



Narratives of women's retrospective experiences of teen pregnancy, motherhood, and school engagement while placed in foster care

Serena K. Ohene^{a,*}, Antonio Garcia^b

^a School of Social Policy & Practice, University of Pennsylvania, 3701 Locust Walk, Philadelphia, PA 19104-6214, United States

^b University of Kentucky College of Social Work, 619 Patterson Office Tower, Lexington, KY 40508, United States

ABSTRACT

Pregnant and Parenting Teens (PPTs) in foster care experience, among many setbacks, more academic difficulties, than their peers who are not in foster care. The challenges of teen pregnancy and parenting and the expectation of maintaining school engagement and positive academic outcomes can be overwhelming, especially for foster care youth who live away from their home of origin. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the extent to which the core tenets of attachment, identity, self-efficacy, and critical race theories collectively explain or validate experiences of school engagement and academic outcomes among pregnant and parenting teens in the child welfare system. Semi-structured interviews with eleven aged-out pregnant and parenting teens supported the utility of the four main theories in elucidating the barriers and facilitators to PPTs school engagement and improved academic outcomes. All together, the PPTs narratives do not single out one of these individual theories as solely playing a direct role in influencing their engagement in educational processes and academic outcomes. Rather, the integration of the tenets and main ideas of each of these theories holistically capture their experiences. Study findings showed that school engagement and educational achievement increased among PPTs in foster and group homes when they experienced attachment connections with foster parents and staff, positive identity development, and enhanced self-efficacy. Suggestions for promoting attachment and relational connections, positive identity formation, enhanced self-efficacies, and racial/ethnic inclusion toward boosting school engagement are highlighted.

1. Introduction

Slowly gaining attention and concern is the increasing rate of teenage pregnancy in the foster care system (Eastman, Palmer, & Ahn, 2019). Pregnant and parenting teens (PPTs) in foster care are two times more than likely to be pregnant by the age of 19 years, and more disconcerting is that many of them will have a repeat pregnancy by age 19 (Boonstra, 2011). A study assessing the outcomes of youth that transitioned from foster care in the state of Utah revealed that 31% of the pregnant and parenting young women between the ages of 18–24 became pregnant within three years of leaving the foster care system. This rate is three times more than birth rates among same aged peers who are not in the foster care system (Dworsky & Courtney, 2010).

PPTs in foster care are known to face many difficulties and risks and are unprepared to grapple with the challenges of early and unplanned motherhood (Eastman et al., 2019; Svoboda, Shaw, Barth, & Bright, 2012). Many studies have shown that teenage pregnancy is associated with low academic performance, school dropout, and limited job opportunities (Basch, 2011; Brosh, Weigel, & Evans, 2007; Kruger, 2011; Pecora, Kessler, & O'Brien, 2006; Whitman, Borkowski, Schellenbach, & Nath, 1987). According to Okpych and Courtney (2014), lower academic achievement has been linked to employment challenges and low-socio economic status among former foster youth. Fernandes and Gabe

(2009), found that many PPTs experience challenges transitioning into adulthood, having been estranged from both school and the job market due to the added burden of being young moms. Teenage pregnancy and parenting among foster youth have been shown to have a devastating impact on school engagement and academic outcomes (Aparicio, Pecukonis, & O'Neale, 2015; Connolly, Heifetz, & Bohr, 2012; Haight, Finet, & Helton, 2009). A recent study conducted by Pillow (2015) revealed a strikingly low school attendance rate among pregnant and parenting teens in foster care in New York City within the first quarter of the 2013–2014 academic year. Only 30% of these expectant and parenting teen moms had been enrolled in the first quarter. Of the pregnant and parenting teen moms in foster care who had been enrolled in school, fewer than 10% were attending school on a regular basis, with the majority of them attending school half of the time or not at all (Pillow, 2015).

While poor outcomes are well-documented, little research has been devoted to identifying what former PPTs in foster care would recommend to mitigate these outcomes. A growing concern, the academic decline among pregnant and parenting in foster care teens can be explained in terms of teens' own negative experiences with foster caregiving (Burley & Halpern, 2001) and their own adverse childhood experiences prior to foster care placement (Currie & Widom, 2010; Martin & Jackson, 2002; Stone, 2007; Vacca, 2008). Although it has not

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: serenaohene@gmail.com (S.K. Ohene).

been empirically validated, theories of attachment, identity, self-efficacy, and critical race may help to unravel why and under what conditions pregnant and parenting teens experience poor educational engagement.

School engagement has been described as a multifaceted construct, with many aspects or elements to consider, as it is influenced by students' cognitions, affects, and behaviors (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). According to Fredricks et al. (2004), school engagement is defined by the student's level of interest or cognitive engagement in the learning; emotional engagement in or affective states and reactions to the learning process; and behavioral engagement or participation and involvement in the learning process. Other authors define school engagement in terms of the student's ability to stay attentive and concentrate; attend school regularly; participate in school academics and social activities; and conform to school rules (Caraway, Tucker, Reinke, & Hall, 2003; Finn & Rock, 1997). Many research studies have shown an association between school engagement and academic outcomes. School engagement as defined above has been shown by many studies to produce positive educational outcomes among students, such as achieving better grades in school and in standardized tests, while the antithesis, or not engaging in school, produces negative educational outcomes, such as having lower grades and scores in standardized tests, dropping out, and not graduating (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprar, & Pastorelli, 1996; Caraway et al., 2003; Patrick, Ryan, & Kaplan, 2007; Wang & Holcombe, 2010). The objective of the current study was to rely upon interviews conducted with PPTs formerly placed in foster care to determine the extent to which the aforementioned theories explain or capture their school engagement process and educational outcomes. Data were used to determine if tenets of the theories should be refined to capture their life histories and circumstances.

What follows is an overview of prior research, illustrating that while core tenets or principles of each individual theory shed light on the educational engagement process of PPTs formerly placed in foster care, they do not capture a holistic picture when critiqued and applied separately in practice contexts. Data were collected from women who experienced pregnancy and/or motherhood while placed in foster care to not only gain a better understanding of how and why each individual theory applies to their lived experiences in school contexts, but to unearth if, how, and under what conditions they are interrelated and collectively influence or shape their educational process and trajectory. Practice and policy recommendations fall short without a clear understanding of the lived school experiences of PPTs formerly placed in foster care.

1.1. Attachment theory and school engagement

Attachment theory posits that a strong, nurturing, responsive, and consistent caregiver-child relationship contributes to healthy child development (Ainsworth, Behlar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969, 1988). According to Bowlby (1973, 1982), children develop an internal working model (IWM), which is a mental representation of how they view themselves based on their interactions or attachment connections with their family and the society as a whole. The question one may therefore ask is, how does attachment theory relate to the experiences of pregnant and parenting teens in foster care, and what can it tell us about the impact of attachment connections on their school engagement?

A longitudinal study (Apfel & Seitz, 1996) that followed teenage mothers for 12 years found positive educational and career outcomes, as well as healthy development for the teen mothers' babies, as a result of the positive attachment connections and support these teenage moms received from their parents. According to the authors, the nurturing environment and positive attachment connections these teen parents experienced living with their own parents produced a secure base and higher sense of self-esteem among these teen parents, which produced positive educational outcomes. Although these teens were not in foster

care, the study is still relevant for understanding the relationship between positive attachment connections and school engagement. In their study of adolescents' academic engagement, Duchesne and Larose (2007) found that strong parental attachment and positive teacher perception contributed to students' academic motivation. Although their study also looked at the mediating links of positive teacher perceptions, it nevertheless reinforces how positive attachment experiences during adolescence can impact motivation toward school engagement and academic achievement. Their study provides insight into some of the challenges with school engagement pregnant and parenting teens in foster care may experience and how they can be better supported, shown more love, and be motivated to attend school and improve their school performance. Positive attachment with teachers or strong bonds between caregivers and children are known to build resiliency, pro social skills, and academic success among children (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Harden, 2004). Bowlby (1969) underscored the importance of parent-child attachment for healthy child and adolescent development and as a precursor for healthy attachment formations with teachers, other adults, and peers, which otherwise become hindered.

