we wanted. We lived with my grandma, my dad's mom. Then they got separated and my mom lived in an apartment with her boyfriend. I don't know but we struggled a lot. Now that I live with his parents they are struggling because his father has not been called to work on the oil rigs. My boyfriend and I help them out. We work very little hours, but we try to help his parents because they also have other kids. Whatever money we get we put it together to help. We all are struggling. I get food stamps, WIC, Medicaid only for my son, not for me. Whatever I get with the food stamps it's not only for me but for my boyfriend’s parents also.

**Virginia:** We are under housing and my boyfriend pays the rent. We get food stamps and housing.

**Valerie:** My mom does not work but is looking for a job right now. Well, I see where my mom struggles financially. My dad works and pays child support. She pays the rent and water with that. My dad has me, my older and younger sister, and baby sister. Then he also has his wife, and a cousin who is a friend’s son who he treats as one of us. He's hard working, but he has a different mindset, the way he spends his money. I live with my mom in an apartment with my brother, sisters and my baby. My mom gets food stamps which helps tremendously.

**Life Experiences.** The twelve participants voiced their lived experience as a pregnant teen or teen mother. During the focus group interview, several questions were asked that help develop Theme 5: Life Experiences. These commonalities emerged from the discussion; culture, view of self: past and future, and advice to other teens.

**Culture.** There are many expectations and conflicts for females in the Hispanic culture that others who are not part of the culture do not understand. Participants were asked to define the gender role and how they handled expectations and conflicts. Each
participant response was reported.

Sarah: I think girls can do whatever boys can do. If it is up north, white men or women think Hispanics are a lot slower, or we can't do the job. We would just have to prove them wrong. I don't know why people are like that but we just have to prove them wrong. We can do what boys can do and because we are Hispanic we can do what white people or African-American people can do. And, to me, if there were no Hispanics, there wouldn't be anything because we are the ones that build everything. Yes, we are Hispanic girls so we have to prove everyone wrong.

Jacky: For us to be Hispanic and female is kind of tough on us, because a lot of people see us as underworked and will take any job for money. I think we are hard workers and need to prove everyone wrong, because a lot of people expect us to be working out in fields. I think that for most people expect very little from us. It's really hard to be out there in the world and become someone. I believe we have a lot of courage and dedication on us because my role model is my mom and she came here, and when people hear ‘Hispanic people,’ I mean white or black or any other race, they obviously think Mexico. And right now Mexico is at a loss (drug war) and people think that way of us. When my mom came over here [it] was because she wanted a better life for us. She came over here when my dad left her, she had a 4 year old little girl, a 2 year old son and I was still in her stomach at 8 months. My mom came over here with no more than $20 in her pocket; we had no home, no car because my dad took everything. My dad was just decided to leave, my mom she pulled through and gave everything she could. She worked real hard; she got us a house she did everything she could for us. She got us a great education, and yes she is Hispanic and she went to college. She went through a lot and most people don't expect us to do a lot. They expect us not to go to school, or expect us not to do a lot with our lives. It proves, well my mom she proved it, and I want to do that. I want to prove that just because I am Hispanic I can do what white people do, or black or any other race or man can do. We try to forget or blind ourselves that there is racism out there. Or just because you are a woman you can't run or be the boss, because you are woman and no one is going to take you seriously. There are women who are out there who have that position and we pay a lot of respect to them.

Bianca: I think we females are capable of doing anything anyone else can do, men or any race all we need to do is set our minds to it. I think Hispanics who don't go to college can't succeed. It's like they say Hispanics are only good for having babies and living off welfare. Well we prove that wrong, it’s just what you think if you want to do it, and then do it, but if you don't you’re just taking the easy way out. I lived up north when going to school and yes, it was just white people and I was the only Hispanic there, everyone else was blond. And it’s the same you’re no different there. You just feel different because you have brown hair and everyone else is blond. But it’s the same--you have a brain, perfectly
Caroline: I would have to say, like everyone else, even though we are women, we can do the same as everyone else. I grew up without the figure of a father so I had to learn to grow up and do everything by myself. And they taught me not to depend on a man. And now that I moved in with my boyfriend’s family, they were raised very different. They believe you’re supposed to depend on the man. And I tell them no, and they tell me he is supposed to do it. They think the woman should stay at home and take care of the kids. I don't think that is the way it should be. I think we should be allowed to have an education and a job also. I also lived in Houston and there were a lot of blacks and whites and there was a lot of racism. Many times I was discriminated [against] because I was Hispanic. At first, they thought I was white and they would treat me ok, because I was real quiet. But when they knew I was Hispanic, they would treat me bad and say I was bad. But I remember they would tell my parents I was a perfect student but I would get written up for no reason. I don't know why people do that or why black people do that because they were discriminated once also. So they know how it feels, why discriminate on Hispanics? Hispanics are the ones that provide everything for the United States, we are the ones that whites don't want or blacks don’t want either. We work in the fields and everything. The bridges they are building Hispanics are doing it.

Neomi: I think that we as females or anyone should be treated the same. We all are the same. They look at our hair color or skin color and they see us different[ly]. I think everyone should be treated the same; I don't think anybody would like to be treated different.

Carla: I don't find a difference between male and female. I think we can do the same. When I was with my baby's daddy he would tell me I had to do this and that but he is the father as well and should help. I don't know why but I feel females are treated different. It shouldn't be like that.

Jada: I don't think there should be any comparisons between man and woman, because just like men have succeeded, women have succeeded in life. There are no differences; I haven't experienced any discrimination because I have lived here, Florida and Arkansas so there are Hispanics everywhere I go. I have never experienced it, so I hope I don’t.

Valerie: I have never been put in that situation; I didn't even know there was that much discrimination between Hispanics or men and women. But the only thing I have come in contact with is when my baby's daddy told me I wouldn't have to work I could stay home with the baby and take care of things at home. I said no, what if he would leave me what am I going to do? I don't think there should be discrimination between us-- we can do the same as them. We can do it in heels.