To understand the meaning of motherhood and the experiences of parenting teens, a study by Aparicio et al. (2015) of teen moms revealed how negative attachment patterns may disrupt academic engagement well into the teen years. One of the themes the authors highlighted was "darkness and despair" (p. 44), where some parenting moms described the anger, unforgiveness, and frustration they had internalized due to the ambiguous loss, abandonment, and rejection they had experienced in their early years. They attributed difficulties with school engagement to lack of time for bonding with parents. The study is relevant to our understanding of how negative attachment experiences influence academic outcomes among pregnant and parenting teens in foster care.

1.2. Identity and school engagement

Another purpose of this study is to closely examine the meaningful connections between identity theory and the lived experiences of women who experienced motherhood while placed in foster care. Erikson (1968) defined identity as the awareness or concept of self. Josselson (1994) described identity as the intersection between a person and the society. Both Erikson and Josselson underscored the crucial role of society in the formation of one's identity. The adolescent era is described as a period of physiological, hormonal, emotional, and psychological changes that can be perplexing to the individual and when the adolescent begins to ask such questions as "who am I?" and "what am I?" (Erikson, 1968; Laser & Nicotera, 2011; Paranjpe, 1975). These questions in and of themselves highlight the familial and societal roles in the positive or negative identity formation of the adolescent (Erikson, 1968).

Adamson, Hartman, and Lyxell (1999) study of students' concept of themselves and academic achievement revealed that a higher concept of one's self depended strongly on one's positive connections with family and the family's positive regard of the adolescent. Studies have shown that adolescents' school identification and engagement are associated with social supports from parents and teachers (Wang & Eccles, 2012; Wang & Holcombe, 2010; Wang, Dishion, Stormshak, & Willett, 2011). Conversely, the foster care system has been known to produce self-devaluation among adolescents, which has impeded academic achievement (Kools, 1997). Pregnant and parenting teens may be motivated to attend school and perform well in an environment where they feel supported and have a positive concept of themselves. According to Sartor and Youniss (2002), positive adult and parental relationships promote positive identity among adolescents.

Adamson et al. (1999) and many other studies have shown the connection and convergence between attachment and identity theories in influencing school engagement and academic outcomes (Sartor & Youniss, 2002; Wang et al., 2011). These studies have shown the impact of a nurturing environment and positive parental attachment on

adolescents' concept of self and how positive identity promotes school engagement and academic achievement. These findings are important for this study as they give insight into the interrelatedness of attachment and identity and their roles in school engagement and positive academic outcomes among the target population.

1.3. Self-efficacy and school engagement

Bandura (1995, 1997) explained self-efficacy as the belief in one's capabilities to undertake and succeed in a given task. The author further posited that verbal persuasion or realistic encouragement boosts a person's sense of self and efficacy. In view of the aforementioned, how then does the theory of self-efficacy relate to mothers' experiences in foster care and how do these experiences affect academic outcomes? In a study to understand educational efficacy among 10–13-year-old inner-city school students, verbal persuasion rated as the highest reason for academic achievement amongst mastery and vicarious reasons (Chin & Kameoka, 2002). These findings highlight the significance of using verbal persuasion and encouraging words to promote school engagement and academic achievement among pregnant and parenting teens in foster care. According to Bandura (1997), the power of encouraging words can increase students' motivation to tackle assignments and their belief that they can succeed at those tasks.

In another study of 38 successful adults who had aged out of foster care, 74% reported that verbal persuasion and encouragement largely accounted for their academic achievement and successful adulthood (Martin & Jackson, 2002). The respondents recounted that the encouragement from their foster parents boosted their motivation for school. Verbal persuasion and realistic encouragement build self-competence and enhance personal efficacy (Bandura, 1997) needed to promote school engagement and academic achievement among pregnant and parenting teens in foster care.

The interconnectedness and interplay of self-efficacy, attachment, and identity theories as they pertain to adolescent school engagement and achievement have been demonstrated in many studies. Children with a higher self-concept tend to have grown up in nurturing and supportive homes. They develop a higher sense of efficacy, which fosters school engagement and academic success (Bandura, 1995; Fass & Tubman, 2002; Witkow & Fulgini, 2011).

1.4. Critical race theory and school engagement

Critical race theory is a set of perspectives that seek to examine certain aspects of society that continue to perpetuate racism and the marginalization of people of color (Solorzano, 1997). Critical race theory was coined by legal scholars who perceived that a subtler form of overt racism, such as microaggression, had encroached into American society and was still debilitating for marginalized populations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The current study also seeks to examine how experiences of racism may have influenced school engagement and educational outcomes. A study by DeGarmo and Martinez (2006) to understand the effects of racial discrimination and social support on the academic well-being of 278 Latino students between the sixth and twelfth grades found that students' experiences with racial discrimination posed as stressors that influenced their school engagement and academic well-being. The authors found that while discrimination impacted academic performance, higher levels of social support from the school, parents, and peers acted as a strong protective factor and a buffer toward school motivation and academic well-being. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) described adolescents' social support or positive interactions with the environment as predictors of school engagement, increasing positive educational outcomes. According to Edwards and Romero (2008), there is a relationship between lower self-efficacy and perceived discrimination, as racial discrimination is known to affect the students' belief in their own competence. Other studies have shown an association between racial discrimination,

school belongingness, school motivation, and lower grades (Alfaro, Umaña-Taylor, Gonzales-Backen, Bámaca, & Zeiders, 2009; Stone & Han, 2005). Deci and Ryan (1985) conclude that students' school engagement is linked to their feelings of belongingness and support from the environment. Although these studies looked at racial discrimination in the school setting, they are relevant to this study, which seeks to understand the impact of foster care discriminatory experiences on PPTs formerly placed in foster care and school engagement and academic outcomes. That is, racial discrimination may negatively impact students' sense of being or identity and their level of confidence and self-efficacy to develop and sustain healthy relationships, subsequently decreasing school engagement and lowering academic performance.

Collectively, these studies point to a potential convergence of critical race theory, self-efficacy theory, attachment theory, and identity theory in influencing school engagement and successful educational outcomes. The importance of the convergence and interrelatedness of attachment, identity, self-efficacy, and critical race theories to our understanding of school engagement and academic outcomes for mothers' who aged out of the foster care system cannot be understated. Indeed, reliance on only one of these theories may fall short of capturing their lived experiences and all the potential impacts on school engagement and educational outcomes. Thus, the interrelatedness of these theories should be considered to provide a fuller picture.

Prior researchers also conclude that achieving positive educational outcomes is contingent upon mobilizing system leaders and workers across systems (child welfare, behavioral health, schools) to improve their overall well-being (Noonan et al., 2012; Palinkas et al., 2014). While participants in the current study will be able to share their educational experiences at will, interview questions were developed, with consideration of the different dimensions or conditions that influence overall well-being: (1) embrace a positive identity, particularly in racialized contexts (Patterson et al., 2018; Rivas-Drake & Umaña-Taylor, 2019), (2) enhance self-efficacy (Halliday, Kern, Garrett, & Turnbull, 2019; McDermott, Umaña-Taylor, & Martinez-Fuentes, 2018; Odaci & Kinik, 2019), and (3) develop the ability to form healthy attachments well into adulthood (Aparicio, Gioia, & Pecukonis, 2018; Miranda, Molla, & Tadros, 2019). Applying a trauma-informed developmental framework, Blaustein and Kinniburgh (2018) offer insight into how improving attachment patterns and promoting self-efficacy and positive ethnic identity is critical to building resilience. To that end, we focused on theories that reflect these dimensions of well-being, and address a significant gap in research by addressing how and under what conditions these dimensions influence academic outcomes among a population of foster youth whose voices often remain invisible.

1.5. Research questions

Using a directed approach to content analysis, this current study determined the extent to which women formerly placed in foster care while pregnant and/or parenting relate the core tenets of attachment, identity, self-efficacy, and critical race theories to their academic engagement and outcomes. To this end, the research questions are (1) to what extent do the core tenets of attachment, identity, self-efficacy, and critical race theories collectively explain or validate experiences of school engagement and academic outcomes among PPTs formerly placed in foster care?, and (2) should key tenets of these theories be refined to address their needs? Inherently, if tenets change, implications for engaging with them in practice contexts may need to be modified. To address these questions, qualitative inquiry is warranted. First, scholars have not adequately addressed the educational experiences of PPTs formerly placed in foster care, particularly among those who identify as African American or Latina. Moreover, it is well documented that agencies face numerous challenges to providing and/or engaging PPTs who are placed in foster care in developmentally appropriate services for them and their newborns (Manlove, Welti, Mc-Coy-Roth, Berger, & Malm, 2011). Previous research has seldom relied upon the

life histories of PPTs formerly placed in foster care to identify how services could be improved to promote positive educational outcomes. In depth semi-structured interviews could enhance our understanding of how best to engage with mothers' placed in foster care in practice and research contexts.

2. Methods

2.1. Recruitment

Participants were recruited from an agency in New York City, which works with foster youth to improve their literacy skills. Nonprobability sampling was used to recruit participants that had aged out of foster care within 10 years. Fliers were emailed to the agency's contact person who in turn forwarded them to interested aged-out pregnant and parenting moms. Interested youths contacted the researcher via phone and email. Participants were screened prior to being interviewed and snowball sampling was also used to recruit more participants.

2.2. Sample

Data were collected from 11 aged-out pregnant and parenting teens between the ages of 23 and 31 years were collected. More than half ($n = 6$) identified as Hispanic or Latin American, with the remaining participants identifying as Black or African American ($n = 2$), biracial of White and African American descent ($n = 2$), and biracial of African American and Hispanic descent ($n = 1$). Over 50% had no high school diploma or GED. Less than 40% had completed high school or GED, and less than 10% had completed 1–3 years of college. Out of the 11 participants, 10 reported as being female and one as other. Narrative interviews revealed that participated entered foster care during their late teen years, and experienced upwards of up to 12 different placements before aging out of foster care. All but one of the participants gave birth to one baby while placed in foster care. One mother revealed she had three children, starting at the age of 15.

2.3. Data collection

The interview setting was determined by each of the mothers' availability and preference of where they wished to be interviewed in consideration of their added responsibilities of being a parenting mom. They were interviewed in the comfort of their homes, restaurants, and libraries, where they could best relax and express themselves. The semi-structured interviews (See Appendix A for Interview Guide) lasted between 20 and 71 min. Although all eleven respondents showed willingness to discuss their foster care experiences, a few of them did not wish to elaborate as much as others about their life history. Study protocol was approved by the University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board (IRB). Prior to collecting data, a consent form approved by the IRB, was distributed to each participant, and the first author explained the purpose of the study, as well as potential risks and benefits of participation. Participants could withdraw participation at any time during the interview. Each participant received \$30.00 in cash for their time, travel, and as an incentive for participating in the study.

The participants were not asked directly to discuss how these theories impacted their educational experiences, as they may have had little to no exposure or training in these theoretical underpinnings. Rather, the interview questions were informed by major tenets and principles of attachment theory, identity theory, self-efficacy, and critical race theory. To that end, the mothers' responses to questions indirectly generated connections between the core tenets of the aforementioned theories and their association with their experiences of pregnancy and motherhood and educational outcomes. During interviews, participants often shared experiences organically. That is, many of the questions were addressed without the first author directly asking that they to respond to them.

2.4. Data analysis

Data for this study were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist, with the audio recordings rechecked and compared to the transcribed data to avoid errors and ensure accurate transcription. Interview recordings were kept securely in a locked file cabinet; and all identifying information, if revealed by participants, were not transcribed. After editing the transcripts, the first and second author analyzed the data individually, relying upon directed content analysis. The directed content analysis approach involves interpreting and analyzing textual data by relying upon a systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The overarching goal of directed content analysis is to support or extend a theoretical framework.

For the purposes of this study, we determined how the aforementioned theories affect well-being; and in turn, promote positive academic outcomes among PPTs formerly placed in foster care. Following the directed content analysis steps outlined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005), key concepts and tenets of the theories (for example, belongingness, isolation, rejection, responsiveness, nurturing, yearning for love, support, stigma, oppression, encouragement, discrimination, and racism) were identified as initial coding categories. Secondly, the operational definition of the initial coding categories was collectively determined after we reviewed the data several times and connected data elements to literature on attachment, identity, self-efficacy, and critical race theories. Thirdly, we individually engaged in focused coding to identify recurrent patterns and synthesize data, using memos and spreadsheets. Next, we convened several times to develop categories from the focused coding process, and to reach consensus on the selection and labeling of final categories and quotes to support them.

2.5. Methods to ensure rigor

We engaged in several steps to increase rigor, and generate findings that relate to the experiences of the participants. First, while we did not rely on multiple sources or methods to analyze the data, we engaged in analyst triangulation. Specifically, the second author analyzed the data independently and reviewed and approved the findings reported herein. Secondly, the authors engaged in the process of member checking. In particular, while participants had an opportunity to review findings and share additional thoughts as needed, they did not respond to our call for revisions. Thirdly, the authors met regularly to challenge biases and emerging results to achieve confirmability. Given our expertise, we took steps to avoid relying upon previous practice experiences to inform the results by (1) writing memos about practice experiences versus findings from the current study, and (2) discussing how the themes and categories specifically relate to the raw data or transcripts. Fourthly, we observed when new categories no longer emerged. While twelve PPTs who were formerly placed in foster care agreed to participate in the study, one of them did not show-up for the interview. Our goal was to initially complete twelve interviews, based upon Guest, Bunce, and Johnson's (2006) research. After systematically documenting the variability of the data and degree of saturation of interviews, they found that data saturation had occurred after the analysis of twelve interviews. Nonetheless, saturation had been reached by the time the first and second author completed coding the eighth interview. That is, by that time, new themes and categories did not emerge.

3. Results

The purpose of this study was to rely on a directed content analysis approach to explain how the foster care experiences and academic making decisions of the pregnant and parenting teens collectively prove or disapprove the core tenets of attachment, identity, self-efficacy, and critical race theories. The study sought to understand how well the theories of attachment, identity, self-efficacy, and critical race theories

Table 1
Connections between quotes and theories.