Virginia, Cris, Rosie and Sylvia did not elaborate on this question but agreed that women
should be treated as men because they can do anything that men do. They also felt that discrimination should not exist anywhere in the world.

**View of Self Past and Future.** Participants were asked if they saw themselves being teen mothers as a child. They were also asked to view of themselves 10 years from present. Once again, every participant response was reported.

**Virginia:** I saw myself as a mother soon because I wanted a baby.

**Valerie:** I never, ever saw myself as a teen mom.

**Sarah:** I didn't see myself as teen mom at all. Having a baby as a teen was the last thing on my list. First was to graduate and go to college and then after I finally got the job I wanted I would have a kid but he just came earlier than I expected. But like I tell everybody, I don't regret it, I don't like that word ‘regret’ but I don't and he isn't a mistake either, which is another word I don't like. Now it's just a little different and he is going to be right next to me.

**Jacky:** When I was younger and my sister had her baby, my mom would tell me, “You’re next.” I would say, “No, I'm not. I am not having a kid until I go to college.” I would think if I got pregnant I don't even want to show up to school. I didn't know what my peers would think of me. High school is very rough on us teens because there is the problem of people who don't like you and rumors. And going in pregnant it’s crazy and gets out of control. I never saw myself as a teen mother and have changed my perspective on things and have made me stronger.

**Rosie:** I never thought it would happen to me.

**Bianca:** As a child I never saw myself as a teen mother but, as I grew older, as a teenager I did think of having a child I wanted a boy but not until after college. I already have a child and I don't regret it. You already have a child and can't regret it.

**Caroline:** I would say none of us wanted to be a teen mother but I'd say we took the wrong footsteps. We became mothers and with a child already here and we love them. It’s not a mistake. Life is still there and we just got to continue and try harder.

**Neomi:** No, I didn't see myself as a teen mother. I would say I don't want kids because I would see my sister pregnant when she was a sophomore. I would see her struggle and I didn't want kids. I went through the wrong path and got pregnant.

**Carla:** No, I never saw myself as a teen mother. I would always tell myself I didn't want a kid because the way mom told me it was. She had me at 15 and it was hard for her. I didn't want one but I don't regret my daughter.
Jada: I didn't see myself with a kid. Especially coming into high school and when I travel by myself or with family I have a big responsibility. I love my baby; I didn't know you could love a kid this much. I don't regret him at all, but when I got pregnant I was disappointed. Just like I disappointed my mom, she expected more of me. She thought when I told her I was pregnant that I would drop out of school, but right now she is proud of me. I want it to stay like that; I want her to be prouder of me when she sees me graduate.

Cris: I never thought I would get pregnant as a teen but it happened and it changed everything.

Sylvia: I didn’t plan to get pregnant while still in school.

How do you view yourself 10 years from now?

Jada: 10 yrs. from now I will be 26 and hopefully I will have been graduated from college and with my son who will be 10 and he will be in 5th grade. Hopefully, I will have the education and money so when he asks me for something I will be able to get it. He will have everything he needs, hopefully more. Hopefully, he will be the only one I have because it’s a handful.

Valerie: In 10 yrs. from now I hope to be settled in a house where my daughter can grow up. Hopefully, [I will be] done with college and doing well in a good job that pays really well.

Sarah: 10 yrs. from now I will be 28 and my son will be 11 1/2. If it doesn't work out with me and his dad, I have always told myself I would have a kid only with that one person, I can't have one with someone else. I don't want my son to have a step dad because I have a step dad and if me and his dad don't work out, it's just me and him. I just want to finish college and I want to be in law enforcement and he will be in school. I just want to have my own house and be able to pay everything I need to pay and get him what he needs. If it works out with his dad it will be so much better.

Virginia: Married to my husband and having a good job.

Jacky: In 10 yrs. I will be 27. I will be finished with college and be a photographer. I will have my own set and be famous. I love photography and still strive so much. That is my plan and I plan to stay with my fiancé, I don't see myself with anyone else. [I hope to] move to Michigan where we were both raised.

Sylvia: I would have graduated from college and working in some kind of business and raising my child.

Bianca: In 10 yrs. I will be 26 and my son 10. I see myself already graduated from college and working in a bank. I think I'd be married by then, hoping we stay together, successful and with a house.
Caroline: In 10 yrs. I will be 29 and hopefully a psychologist by then. My daughter will be 10 and hopefully I can have my own house by then and her dad, I'm hoping I'd still be with him and she will have a mother and father figure.

Cris: Graduated from college and married to my baby’s dad.

Neomi: In ten years from now, I will be 25 and my daughter will be 11. I want to be a teacher and she will be in school. I hope I will be a teacher and married.

Rosie: Working at a successful job and providing for my child.

Carla: I will be 26 and my daughter 10. I will be done with college, I want to be a RN and have my own place. I would get back with my baby’s daddy but I don't think it will work. I would like my daughter to be in his life. I have never met my dad and I would want her to have a dad.

Advice to other Teens. Participants were asked to provide advice to other teenage girls in high school. All of the participants voiced their opinion of waiting until after high school to have children. Valerie advised, “I would tell other teens to wait. Yes we want to have fun, parties and boys but to have a baby right now is the most difficult thing ever. It would be so much easier because right now it’s not you can just pick up and leave. It’s get the baby, feed the baby and if she poops you have to change her, redress her and get the diaper bag and leave. It’s so much harder to do everything when you have a baby. It’s especially hard when you are running late to school and you have too many tardies and you have to go court. Oh, my God. Yes, wait, wait and if you can't wait then use protection, all the protection you can use. In the end it will be worth it to wait.” Jacky’s advice included not dropping out of school. She commented, “If there was something I could tell a teen right now in high school is if you are not up to the challenge of having a child right now then you should wait. It is difficult and it’s tiring on a person themselves. If you do get pregnant, dropping out is no excuse. We are here doing it, succeeding in life. For them to drop out is a very poor choice and for their child's future. Bianca paints a picture to the high school teen, “Think how hard [it will
and the difficulties in having a child. All the things you have to do and money needed. You have to buy diapers, formula and clothes. If it urges you, then be prepared for the challenge or use protection. There are shots or IV better than condoms.”