Theme	Category	Quote(s)	How Quote(s) Relate to Theory
Attachment theory	Negative attachment	<p>1 -A The group home is just like, it's kind of like a hospital environment. It's like everybody's in a room, you've got this scheduled time and where you've got to go to bed. It just is not really so much of a family home. It's more just like a group home. ... You feel like a patient. You feel like, alright, let me just hurry up and get out of their face real quick. ... It was just like a regular routine ... everybody get up at this time, like it wasn't a loving connection. It wasn't nothing like that. It was more like work staff; you all are the patients and do what you've got to do.</p> <p>1-B I didn't really feel comfortable in the home because you do feel like a visitor, like you don't know how long you're going to stay, you don't know, you know, what little thing could just make the parent want to get rid of you. So it was like one thing that I did try to put all my focus to was just going to school. So that was like my biggest like motivation. ... I'll just go to school and spend the day there, and you know when I come here, just like eat dinner and you know go to sleep and just repeat the process.</p> <p>1-C It was hard, like extremely hard, for me to feel I belong somewhere and my kid belongs somewhere because at because at that time I just had one [child] with me, and it was heart-breaking. It affected my motivation a lot because it made me just want to stay home and make sure that my daughter was progressing and not myself.</p> <p>1-D My school attendance wasn't great because I wasn't receiving the help that I should have been receiving from my foster mother so I was a drop out...they didn't encourage me as much as they should have and that's what kind of got me to just drop out.</p> <p>I didn't feel like there was a need to go to school because I wasn't getting pushed or motivated to do the things, I had to do for me as a parent and me as a student</p> <p>1-E Being in foster care affected my education because I was moved from different homes. I was in 12 different homes from 17 to 21 [ages]. So I wasn't, I was never stable to go to school and get a job.</p> <p>I was out of school, for like three and half, four months. I was missing credits... so it was like really tough for me. I had to wind up getting my GED.</p>	<p>1-A This mother's poignant statement of the group home devoid of any loving connection and feeling like a patient can be related to attachment theory which draws a stark relationship between growing up in a loving home and healthy child development. She described that prior to being removed, her mother was supportive of her studies, which motivated her to stay engaged in school and earn good grades. She compared the undivided attention she received by her mother regarding her school work to her experiences and observation of the group home. This is indicative again of how cultivating a healthy attachment relationship in a supportive environment influences motivation to succeed in school.</p> <p>1-B The quote which describes feelings of uncertainty, not being comfortable, and feeling like a stranger are all indicative of negative attachment as described in attachment theory. According to Ainsworth et al. (1978), children develop insecure attachment when they experience negative living conditions with caregivers. These negative conditions create uncertainty in them.</p> <p>1-C The feeling of not belonging, is one of the core tenets of negative attachment theory. Positive attachment and the feeling of belonging create resiliency and positive behaviors among children (Harden, 2004). As shown in the quote, one of the mothers talked about feeling less motivated to attend school as a result of not feeling a sense of belongingness in the foster home</p> <p>1-D The quotes show how uncaring and inconsistent caregivers can lead some children to feel apathetic and unmotivated, for instance, in their academic pursuits. According to respondents, not getting support from their foster parents affected their outlook on academics.</p> <p>1-E Respondents shared painful experiences of being moved from one home to another, making them feel like they didn't belong in any home. They sensed rejection and felt unwanted by their foster parents, which are indicative of negative attachment. As a result of experiencing dislocation, moving from home another, some respondents internalized feelings of rejection. Respondents' numerous placements underscore their difficulties in being engaged in school and performing well academically.</p>
	Attachment enhancers	<p>2-A When I got to [foster mother's name omitted], it was a little different for me because ... she's like how are you out on the streets with a little baby and you have no phone? What happens if something happens to you and you have to call out? So it's like every foster parent is different, like every foster parent is in it for a different reason. ... She bought me pampers, wipes, phone, and, and then she'd give me money on his part [respondent's baby], money on my part. They'll drive me, they'll pay for my child care, like stuff like that. Like I, when I actually got to her house, I was, um, doing a little bad in school, so like when I finally got to her house, I graduated. And it was like that was like big for me.</p> <p>She took me in with no, with no hesitation, no explanations, you know, and asked no questions about me, and I felt like I finally found a foster mom that could accept me for me. I felt like I was loved. I wasn't neglected no more. I had someone that would supported me, guided me, even though I was lost and confused; she still made me move forward and better myself. Not just for myself, for my children too. That's what it made me feel that I belonged in this system, with this foster mom that actually cared about me and my children.</p>	<p>2-A A sense of belongingness, according to some respondents, instilled engagement in school and impacted their academic performance. The quotes herein highlight the positive relationship between attachment and academic outcomes.</p>
Identity theory	The expectant parent /teen stigma	<p>3-A You kind of feel lost. Like you just don't know where your life is going to go. And just like ask yourself like what's the next step, like where? What direction should I go to? Because ... you feel like you already made a wrong move, so it's like anything after that is just like it's either you're making it worse or you're trying to fix that.</p> <p>3-B I think that staff that was handling my aging-out process was discriminating towards me because she felt I couldn't raise my baby with, um, my disorder, and she felt that maybe I would be too overwhelmed with the baby and continuing school, and it might trigger my mental illness. ... They didn't</p>	<p>3-A The quote underscores Erikson's (1968) theory of identity and confusion, where the respondent clearly begins to question her identity as a pregnant teen and the confusion of the unknown fate which lies before her at the face of becoming a teen mom. Ultimately, some respondents described this state of confusion and shame of being pregnant as impacting their motivation to go school for fear of being mocked by their peers.</p> <p>3-B The quote shows the relationship between mental health and identity theory where this mother believed in staff's misapprehensions about her ability to handle both school and pregnancy due to her mental illness. As the mother internalized</p>

(continued on next page)

Table 1 (continued)