Caroline’s advice includes staying away from boyfriends. She offers, “Don't get pregnant, use protection. Better yet don't have a boyfriend, because that will cause the temptation. If you do have a child, don't drop out, it’s not an excuse. Continue life, love your child, don't ever regret your child because they came early but they didn't choose to come it was our decision to bring them. It was our mistake and we shouldn't take out our mistake on them.” Finally, Jada’s advice includes not depending on the government. She advised, “Right now getting pregnant, yes the government makes it easy on you because they help you with everything. But my mom she is not letting me depend on anything. She doesn't want me to get any help so I could learn. It is hard and if you are depending on the government you will get used to it. When you do have to pay for your own things, it will be difficult and that is how my mom is teaching me. That is why there a lot of teenagers having a lot of kids because they are depending on the government. That is my opinion. And the way my mom is teaching me, I don't want more kids because it is hard.”

**Written Reflection**

Participants were asked to write a letter to their unborn or born child after the individual interview was conducted. Each letter was written with the love and hope the mother feels for her child. Some letters include the struggles a teen mother has experienced, but mostly it is about the hope for a bright future they hold for their child. The letters may be found in Appendix E, “Written Reflections” as they were written by
each participant.

**Summary of Findings**

In this chapter, the voice of twelve Hispanic teen females’ lived experiences of teenage pregnancy and motherhood while enrolled in high school were heard. Through individual interviews, a focus group interview, and a written reflection the participants revealed their lived experiences of staying in school despite the challenges of teen pregnancy and motherhood. Analysis of the data revealed how participants managed and desired to stay in school. Five prominent themes emerged through the data analysis process. The first theme was the relationship support from family, boyfriend and teachers which contributed to their school success. The second theme was the education aspirations the participants developed when they became pregnant and into motherhood. These included school, teachers, goals, and academic success. The third theme was the participants’ personal transformation which included challenges, influences, and motivation to stay in school. The fourth theme was household continuity that looked at family history of teen pregnancy, parents’ education and family’s income which are all contributing factors of teen pregnancy. The final theme that emerged was the life experiences of the participants. The Hispanic culture, the view of the past and future, and advice to other teens were meaningful units in this theme. In the final chapter, the ramifications of these themes and recommendations for future research will be discussed.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This final dissertation chapter will find meaning and answers to the research questions that guided this study. The summary of the study is provided, followed by a conclusion that was drawn from the analysis of the data in relation to four specific research questions. The discussion section will follow with the limitations of this study. The final section of the chapter suggests recommendations for further research.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the phenomenon of Hispanic teen pregnancy and school resiliency by means of their lived experiences. Through this study, participants were able to share the experiences affecting their choices to stay in school. I was interested in examining the obstacles and challenges Hispanic pregnant teens or teen mothers face during their high school years. In addition, I sought to find common experiences among the social, academic, and economic factors of the participants. The focus of the study was to find common experiences among the participants in which helped develop the following research questions:

1. What factors influence Hispanic teen mothers to remain in high school through graduation?
2. What personal challenges are experienced by Hispanic pregnant teens or teen mothers that impact the completion of education?
3. What are the lived experiences and factors of persistence and resilience that...
contribute to Hispanic pregnant teens and teen mothers’ academic success?

4. What are the educational aspirations of pregnant or parenting Hispanic females?

To provide answers to these research questions, data was obtained from the 12 participants through individual interviews and a focus group interview. In addition, each participant was asked to write a reflection in the form of a letter addressed to their born or unborn child after the individual interviews. The individual interview consisted of 19 questions divided into school-related, personal, and economic sections. Each participant described her lived experience as a pregnant teen or teen mother in high school during a one-to-one interview held within a period of three weeks on campus. The focus group interview consisted of 10 open-ended questions. The 12 participants met with the researcher during a school day on campus to share common factors of their lived experience in high school.

The research method of qualitative hermeneutic phenomenology provided a voice to a group of pregnant teens and teen mothers enrolled in high school. The hermeneutic approach also provided a lens by which the experiences of the participants may be viewed and interpreted. In order that the participants’ experiences may be understood thoroughly, the hermeneutic circle, an analytical process in which the parts are related to the whole and the whole to the parts was incorporated in the research (Patton, 2002). So, within the hermeneutic circle, the whole can be understood by study of the particular, and the particular with reference to the whole. Phenomenological descriptions are rich and evocative, invoking in readers the phenomenological nod in recognition of a phenomenon
so richly described that they too may have experienced (van Manen, p. 27).

Phenomenological themes may be understood as structures of experience and offer a thick description of phenomena (van Manen). A rich data approach was utilized to allow the reader to vividly visualize the research process in order to better understand the phenomenon of teen pregnancy/ motherhood and school attainment. Quotes from the individual interviews and focus group interview contributed to the rich description of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002; van Manen, 1997). The collected data was refined and shaped into categories to describe the phenomenon of teen pregnancy and school resiliency.

In the literature review of the study, a great amount of information pertaining to why students drop out was provided. What was not found in the literature review was why those “at-risk” as teen parents in high school might choose to remain in school, which was the primary concern that led to this study. Also found in the literature review was the importance of the amount of support students receive from schools, family, and the environment in motivation and academic achievement. In relation to teen pregnancy, family, school, and the environment are key factors to academic achievement. Scholarly articles and books written on these topics were sources to the study.

There is a large need to understand the demands of teenage parenting in relation to staying in school. The gap in the literature was that dropping out is often discussed in relation to parental support and social behaviors of teen parents but less is known about teen parenthood and resiliency. The central purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenology study was to examine the lived experiences, resilience and motivating factors that contribute to the success of Hispanic female teen pregnancy and teen motherhood while
in high school.

Participants for this study were purposefully selected by the researcher. The eligibility requirements were that participants be a Hispanic pregnant teen or teen mother while enrolled in high school. Seven of the participants were pregnant during the time of the individual interviews and five were mothers of one child. All twelve participants were enrolled in the same high school which includes grades ninth through twelve. There were 3 participants per grade level. Each participant was recruited by a personal, oral invitation from the researcher.

Data collection for this study was done from three sources. Each participant was first interviewed individually for approximately one hour from a prepared set of questions. Questions were based on the three common factors Rumberger’s (1987) categories of dropout reasons; school-related, personal, and economic. Next, a focus group interview with open-ended questions took place at a later date after all the data from the individual interviews were hand-transcribed. Both interviews were audio-taped. In addition to the interviews, participants were asked to write a reflection paper. The written reflection was a letter to the participant’s born or unborn child. The purpose of the letter was to allow the participant to share with her baby anything she felt she could not have shared during the interviews. Finally, after being read repeatedly, all hand-transcribed data from interviews was organized into categories and themes that captured the general consistencies of participants during the study. Thematic aspects formulated from the transcripts of the interviews produced five themes. Memoing, open coding, rich data, feedback, and member checking were utilized in order to ensure that the data was accurate and credible.
Triangulation with multiple analysts provided validation of the findings and addressed the credibility of the research (Patton, 2002). Two professionals within the educational field and not involved with the research reviewed the data to validate the researcher’s thematic analysis and the five themes to verify the appropriateness of the data chosen to demonstrate. Ten of the twelve participants were available to read their interviews and confirm that their lived experiences as a teen mother in high school were represented truthfully.

Discussion

This study explored the lifeworld of twelve Hispanic pregnant teenagers through their voice as they related to their lived experiences of persistence and resiliency to stay in school in spite of their at-risk factors. The goal of the researcher was to find answers to the guiding questions of this research. The following provides the answers to the research questions.

Factors of Influence. The participants in this study shared several common factors of influence in their lived experiences as they went through high school. Among these were the influences of family members, teachers, the baby’s father, their child or unborn baby, and/or self. All of the participants spoke positively about the relationship support they received from family, teachers, a boyfriend and their own motivation to stay in school while becoming a teen mother. Most of the participants saw their mom as the biggest influence of support to stay in school. Their mother was not only reminding them to get up every day to go school but also provided child care while they were at school. Jada, a junior, commented, “My motivation to stay in high school and graduate are my son and my mom. If I quit or drop out of high school I don't have my mom’s support and
then I would be a bad role model to him.” Each of the participants saw her relationship with the father of her baby as a mutual support. At school, teachers play a major role in two areas: the relationship support and educational aspiration of the teen mother. Most of the participants mentioned the caring support and influence they got from one or more teachers while they were going through the hardest part of their pregnancy. All the participants saw their pregnancy as something that happened but were positive in seeing themselves through school and being a positive role model for their child.

**Personal Challenges.** The participants went through personal transformation that took them through challenges, emotions, and stress as they continue their route of obtaining an education. These challenges centered on obstacles at home such as: care for their child, relationship with the baby’s father, physical and mental emotions related to their pregnancy, and stress related to school. All participants had personal obstacles at home as they went through their pregnancy and motherhood, but all were generally provided with support from family members. While their needs such as a place to live, food and clothing were met, many emotional needs were left unsolved by the participants’ parents and guardians. Some participants looked for that comfort from supporting teachers at school who noticed their educational challenges. In these situations, I found that support from the school-related component would compensate. All participants agreed the greatest personal challenge they faced was school. Valerie commented, “My greatest challenge right now is staying in school. I have a goal of graduating this year as a junior, but it is really, really hard. It makes it harder with my mom working because she is the one who watches my daughter.” Other participants looked for support from friends or the father of the baby. Regardless of the emotional
needs, all participants had a strong drive to continue going to school in order to become positive role models for their babies. The participants were willing to take the responsibility of motherhood but they all agreed that the family support system needed to be there. This included meeting the teens’ needs as well as providing some encouragement to continue and finish high school.

During the focus group interview, the participants were asked to share advice to other teens based on their life experiences. Each teen spoke sincerely about their experiences and were willing to share with others. All participants felt they had learned from their pregnancy experience. Their experiences, which were part of their personal transformations, ranged from specific problems to epiphanies about life. The advice offered to other teens ranged from advice about staying away from boyfriends if sex was too much temptation to concentrating in school, going into higher education, proving to society that Hispanic teens can finish high school despite of circumstances, and not allowing family history of pregnancy get in the way to their success.

**Contributors of Academic Success.** Academic success, as it is defined in this study, was a pregnant teen or teen mother staying in school or graduating from high school despite of the risk factors identified in the literature review. I revealed that school support was an essential factor to the pregnant teen or teen mother’s academic success and goal-setting towards graduation. While the school-related component was found to be a major factor for at-risk teen parents dropping out of school in the literature review, it was also a key factor for keeping at-risk teen parents in school. Participant Sarah supported her decision to stay in school and be academically successful with the following statement, “To me I think there is no reason for anyone to drop out. As soon as
you find out, yes, you will wake up in the morning with morning sickness but if you don't want the struggle with family and you don't want that for your kid, and then there is no reason to drop out. I have always had good grades, and whenever I found out I was pregnant, my dad told me he didn't want to think I wasn't going to graduate. My sister dropped out and everyone I know who has been pregnant has dropped out. So I want to be the first one and I really want to prove to my dad that he is wrong. When he told me that, I knew I really needed to graduate.” Participants also sought teachers who gave them that motivation to do their best academically.

Some of the participants like Valerie owed their academic success to the support they got from their family. Valerie stated, “Right now, I manage to be academically successful because of the support that I have. There are times when I am doing homework from the time I get home until 1 or 2 in the morning. It is just the push from my parents telling me I can and my baby daughter’s future. It should be noted as mentioned in the literature review that in the Hispanic culture, in comparison with other pregnant teenagers, Hispanic are more likely to view pregnancy as an opportunity to build closer relationships with family members and their partner and to also be motivated by the relationship they will develop with their baby (Rosengard, Pollock, Weitzen, Meers, & Phipps, 2006).