Theme	Category	Quote(s)	How Quote(s) Relate to Theory
Self-Efficacy	Identity and oppression	believe in me being pregnant and continuing my education like I didn't believe in myself. 3-C I feel like when I was told I read on a second-grade level, when I was told that I couldn't have passed that test, when I was told that I was dumb head, that's how I feel; I ... it filled through my head for the rest, like throughout my life, and I just felt like I'm not worth it, like I can't do it. ... I've been around friends that, who try to push me, and I still felt worthless. So, it's just something that I plan on working on, within me. I'm nervous to go back to school and I push myself far away from school... Um I didn't finish the way I want my daughter to finish... I do feel that, you know, school can be hard, school can be difficult...I just feel like I'm not smart enough. 3-D My old foster mother, who just kept telling me, "you're not going to amount to anything," or "you are just going to be good for just laying on your back and have sex," and as a child in foster care and as a parent in foster care, that was hurtful, and it made me felt like that was only what I was good for. Instead of encouraging me to do a lot better, she belittled me.	the feelings of incompetence as conferred upon her by staff, she accepted the label and dropped out of school. 3-C The quotes illustrate how damaging words can exert a negative toll on one's self-esteem and self-efficacy to thrive in academic contexts. Accordingly, these devaluations are indicative of how these damaging words could stem from unhealthy attachment relationships. Perceptions of identity, under these circumstances, could then be called into question, as confusion about one's place and purpose in life may emerge. 3-D This quote reflects how being insulted influenced perceptions of herself - perceptions that ultimately reinforced feelings that she would not succeed in school, and in other facets of her life.
	Paralysis of discouraging words	4-A After I heard about being pregnant and that I couldn't finish school, and then I had to make alternate decisions. I felt depressed, um, confused, overwhelmed, and a little bit like I felt that maybe I won't be able to finish school because I was pregnant, or maybe I wasn't good enough to even take care of my kid because the lady was saying abortion; she seemed very focused on abortion. I was just kept being told like, you know, because you are young, and you had a child, things are limited for you, like you're not going to finish school like everybody else. Just go get a GED. Like, you know, so it's like, well, you don't even have faith in me, like you don't even think I can do it.	4-A PPTs reported feelings of inadequacy and ineffectiveness from believing in numerous negative comments directed at them. One respondent stated that she was told her opportunities for going to college were limited in the face of early childbearing. Self-efficacy theory as purported by Bandura (1997) explains how social persuasion and encouragement boost one's confidence and self-competency. All of the respondents narrated the negative impact of discouragement on their sense of confidence and subsequent impact on school engagement.
Critical Race Theory	Encouraging words	5-A They was more like that parent that cared to ask us how our day was ... to give us that motivation, inspirational talk, that pep talk saying that we can do better ... like they encouraged us to go to school. I just felt like, really, my social worker ... supported me tremendously. I wouldn't be where I'm at today if it wasn't for that man. ... I felt comfortable with him. ... I actually kept a job the longest I ever had in my life, which was for seven months. ... He kept me focused. I would go tell him different things that would happen at work, everything like it was awesome. Like he was really good.	5-A PPTs also reported feeling a sense of self-efficacy upon receiving encouraging words and support from positive and caring group home staff, foster parents, and caseworkers. These encouraging words, as described by some of the mothers, have had positive influence on their sense of competency and motivation to succeed in school.
		6-A She was African American, she was loud, and some staff gets scared; they think if you're loud, then you're bad, and that's bias and judgmental. And I saw that she, they treated someone's son not fair, the black girl that was loud, you know, um, so they would either not try to bring up certain special job opportunities for them, so like they don't deserve it, this and that, instead of still trying to give them a chance. Or if they didn't like the mother, they didn't like her kid, and you have to watch how they treat your kid at the day care. I witnessed something happen to a kid that I would hope that someone will tell me if they saw something happen to mine. ... It was tough 'cause I felt like attacking the staff; maybe they felt I shouldn't have told on them because they treat my kid good, but then my kid, he's African American, but he is light skinned, and blue-eyed, blond hair ... to me that's so racist like; also, you only treated him good because he is so different from the rest of the babies.	6-This participant described feelings of anger and frustration over witnessing racial discrimination and service disparities in the group home where she resided. These observations underscore how certain aspects of society continue to perpetuate racism and the marginalization of people of color. In turn, these experiences shaped how they viewed the systems that they were involved in (schools, child welfare, and behavioral health) - and the extent to which they engaged in those systems.

describe PPTs' lived experiences and school engagement. Indeed, the rich narratives of the aged-out pregnant and parenting teens that this study collected highlighted and validated the utility of the four main theories of attachment, identity, self-efficacy, and critical race to explain the PPTs' lived experiences. Table 1 spells out (1) the main categories for each theme (or theory), and (2) how the quotes to describe their rich histories are associated with the core tenets of the aforementioned theories.

Attachment theory has two main categories: (1) negative attachment and (2) attachment enhancers, each of which include sub-categories described below. Identity theory has two main categories,

namely (1) identity and stigma and (2) identity and oppression. Like attachment theory, sub-categories for identity theory were coded. Self-efficacy theory has two main categories: (1) paralysis of discouraging words and (2) reinvigoration of encouraging words. Finally, quotes are provided to illustrate how critical race theory applies to the experiences of former PPTs.

3.1. Theme 1 – attachment theory

3.1.1. Negative attachment

Aged-out PPTs described their experiences in foster care as negative

and lacking attachment connections with their foster parents and staff. They related feelings of not belonging, rejection, loneliness, and abnormality. Specifically, subcategories of negative attachment include: (1) residing in a “hospitalized” environment, (2) estranged/“alien” perceptions, (3) asking “where do I belong?”, and (4) feeling like an outcast, due to (a) unresponsive foster parents and staff, (b) silent treatment, and (c) experiencing numerous foster home placements. Their feelings expand and prove the core tenets of attachment theory, which describes the child’s propensity to seek love, attention, and responsiveness from the caregiver, without which the child experiences a void, emotional deprivation, anxiety, and insecurity.

3.1.1.1. “Hospitalized” environment. One PPT described life in the group home as resembling being hospitalized, with doctors only coming in to check on her, nurses coming in and out to give her medication at fixed times, while being expected to comply with the hospital’s regulations. There was no attachment connection in the group home, only staff coming and going with no permanency. According to this PPT, being in the group home did not feel like home, as it was run like the hospital system.

The group home is just like, it’s kind of like a hospital environment. It’s like everybody’s in a room, you’ve got this scheduled time and where you’ve got to go to bed. It just is not really so much of a family home. It’s more just like a group home. . . . You feel like a patient. You feel like, alright, let me just hurry up and get out of their face real quick. . . . It was just like a regular routine . . . everybody get up at this time, like it wasn’t a loving connection. It wasn’t nothing like that. It was more like work staff; you all are the patients and do what you’ve got to do.

The core tenets of attachment theory are reminiscent in this mother’s poignant statement of the group home devoid of a loving connection and feeling like a “patient”. Attachment theory asserts that conditions like these make it difficult to develop and maintain healthy attachments well into adulthood. Her internal working model suggests that she is underserving of love. Each mother described instances when these feelings emerged during their experience in foster care, often due to perceived stigma of being placed in foster care and/or being a teen mom. Moreover, former PPT reported that conditions of the group home impacted their school attendance. The mother referenced above described that prior to being removed, her mother was supportive of her studies, which motivated her to stay engaged in school and earn good grades. She compared the undivided attention she received by her mother regarding her school work to her experiences and observation of the group home. This is indicative again of how cultivating a healthy attachment relationship in a supportive environment influences motivation to succeed in school. As she noted, “it (the encouragement) made you want to, you know, make your mother proud or make somebody proud”.

3.1.1.2. Estranged/“Alien” perceptions. One of the PPTs related her experiences of feeling like an alien and a visitor in her foster home, feeling more like an outsider than an insider.

I didn’t really feel comfortable in the home because you do feel like a visitor, like you don’t know how long you’re going to stay, you don’t know, you know, what little thing could just make the parent want to get rid of you. So it was like one thing that I did try to put all my focus to was just going to school. So that was like my biggest like motivation. . . . I’ll just go to school and spend the day there, and you know when I come here, just like eat dinner and you know go to sleep and just repeat the process.

The above quote, which describes feelings of uncertainty, not being comfortable, and feeling like a stranger, illustrates how negative attachment prevails. According to [Ainsworth et al. \(1978\)](#), children develop insecure attachment when they experience negative living

conditions with caregivers. Worth noting is that unlike other former PPTs who internalized negative attachment patterns, the mother above described that she found solace and reassurance in attending school.

3.1.1.3. Where do I belong?. PPTs talked about their pain of not belonging in most of the foster and group homes they were in.

It was hard, like extremely hard, for me to feel I belong somewhere and my kid belongs somewhere because at that time I just had one [child] with me, and it was heartbreaking. It affected my motivation a lot because it made me just want to stay home and make sure that my daughter was progressing and not myself.

I felt like, when my friends was talking about that they were going out to eat with their family . . . and hearing my friends say they’re going home to their mom, they’re going home to do this, and knowing that I’m not going home to do that; it hurts.

The feeling of not belonging, as summarized in the above two quotes is one of the core tenets of negative attachment theory. Positive attachment and the feeling of belonging create resiliency and positive behaviors among children ([Harden, 2004](#)). Mothers talked about feeling less motivated to attend school as a result of not feeling a sense of belongingness in the foster home she was with her children.

3.1.1.4. Outcast. Some of the PPTs expressed feelings of not being wanted and of rejection just because they were teenagers, irrespective of being a mom. Such beliefs and painful expressions of rejection show the negative attachment relationships some of them experienced and endured.

Participant A: It hurts because I was one of those teenagers who was being shipped from home to home because foster parents didn’t want to deal with me. They didn’t want me because I was a teenager. So I knew how it felt to be one of those teenagers, to be unloved and untouched. Everybody deserves to have the love no matter whether you are a teenager, baby, black, white, Hispanic, Indian, no matter; we are all God’s children.

Participant B: When you’re not their kid, you feel like an outcast; that’s it.

Participant C: We were left to suffer. Just to be brought into somebody else’s home to get neglected? . . .And it’s sad because no child should go through a situation like that. That’s unhealthy . . . I wouldn’t want my child through that. I am overprotective of my child.

Respondents explained in their narratives that feeling like an outcast did not motivate them to go to school. For them, there was no incentive to go to school, as further supported by the quote below:

What didn’t motivate me is the foster parent didn’t push me so it was like if I stayed home she wouldn’t push me so I just stayed home. . . I didn’t have any encouragement to go to school that’s why I dropped out.

There were three primary reasons why former PPTs felt like an outcast: (1) foster parents and staff were unresponsive, (2) ensured silent treatment by foster caregivers, and (3) experienced numerous foster homes, hindering their ability to form long-term connections.

3.1.1.4.1. Unresponsive foster parents and staff. A number of pregnant and parenting teens described their foster parents and group home staff as uncaring, unsupportive, not nurturing, and unresponsive to their basic needs. They spoke of situations in which they lacked basic needs, went hungry, and did not receive child care support from their foster parents. The quotes below show how uncaring and inconsistent caregivers can cause some children to be apathetic and not motivate them, for instance, in their academic pursuits.

Participant A: My school attendance wasn’t great because I wasn’t receiving the help that I should have been receiving from my foster

mother so I was a drop out...they didn't encourage me as much as they should have and that's what kind of got me to just drop out.
Participant B: I didn't feel like there was a need to go to school because I wasn't getting pushed or motivated to do the things, I had to do for me as a parent and me as a student

Participant C: Sometimes, I didn't have panties; sometimes I didn't have socks, . . . and it hurts because I really wish like I could really say something to somebody and say like, did you check this home [implying if the foster home was properly vetted before placing foster children in it]? And it's sad because, you know, you [implying child welfare system] take us away from our mom that you say is negative to us, that probably nine times out of ten never let their kids go without panties or socks.

3.1.1.4.2. Silent treatment. One respondent metaphorically described the lack of attachment connection she felt in the foster home when the foster mother refused to communicate with her. She spoke of the lack of communication by the foster mother in terms of being locked in a room with no one to talk to.

I was going home to a foster mother that locked me in a room, locked me in a room by myself, like she barely talked to me; she barely spent time with me.

Many of the former PPTs experienced moments when lack of clear communication prevailed, with some adding that they "acted out" in school to receive the attention they craved while placed in foster care.

So usually Fridays, everybody is saying what they are doing for the weekend. Me. I used to like, be very quiet in school because I used not like to let people know what I'm going through. I will know deep inside my heart that I am not going home to nothing. I'm not going home to a mother that loves me...so it would affect my school attendance because instead of going to school to actually focus in class, I will show out or act like a fool in the hallway to get the attention that I should have been getting at home from my foster mom.

She felt awkward especially on Fridays when her school mates discussed among themselves what they were going to do with their family over the weekend. The sense of feeling abandoned by her foster mother affected her ability to fully engage in school. According to Bowlby (1988) children develop insecure attachment when caregivers are unresponsive.

3.1.1.4.3. Numerous foster home placements. Respondents shared painful experiences of being moved from one home to another, making them feel like they didn't belong in any home. They felt a sense of rejection and being unwanted by their foster parents, which is indicative of negative attachment. Being moved from home to home made some of the respondents internalize feelings of rejection. These lingering feelings of rejection overshadowed their ability to engage in school and perform well academically, as noted in the quotes below.

Participant A: Being in foster care affected my education because I was moved from different homes. I was in 12 different homes from 17 to 21 [ages]. So I wasn't, I was never stable to go to school and get a job to provide for my kid.

Participant B: I was out of school, for like three and half, four months. I was missing credits... so it was like really tough for me. I had to wind up getting my GED.

3.1.2. Attachment enhancers

PPTs described experiences of building positive connections with some foster mothers, group home staff, and caseworkers. Those positive connections made them feel a sense of belonging and acceptance, feelings that relate to some of the core tenets of positive attachment theory. Some respondents described their positive attachment connections as instrumental in eventually being motivated to go to school and

stay focused. In particular, subcategories of attachment enhancers included: (1) nurturing and responsive foster mothers and group home staff, and (2) supportive and reliable agency workers.

3.1.2.1. The nurturing and responsive foster mothers and group home staff. Some PPTs described being in other homes where they experienced a great deal of love and support from the foster parent or group home staff, which helped them to flourish. Many respondents talked about feeling a sense of belongingness when they entered such a nurturing and loving home. That sense of belongingness, according to some respondents, helped them to remain engaged in school. The quotes below illustrate the positive relationship between healthy attachment patterns and academic outcomes.

Participant A: When I got to [foster mother's name omitted], it was a little different for me because . . . she's like how are you out on the streets with a little baby and you have no phone? What happens if something happens to you and you have to call out? So it's like every foster parent is different, like every foster parent is in it for a different reason. . . . She bought me pampers, wipes, phone, and, and then she'd give me money on his part [respondent's baby], money on my part. They'll drive me, they'll pay for my child care, like stuff like that. Like I, when I actually got to her house, I was, um, doing a little bad in school, so like when I finally got to her house, I graduated. And it was like that was like big for me.

Participant B: She took me in with no, with no hesitation, no explanations, you know, and asked no questions about me, and I felt like I finally found a foster mom that could accept me for me. I felt like I was loved. I wasn't neglected no more. I had someone that would supported me, guided me, even though I was lost and confused; she still made me move forward and better myself. Not just for myself, for my children too. That's what it made me feel that I belonged in this system, with this foster mom that actually cared about me and my children.

3.1.2.2. Supportive and reliable agency workers. Some respondents spoke about having had the opportunity to work with supportive caseworkers who showed concern, love, and empathy for them. As in attachment theory, PPTs described the sense of security they felt at such a show of love and how that influenced their school engagement.

Umm, like I was telling you, um, that worker that I had, [name omitted], she always was at my school. If I missed days, she'll be calling me like, umm, I called your school; why are you not in school today? Like little stuff like that to show that you care. She didn't have to do all of that because at the end of the day she's still getting paid. She got so many other kids that she's dealing with, and she was always picking the phone and how are you doing today? How are you and [son's name omitted]? Just calling to check on you guys, like, like little stuff like that. And like every time I had an issue in school, with attendance, or a foster parent not wanting to watch [son's name omitted] so I could go to school, she always was there to vouch for me.

. . . And then there was another education specialist . . . which I still keep in contact with until today. She supported me a lot through the education. She made me feel like there's hope and that having a kid didn't completely ruin your life because people, not that it's the best, but people do it all the time, and they still get to where they want to go.

3.2. Identity theory

Two categories were identified from the identity theory theme, as aged-out pregnant and parenting teens cited experiences with stigmatization (category 1) and oppression (category 2). Stigmatization for being in foster care, having learning disabilities, mental health

problems, and being pregnant in their teens were recounted by PPTs. They described how the feelings of stigmatization and oppression affected their identity and sense of being. These experiences are in line with identity theory concepts, the impact of which served as barriers to their school engagement.