Throughout the research analysis, family support appeared to be the strongest of the areas of personal, school-related and economic components. It seemed to be the strongest when the three components, family support, boyfriend support, and teacher support equally provided support to the teen mother. I found that while two components may help a teen mother succeed, the absence of two components would set up a teen
mother for failure. I concluded that success is contingent upon the contributions of the school-related, personal and economic components.

**Educational Aspirations.** Education was a concern of all the participants. Virtually all participants agreed that their education aspirations to stay in school and graduate were key components in their success in high school more after they became pregnant. The participants shared the commonalities of school, teachers, goals, and family support which included their baby-related to educational aspirations. Teachers appeared again, signifying their importance in the participant’s lived experience. Getting through high school became an accelerated force once the participant became pregnant. All participants felt that finishing school was in the best interest for their future and the baby. The participants had the same goal of graduating from high school and the dream of going to college someday, but mostly getting a job to support their child.

Despite the household continuity of each participant, they all had a dream to achieve more academically than other family members. Most of the participants had a teen pregnancy family history where either their mother or an older sister had been a teen mother. Each participant felt they would beat the odds, though they also became pregnant, they had the resiliency to stay in school and make a better life for themselves and their baby. Their strongest educational aspiration was to break away from the research of Hispanic teen pregnancy and dropout statistics and become successful in high school completion.

**Implications.** The willingness of the Hispanic pregnant teen or teen mother to participate in this study implied their desire to voice their experience of teen pregnancy and school resiliency. According to the research within the literature review, one of the
predictors for high school dropouts was teen pregnancy. Teen mothers are twice as likely
to drop out as a non-parenting teen and impair their future education. This research study
shed light on the lived experiences of Hispanic pregnant teens and teen mothers who
stayed in school in spite of the risk factors. The common voice of the participants shared
that academic success and high school completion is possible for Hispanic teen mothers.
Although teen pregnancy and motherhood is not an easy experience, the analysis of this
study implied school and family as key factors for the teen’s success. All participants
agreed they could not be successful without their family support. As noted in the
Resiliency Theory, the expectation is that the students who continued have higher
resilience and a different perception of their support factors than students who
discontinued their academic pursuits.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to this study. The first limitation is that all
participants are from the state of Texas. The participants were drawn from one public
high school. Another limitation was the lack of ethnic diversity, although the participants
will be consistent with the minority population in the state, a limitation is possible since
participants are drawn from a small sample of minority group. While the scope of this
study considers how the social, academic, and socioeconomic background of Hispanic
teenage mothers leads to their resiliency, the study itself is limited to the pregnant and
parenting Hispanic teens attending one high school. Narrowing the focus of this study
did allow for in-depth exploration and analysis of Hispanic teenage pregnancy within a
specific geographical area including a focus on academic and social interventions.
Recommendations

This study explored the phenomenon of teen pregnancy and school resiliency through the lived experiences of twelve Hispanic girls enrolled in high school. These pregnant teens and teen mothers face many obstacles and risk factors for dropping out of school, but they were persistent to stay in school. Based on individual and group focus interviews with the participants, I developed several recommendations for teen pregnancy programs, school districts, and school leaders.

Teen Pregnancy Programs. As teen pregnancy continues to rise (Reinberg, 2007), educators must have teen parent programs that support those at-risk of dropping out. These programs should be equipped to address the school, students and family needs. All programs addressing teen parents or students at-risk of dropping out should increase the opportunity for students to remain in school though graduation. I recommend these programs to include home outreach sessions that would orient the teen mother’s parents to their daughter’s social relationships, child care responsibilities, and the demands academic success. Furthermore, teen pregnancy programs should include positive interactions and group learning. I found from the group focus interview that teen parents had limited interaction with each other. Teen programs could include positive interactions with in-school peers as an integral part of group learning and school involvement.

School Districts. Teen pregnancy programs need not be expensive in order to be successful; however, school districts must make an economic effort to address sex education not only at the high school level, but rather as early as late grade school. According to Teenpregnancy.org, teens as young as thirteen or fourteen years of have had
their first experience with intercourse. The Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education (2004) provide six key concepts for grades K-12 that include human development, relationships, personal skills, sexual behavior, sexual health and society, and culture. These six key concepts can be broken down into several topics with age-appropriate levels. Teenpregnancy.org also reported that “Seventy-eight percent of white and seventy percent of African-American teenagers lack communication between a girl and her parents and is often a reason teenage girls have babies” (p.2). Based on this concept, I recommend school districts should include sex education activities that will encourage parental involvement with teens as they receive vital information.

**School Leaders.** School administrator support is imperative in any teen pregnancy. The success of a teen pregnancy program requires an informed and educated in teen pregnancy school administrator. Administrators aware of teen pregnancy or parenting programs have a good concept of the underlying factors that contribute to teen pregnancy, (low self-esteem, absentee fathers and a family history of teen pregnancy). School leaders must enthusiastically support the program and pledge the continued funding of the program. Furthermore, all administrators should be educated not only about the importance of teen pregnancy/parenting programs, but the availability of effective school-based programs that will lead to the academic success of pregnant teens/teen mothers on their campus.

**Suggestions for Further Studies**

The focus of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the lived experience of teen pregnancy in relation to her academic success and school resiliency. Through individual interviews, a focus group, and a written reflection from the
participants the researcher gathered data to analyze and found common themes, which is the nature of a qualitative study. The methodology of this study could be changed to survey research or to a quantitative study to reveal other data not available in this research study.

Each theme identified from the data collection provides a potential for future studies. The first theme in this study was relationships. The participants placed great emphasis on their relationships with their parents, the father of the baby, and their teachers. A further study into the relationships with influential members of their lifeworld would give a greater insight into their complex lives. For example, Hanna (2001) suggested studying the fathers of the babies of teen mothers. “Little is known about the fathers of the children and whether their lack of involvement is intentional or simply because they do not know what role to play” (Hanna, 2001, p. 462).

The second theme in this study was education aspirations. A future study in this area could include the careers of teen mothers that had the educational aspiration to continue into higher education after high school. During the focus group of this study, the question, “How do you view yourself in the future?” was asked. The replies of all participants included graduating from a university and being successful in life.