3.2.1. Identity and stigma

Subcategories for identity and stigma include: (1) stigma related to being an expectant teen mom or teen parent, (2) mental health diagnosis stigma, (3) the “learning problem” stigma, and (4) the foster care status stigma

3.2.1.1. The expectant/parenting teen stigma. PPTs recounted experiences of being humiliated and stigmatized for being expectant and parenting teens. One PPT shared her pain of feeling at a loss as to who she was as a person and in regard to her identity. The quote below underscores Erikson (1968) theory of identity and confusion where the respondent clearly begins to question her identity as a pregnant teen and the confusion of the unknown fate which lies before her at the face of becoming a teen mom. Ultimately, some respondents described this state of confusion and shame of being pregnant as impacting their motivation to go school for fear of being mocked by their peers.

Participant A: You kind of feel lost. Like you just don't know where your life is going to go. And just like ask yourself like what's the next step, like where? What direction should I go to? Because . . . you feel like you already made a wrong move, so it's like anything after that is just like it's either you're making it worse or you're trying to fix that.

Participant B: People look at pregnant, like young pregnant girls, like, oh, she's fat. Oh she's nasty, stay away from her, watch out for her, like stuff like that. So like at the beginning, I felt like a little like shaky about like even telling anybody like I had a small baby, because I was so young and I looked so young in the face. So like it bothered me a little bit, because that's not what I really wanted for myself, but things happen in life.

3.2.1.2. The mental health diagnosis stigma. One of the respondents shared the stigma she experienced over having a mental health diagnosis and being pregnant. The teen spoke about being advised to abort her baby since she could not possibly further her education with pregnancy and mental illness. According to the teen, she chose to keep her baby and forfeit her education. She explained that she should have believed in herself more and continued her education while pregnant, but she believed that she could not have both a child and achieve her educational goals because of her mental illness. The quote below sheds light on how staff may assume that those diagnosed with a mental illness are unable to juggle both school and pregnancy. As the mother internalized the feelings of incompetence as conferred upon her by staff, she accepted the label as part of her identity and dropped out of school.

I think that staff that was handling my aging-out process was discriminating towards me because she felt I couldn't raise my baby with, um, my disorder, and she felt that maybe I would be too overwhelmed with the baby and continuing school, and it might trigger my mental illness. . . . They didn't believe in me being pregnant and continuing my education like I didn't believe in myself.

3.2.1.3. The learning problem stigma. A few of the former PPTs also described feeling stigmatized by being called “dumb” and feeling humiliated to go to school. They recounted how their identity and self-worth as a student was compromised, often feeling incapable of going to school and believing they were “too dumb” to make it academically.

Participant A: I'm nervous to go back to school and I push myself far away from school... Um I didn't finish the way I want my daughter to finish... I do feel that, you know, school can be hard, school can be difficult...I just feel like I'm not smart enough.

Participant B: I feel like when I was told I read on a second-grade level, when I was told that I couldn't have passed that test, when I was told that I was dumb head, that's how I feel; I . . . it filled through my head for the rest, like throughout my life, and I just felt like I'm not worth it, like I can't do it. . . . I've been around friends that, who try to push me, and I still felt worthless. So, it's just something that I plan on working on, within me.

3.2.1.4. The foster care status stigma. Stigmatization for being in foster care was echoed by many of the PPTs. Some of the PPTs recounted feeling awkward and disgraced by their peers knowing they were in foster care, and they consequently took pains to avoid having their friends know of their foster care status. Given the stigma attached to foster care, they tried to avoid the labeling of a “foster kid” and/or a “teen mom” – they did not want to embody these stigmas and attach them to their personal identify. Thus, some of the respondents' were reluctant to attend school, knowing full well teachers and staff at school would directly or indirectly remind them of their situation.

Participant A: I was ashamed and embarrassed to even go back to school with a new born baby so it set me back from going to finish school

Participant B: I didn't want to be open and say like, wow, you know I'm a foster child because you would get made fun of because of that. Like, oh, you're a foster kid. And then the other thing was if I was to do anything in school that got me in trouble, the person that would have to come to the principal's office was not my mother, was not my grandmother; it was a caseworker. So that was like really embarrassing.

3.2.2. Identity and oppression

PPTs described feelings of oppression, being subjected to subtle and harsh insults which impacted their sense of self and identity formation. PPTs further explained the insults as psychologically debilitating and weakening their self-efficacies. Respondents described these insults as belittling and oppressive (subcategory); and many of the mothers', reflecting back on these moments, internalized them.

3.2.2.1. Insulted and belittled. Three of the PPTs narrated feeling oppressed in the foster homes of parents who continuously insulted them and put them down. According to PPTs, these forms of oppression affected their identity and sense of self-worth. In turn, they felt like failures before they even stepped into a classroom.

Participant A: The reasons why I used to go to school honestly is to be with my friends...I never used to go to class, really...the foster home, like, was a part of my decision, because I did not want to go to school”.

Participant B: My old foster mother, who just kept telling me, “you're not going to amount to anything,” or “you are just going to be good for just laying on your back and have sex,” and as a child in foster care and as a parent in foster care, that was hurtful, and it made me felt like that was only what I was good for. Instead of encouraging me to do a lot better, she belittled me.

Participant C: I was always told that I'm going to be just like my mother. I was always told since 10 [age 10], before I even knew what sex was, that I'm going to be a whore, I'm going to be this, I'm going to be a drug addict. I was always told all these negative things that being pregnant made it come to life. I started to believe what I was told. So I think that's why I took that as a negative thing.

3.3. Self-Efficacy theory

For this study, two categories pertaining to self-efficacy theory were identified, namely (1) paralysis of discouraging words and (2) reinvigoration of encouraging words. In line with self-efficacy theory, some respondents spoke about their self-esteem being compromised in homes where they lacked a sense of belonging. In homes where they felt stigmatized and devalued, they developed feelings of ineffectiveness and inadequacy in all facets of their life, especially with their educational trajectory (or lack thereof).

3.3.1. Paralysis of discouraging words: feelings of ineffectiveness and inadequacy

PPTs reported feelings of inadequacy and ineffectiveness from believing in numerous negative comments directed at them. One respondent stated that she was told her opportunities for going to college were limited in the face of early childbearing. Self-efficacy theory as purported by Bandura (1997) explains how social persuasion and encouragement boost one's confidence and self-competency. The relationship between negative patterns of self-efficacy and school disengagement is exemplified in the quotes below.

Participant A: After I heard about being pregnant and that I couldn't finish school, and then I had to make alternate decisions. I felt depressed, um, confused, overwhelmed, and a little bit like I felt that maybe I won't be able to finish school because I was pregnant, or maybe I wasn't good enough to even take care of my kid because the lady was saying abortion; she seemed very focused on abortion.

Participant B: I was just kept being told like, you know, because you are young, and you had a child, things are limited for you, like you're not going to finish school like everybody else. Just go get a GED. Like, you know, so it's like, well, you don't even have faith in me, like you don't even think I can do it.

3.3.2. Reinvigoration of encouraging words: efficacy development

PPTs also reported feeling a sense of self-efficacy upon receiving encouraging words and support from positive and caring group home staff, foster parents, and caseworkers. These encouraging words, as described by some of the mothers, have had positive influences on their sense of competency.

Participant A: They was more like that parent that cared to ask us how our day was . . . to give us that motivation, inspirational talk, that pep talk saying that we can do better . . . like they encouraged us to go to school.

Participant B: I just felt like, really, my social worker . . . supported me tremendously. I wouldn't be where I'm at today if it wasn't for that man. . . . I felt comfortable with him. . . . I actually kept a job the longest I ever had in my life, which was for seven months. . . . He kept me focused. I would go tell him different things that would happen at work, everything like it was awesome. Like he was really good.