The personal transformation theme looked at the challenges a pregnant teen faces while in school. One of the emotional challenges participants faced was stress. A further study of the relationship between stress and resilience in the pregnant teen population might be of interest to educators or those who work closely with pregnant teens. A family stress study by Swick and Willaims (2006) recommends following a bio-ecological system perspective to generate strategies and approaches that will empower
stressed families to find a new hope and a renewed purpose.

The last two themes, household continuity and life experiences included commonalities such as family history and view of self in past to future. A study exploring the lived experience of teen pregnancy in family generations would be of interest to scholarly research. Likewise, a study comparing the lived experiences teen pregnancy in the past to how it is viewed today and in the future would be of interest to the field of education as programs for pregnant teens and at-risk students are researched.

The lived experience of teen pregnancy is an ongoing cycle as the pregnant teen enters into motherhood. The participants in this study continue to experience it on a daily basis. It is hoped that the findings of this research will serve as a support and guide to future research in the phenomenon of teen pregnancy.

Conclusion

This study is significant in that it provided an opportunity for twelve Hispanic pregnant teens/teen mothers in a high school tell their lived experience of teen pregnancy and school resiliency. The primary findings in this study were that the in spite of challenges a pregnant teen/teen mother faces, getting an education is important for their future. Their born or unborn child is their educational aspiration to keep going to school. Coupled with these findings was the realization that within school, family, and their socio-economic factors are contributors to the teen’s academic success. I hope this study will ignite others on to release the voice of those who are inspired to make a difference in their education.

As an educator, with a strong belief in God, I encourage others to partner with communities of faith in educating our youth about abstinence. I believe that we are all
God’s children and He loves us all the same. My research has taught me to see teen pregnancy through Jesus’ eyes. He has led me to establish a closer relationship with pregnant teens; understanding their circumstances and helping them with their challenges they face. I look for God’s guidance as I make decisions along with them. God will open up hope where none existed for these young mothers. I encourage community faith based programs to teach young mothers about the love of God and His Word (the Bible).

*1Timothy 4:12* says, “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”
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Appendix A: Interview Questions

A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Exploration of Hispanic Teenage Pregnancy and School Resiliency

School-related

1. What are your thoughts of yourself as a high school student?
2. Do you feel accepted by peers, teachers or anyone else in school?
3. What are your goals for the future while attending high school?
4. How did your goals change after becoming pregnant or a parent?
5. How did you succeed in spite of becoming pregnant or a teen parent?
6. Are there any persons (teachers, administrators, counselors) that are supportive to your needs? If so how?
7. How did you handle academic obstacles through your pregnancy and as a teen parent?

Personal

1. How did you handle personal obstacles (family, boyfriend, siblings)?
2. Are there any supportive programs outside of school that you participated? If so, what and how.
3. What or who do you believe influenced the most during high school?
4. When do you become pregnant- at what age and school year?
5. How did the father of the baby react to your pregnancy news?
6. How did your immediate family react to your pregnancy news?
7. Was there any history of teen pregnancies in your family?
Economic

1. Did you receive free lunch or reduced lunch in school?
2. What is your socioeconomic status?
3. What was your parents’ highest level of education?
4. Did your family receive any subsidies?
5. What needs do you have as a pregnant or teen parent?
Appendix B: Focus Group Interview

Write a personal letter to your unborn or child, explaining your love towards him/her.

After letters are written the following open-ended questions will be discussed.

1. Tell me about your experience as a pregnant or teen mother in high school.
2. Elaborate or describe what were/are your greatest challenges as a pregnant or teen mother.
3. How do you define success?
4. What motivates you to stay in high school and graduate?
5. Tell me how you managed to be academically successful in comparison with other teen mothers that drop out of school.
6. There are many expectations and conflicts for females in the Hispanic culture that others who are not part of the culture do not understand. Tell me, how do you define gender role? How do you handle these expectations and conflicts?
7. What, who, or what has helped you become a successful student in your personal life, family life, and the high school community?
8. When you were a child, did you see yourself as a teen mother?
9. How do you view yourself in the future, say in 10 years?
10. What advice would you give to other teenage girls in high school?
Appendix C: Parent/ Student Consent Letter

CONSENT FORM

Exploring Hispanic Teenage Pregnancy and School Resiliency

Olga Estrada, Doctoral Candidate

Liberty University: College of Education

Introduction:

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating the influences that keep teen parents or teen pregnant students in school. This study is being conducted by Olga Estrada a graduate student at Liberty University. You were selected as a possible participant in this research because you are either a Hispanic teen mother or a Hispanic pregnant teen. Please read this form and ask questions before you decide whether to participate in the study.

This study is being conducted by Olga Estrada, Doctoral Candidate at Liberty University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to find the factors that keep pregnant or teen parents motivated to stay in school. Understanding the unique attitudes and perceptions that motivate pregnant teens to stay in school will help school leaders design programs that will increase the amount of pregnant or teen parents to graduate from high school. Approximately 12 people are expected to participate in this research.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation may involve a confidential interview. You will be asked to participate in a focus group interview, where you sit in a group with other pregnant or teen mothers and answer questions about how you feel about your pregnancy and school. Each of these interviews will be geared towards hearing your feelings and thoughts. This study will take approximately three or four months.

The individual interview will last approximately a half hour and the focus group interview will last about an hour. You may be asked by the researcher to participate in a follow up interview in order to clarify your thoughts and/or to better understand your feelings about your educational attainment.
Your responses will be audio taped and you will be given a chance to review the answers after the interview to make sure they are what you meant to say. The audio recording will be used by the researcher to go back and listen to what you have said if necessary. If you are chosen to participate in a focus group interview, the conversation will be transcribed for further review.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained in connection with this research study that could identify you will be kept confidential. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable and only group data will be presented. Fake names (pseudonyms) will be used in the summary of findings to protect your privacy.