3.4. Discrimination and critical race theory

Racial, ethnic, and sexual orientation discrimination were described by some respondents as debilitating experiences that impacted school engagement. Some of the former PPTs noted underscored how racism, daily microaggressions, and overt forms of discrimination intentionally or unintentionally created inequity in service disparities. As exemplified in the quotes below, former PPTs were able to articulate how societal norms perpetuate racism and the marginalization of people of color. In turn, these experiences shaped how they viewed the systems that they were involved in (schools, child welfare, and behavioral health) - and the extent to which they engaged in those systems.

Participant A: She was African American, she was loud, and some staff gets scared; they think if you're loud, then you're bad, and that's bias and judgmental. And I saw that she, they treated someone's son not fair, the black girl that was loud, you know, um, so they would either not try to bring up certain special job opportunities for them, so like they don't deserve it, this and that, instead of still trying to give them a chance. Or if they didn't like the mother, they didn't like her kid, and you have to watch how they treat your kid at the day care.

Participant B: I witnessed something happen to a kid that I would hope that someone will tell me if they saw something happen to mine. . . . It was tough 'cause I felt like attacking the staff; maybe they felt I shouldn't have told on them because they treat my kid good, but then my kid, he's African American, but he is light skinned, and blue-eyed, blond hair . . . to me that's so racist like; also, you only treated him good because he is so different from the rest of the babies.

Participant C: I haven't experienced it, but I witnessed it, happening to other girls, and I do feel so bad for them, and that's why, you know, in the future, that's why I want to be a social. . . . I want to help and be a part of fixing that problem. Because it hurts me; it's so wrong. Like I know some probably pretend they don't see it; they tell me I should be happy. I'm not happy that I'm treated different or better because I'm white.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this research was to use the directed content analysis approach to critically examine and identify key concepts from the rich narratives recounted by the study's interviewed subjects as they pertain to existing theories of attachment, identity, self-efficacy, and critical race. Study findings shed light on how former PPTs' placed in foster relate the core tenets of attachment, identity, self-efficacy, and critical race theories to their educational experiences.

4.1. Negative attachment versus attachment enhancers

Aged-out pregnant and parenting teens' narratives of their foster care experiences highlight the core tenets of attachment theory, which posits that children will develop a sense of insecurity, feelings of not belonging, and lack of confidence in themselves in homes where the caregiver is unreliable, uncaring, unresponsive, and unpredictable (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969; Courtois, 2014). The mothers' described feelings of loneliness and a sense of not belonging or "fitting into" their foster and group homes. The frequent use of similes and metaphors to accentuate their painful experiences of not feeling loved and accepted, such as feeling like a visitor and always being on edge in a foster home, is consistent with previous research and literature on attachment theory. In particular, one description of a group home that likened it to a hospital setting, with the group home staff coming and going like a hospital staff, validates Ainsworth's previous research on how the inconsistency and unreliability of caregivers create insecure attachment for children (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

The mothers' experiences of isolation and not belonging in the foster and group homes were explained by respondents as major contributing factors to their school disengagement and poor educational outcomes, building upon previous research and validating some of the core tenets of attachment theory. Their experiences are consistent with existing literature that discussed how children develop an internal working model (IWM) of both negative and positive attachment conditions and messages, which later impact behaviors, the attainment of social skills, and academic decisions (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969; Courtois, 2014; Duchesne & Larose, 2007; Fass & Tubman, 2002; Mooney, 2010).

According to Bowlby (1973, 1988), children will develop a secure

base and sense of confidence, belongingness, and autonomy in homes where the caregiver is loving, consistent, reliable, responsive, and nurturing. The mothers' narratives validate extant literature and attachment theory research that have shown how nurturing and responsive caregiver-child relationships influence school engagement and academic achievement (Fass & Tubman, 2002; Harden, 2004). Also, in validation of attachment theory, respondents described having inner confidence, hopefulness, a sense of security, new motivation for school engagement, and positive educational outcomes in the foster and group homes where they experienced love, belongingness, stability, and reliability with foster mothers, group home staff, and agency case-workers.

4.2. Identity theory — stigmatization and oppression

The core tenets of identity theory are clearly revealed in the participants' narratives of their foster care experiences' impact on school engagement and academic outcomes. Respondents spoke repeatedly of incidents of stigmatization and oppression while in foster care, all of which impacted school engagement and completion, validating Erickson's epigenetic theory of identity versus confusion (Erikson, 1968). The theme of self-stigma or internalized stigma, as echoed in the women's narratives of their foster care experiences, supports previous research on foster care stigma and its impact on adolescent identity (Kools, 1997).

Consistent with extant literature, self-stigma, which impacts one's sense of self, self-efficacy, and self-esteem, is developed when individuals internalize negative messages and legitimize common stereotypes and preconceived notions associated with stigma (Rose, Joe, & Lindsey, 2011; Rüsich, Lieb, Bohus, & Corrigan, 2006). The central messages of the mother's feeling stigmatized for having a mental illness, mocked for being in foster care, and shame for being a teen parent, or being told they are a failure or dumb validate prior research on identity theory, particularly studies that have shown how adolescents' identity formation is influenced by public or societal perceptions of them (Laser & Nicotera, 2011; Paranjpe, 1975).

As noted above, respondents' narratives are consistent with Erikson's theory of identity and confusion, which illuminates the adolescent's embarkation on the search for a sense of self and how the adolescent's negative and positive beliefs and impressions of self are construed from familial and societal interactions (Erikson, 1963, 1968). Aged-out pregnant and parenting teens described experiences of stigmatization and oppression in foster care that are consistent with prior research on stigma, which is associated with negative identity and can impact the core sense of being and thought processes. In turn, these circumstances can often lead to feelings of devaluation and self-stigma (Heijnders & Van Der Meij, 2006; Kools, 1997; Rose et al., 2011; Sengupta, Banks, Jonas, Miles, & Smith, 2011).

4.3. Self-Efficacy theory — words of encouragement versus discouragement

Social persuasion, which is one of the sources of self-efficacy theory, posits that belief in one's ability and competence to succeed can be influenced by positive and realistic encouragement from others (Bandura, 1995, 1997). Findings of this current study validate and extend self-efficacy theory, as the narratives of the mother's interviewed revealed how words of encouragement by foster parents and child welfare staff motivated them to go to school and to succeed, while words of discouragement created feelings of emptiness and a sense of ineffectiveness, inadequacy, and hopelessness, acting as barriers to school engagement.

This is consistent with prior studies that have shown parental and caregiver encouragement, acceptance, and warmth produce a greater sense of self-efficacy, higher levels of school engagement and academic performance, and healthy development among children and adolescents (Chin & Kameoka, 2002; Steinberg, Lamborne, Dornbusch, &

Darling, 1992; Witkow & Fulgini, 2011).

4.4. Discrimination and critical race theory

Keywords from respondents' narratives such as "not deserving", "bias", "judgmental", "racism", "blue-eyed", and "blond hair" build on critical race theory. The mother's foster care experiences validate how tenets of critical race theory relate to their lived experiences. Their experiences of microaggressions and disparities in service delivery are consistent with those found in existing literature (Bass, Shields, & Behrman, 2004; Garcia, Kim, & DeNard, 2016).

4.5. Convergence of attachment, identity, self-efficacy and critical race theories

The findings of this study make a unique contribution to research on the subject by revealing the interrelatedness of attachment, identity, self-efficacy, and critical race theories, and how they collectively enhance our understanding of the mothers' foster care experiences and academic outcomes. As exemplified in Table 1, experiences of negative attachment