I will keep the research results in a password protected computer and/or a locked file cabinet in my home and only I and my advisor will have access to the records while we/I work on this project. We/I will then destroy all original reports and identifying information that can be linked back to you. All taping or video recordings will be kept under my care and will be destroyed after the research is completed. Upon completion of this study, I will make available the results of this study if requested.

Voluntary nature of the study:

Participation in this research study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with your school standings in any way. As a participant who will be interviewed you may refuse to answer any question if you choose to do so. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time without affecting these relationships, and no further data will be collected.

Contacts and questions:

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Olga Estrada at 956-797-1386 or by email at oestrada@wisd.us. You may ask questions now, or if you have any additional questions later, I will be happy to answer them. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may also contact my advisor at Liberty University or the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd. Suite 2400, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

Dr. Angela Smith/ Committee Chair                amsmith11@liberty.edu

Assistant Professor, Liberty University
You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time and no further data will be collected.

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study.

_______________________________________________________________________

Signature of Participant  Date

(If participant is under the age of 18 years old)

_______________________________________________________________________

Signature of Parent, Legal Guardian, or Witness  Date

_______________________________________________________________________

Signature of Researcher  Date
Appendix D: Assent to Participate Research

I, Olga Estrada, am asking you to take part in a research study. The purpose of this research study is to learn more about being a high school teen parent or pregnant teen. You were chosen because you became pregnant or are a teen parent while in high school. There is a small risk to joining this study. You will be sharing some personal information. You will not use your real name. There is no benefit to you, but you will be helping the school make sure each of its high school students successful. You will not receive any payment or rewards for joining in this study.

I will ask you to fill out a survey. You may ask your parents or guardians for help in filling it out. After I’ve looked at your answers, I will meet with you for an interview. This won’t last longer than 90 minutes. I will meet with you again within two weeks to ask you some more questions. This second meeting won’t last longer than 90 minutes. After the interviews are finished, I will write up your responses. I will give you a copy to read. At this time, I will ask you if you have any changes to what I wrote.

You may ask me any questions that you have about the study. If you have a question later, you may ask me at that time. You may call me at 956-345-9862. You may also e-mail me at oestrada@wisd.us. You may also call my faculty advisor, Dr. Angela Smith at 602-403-1647. You may e-mail her at amsmith11@liberty.edu.

Signing your name at the bottom means that you agree to be in this study. After you sign this form, I will make sure you get a copy of it. You do not have to be in this study. If you agree to be in the study and then change your mind, you may stop being part of the study. It will not affect your grades in school.

____________________________________
NAME OF STUDENT (PLEASE PRINT)

___________________________________
SIGNATURE OF STUDENT

____________________________________
DATE

RESEARCHER’S SIGNATURE_________________________________DATE ___
Appendix E: Written Reflections

Bianca’s Letter

I realized that at your age you may not understand everything that’s going on in life, but what you should know is that I love you with my heart and soul. I would do anything possible to keep you happy. Everything I am doing now is to give you a better life. I study very hard to get a good career that will pay for all your needs and wants. My hopes for you are that you grow to understand all of this and learn from it to do good yourself. The world has its ups and downs but you just need to surpass that and overcome its happenings. Right now you are my little baby and anything you want I’ll get for you because my life is all about you! I love you and that’s all you need to know. Life is just steps at a time but I will be right there beside you holding your hand because I don’t ever plan on leaving you. Remember you’re above it all with much to learn and succeed in!

Sincerely,

Your Mother

Carla’s Letter

I want to tell you that I got pregnant of you when I was in the 10th grade. You were born on April 8, 2011. I stayed in school and worked very hard to get through school. I want you to get an education and get through school also. I don’t want you to be thinking of having kids while in high school because it is not easy! I might not have been thinking then but I don’t regret having you. I still have hopes of going to college and becoming an RN. I hope that you will have bigger dreams than I did and do the right thing.

Love,

Mom

Caroline’s Letter

Even though you are not born yet, I want you to know how much I love you. You’re my life, my reason to live and try harder to succeed in life. I hope to be a great role model for you someday. Every doctor appointment sends a rush of excitement runs through my
body. Just to know I’m going to see you, my mind is already trying to picture you in my arms. I promise to do my best and not allow you to suffer or go through what I did while growing up. It was tough for mommy to grow up without the image of parents in my life. You will always have a mommy and daddy. Most importantly you will always have our love. We can’t wait to see you running around asking for things and making us spend money. Of course, we can’t forget the quinceanera. Daddy’s wallet will sure feel that.

Your dad and I will love seeing you graduate twice, from high school and from a university. We’ll make sure all your dreams come true. Don’t forget we love you. You are the best thing that ever happened to us. We thank you for entering our lives and God Bless you.

With Love,

Mom

Jada’s Letter

You will be born in 3 weeks and I have picked a name for you even though your dad likes another name. Whatever we name you, I hope you like it! Each day becomes more exciting and closer to being with you. I just hope you don’t do what I did and become a young parent, but if you do you will have all my support. I’m willing to work hard and graduate from high school early so that I can spend more time with you.

This world is full of challenges and I want to teach you everything you need to know. You will meet people that have no interest in you other than their own satisfaction. I hope that you will be able to see through all that nonsense and make wise decisions. I want you to be a positive contributor to society. You should be confident in what you believe in but not too stubborn to figure you are wrong when you are wrong. Remember everything you do reflects on your character your actions today are your legacy for tomorrow. Life is full of good and bad. Ultimately, it will be up to you to make it what you want. Just know that I will do everything I can to help you along the way. I’m looking forward to meeting you! You can’t read this now and you won’t be able to do so for while, but when the day comes that you do, I hope you will take these advices to heart.

Love,

Your Mom
Jacky’s Letter

If there is one thing I could say to you right now, it would be thank you. You mean the world to me. You alone, have changed my perspective on life since the day I discovered I was pregnant. You are the reason I strive in school.

You have taught me so much in the 6 months you’ve been in my womb. The world I knew has changed and for the better. You’ve helped me mature into a woman, and have opened my eyes to a new goal. You have given me that extra push I needed in order to succeed in life. You have done so much for me already and yet you have not seen the world you will come to live.

Every kick you make gives me a sign of hope that when your day comes I will become the mother you need me to be. You have taught me so much, yet I still have so much to learn. We begin our journey together where I will teach you the way of life. We have so much to learn together as mother and daughter. I love you.

Love,

Mom

Neomi’s Letter

Well as you know I was a teen mom and I got pregnant with you at age fourteen. It wasn’t easy going to school and being pregnant. Thank God that both of your grandmas were with me as I went through high school. I just want to tell you that you are going to come at an age where you will understand the meaning of life. You also will someday fall in love which is part of life and I want to be there for you. I want to make sure you do the right things in life. I want to protect you from any hurt and if you do wrong know that I will understand because I went through the same thing. I will always give you 100% of my attention and guide you in the right path.

Love,

Your Mom

Rosie’s Letter

I am writing this letter to you to let you know that I am so happy you were born. Though I had you at a very young age, I don’t regret having you. You have made a difference in
my life. It is because of you I made it through school. I work very hard every day so that I can be able to provide almost everything you need. My hope is when you grow up you too will graduate from high school and continue into college. I wish for you my son to become somebody in life. Always remember that I will always be there for you no matter the circumstances. I love you so much

Yours Truly,

Mom

Sylvia’s Letter

You are now about 71/2 months in my womb. Your daddy and I are excited about you coming into this world. I wonder who you will look like. Whose nose, lips and eyes you will have? I want to hold you and play with your little feet. Your grandparents can’t wait until the day you are born. They are going to take you everywhere! I know you might not know why this letter, but know that you have changed my life in the best ways. I have grown up a lot because of you. Your dad and I love you and are excited that in a few more months you will see the real world. I love you baby.

Love,

Mommy

Sarah’s Letter

It’s Mommy! Right now you are 1 year and 2 months and you know so much already. You are really smart! You are walking also. Your dad and I are doing great so far. Everything we do now, we think of you first. I am very proud of myself and I hope you are too. You see even though I am a teen mom, I am ranked 97 of 395 seniors! Many girls give up on school when they become pregnant, but not your mom! Right now the people that are helping with you while I go to school and play sports is your grandma and your aunt. I want you to know without them helping me out it would have been very hard for me to continue school. I have so much planned for our future. I think and day dream about this daily. I want you to know that I want to be able to give you everything I didn’t have. It will be forever you and I in this world.

Always,

Mommy
Virginia’s Letter

My soon to be daughter this is your mommy writing to you to tell you how much I love you and wait for your arrival. I excited to be your mom and experience what it is like. I wanted to have a baby and God gave me you. I am so happy that you will be teaching me what it’s like to take care of you. The day that you arrive it will be a blessing. Your daddy and I wait for your arrival with gifts and lots of love. Upon your arrival there will be tears of joy and happiness. Your daddy and I are excited to be your parents.

Love,

Mommy

Valerie’s Letter

Finding out I was pregnant was surely a big surprise. I couldn’t believe, I was going to be your mother. I would be in charge of someone else’s life. From that moment on, my life changed forever. You are 6 months old now. I can’t believe how quickly the time has gone and how you are becoming your own little amazing person. You smiles are infectious and make my heat smile. You are a happy baby and I hope that your life will always be happy.

Getting home from school the other day you saw me and opened up your arms for the first time to receive me. Maybe one day, but for now I need to go to school so I can try to provide you the best life possible. As much as I wish for you to stay young, I know that one day you will grow into your own person. Please know that I love you very much and I will always be there for you. I am here to watch over you, protect you, and help you grow into the person

Love,

Mommy
Appendix F: IRB Approval Documentation

August 19, 2011

Olga Estrada
IRB Approval 1144.081911: Exploring Hispanic Teenage Pregnancy and School Resiliency: A Hermeneutic Phenomenology Study

Dear Olga,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
IRB Chair, Associate Professor
Center for Counseling & Family Studies

(434) 592-5054

Liberty University
40 Years of Training Champions for Christ: 1973-2013
Appendix G: Superintendent Approval Letter

WESLACO
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT – Office of the Superintendent
319 West Fourth Street – P.O. Box 266, Weslaco, TX 78599-0266
Dr. Richard Rivera, Superintendent of Schools
Email: rivera@wisd.us
Telephone: (956) 969-6503  Fax: (956) 969-0201

Request for Consent to Superintendent of Schools

Dear Dr. Richard Rivera,

I am Olga Estrada, a doctoral student at Liberty University. I am conducting a research study on Hispanic pregnant/teen mothers who stay in school regardless of the risk factors they encounter or parenting. I am seeking your permission to include 12 Hispanic pregnant/teen mothers attending Weslaco East High School during the 2010-2011 school year in my study.

My study is to research the influences that keep teen mothers in high school regardless of the risk factors that prevent them from continuing school due to their pregnancy or being a teen mother. Through the research, the voice of pregnant/teen mothers will be heard and their stories of the personal, social or academic struggles and positive influences they experienced while pregnant and being a teen mother will be told. Understanding the unique attitudes and perceptions that motivate teen mothers to stay in school will help school leaders design better programs that will increase the amount of Hispanic pregnant/teen mothers graduating from high school. With your permission, I would like to conduct individual and focus group interviews during the school day or after school. If participants wish we will also use Saturdays to meet on campus. As teen mothers the best time to meet with them will be during school hours in which they will be allowed to make up missed assignments.

Thank you for your consideration,

Olga Estrada
Liberty University
cestrada@wisd.us
(956)969-6503

August 18, 2011

Olga Estrada:

I am pleased to grant permission for you to conduct a research study to include 12 Hispanic pregnant/teen mothers who attended Weslaco East High School during the 2010-2011 school year as long as all procedures to conduct this study are in place and followed.

Good luck with your research study.

Sincerely,

Dr. Richard Rivera
Superintendent of Schools

RR/av

Weslaco ISD does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, color, national origin, sex, or disability in providing education services, activities, and programs, including vocational programs, in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972, section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended.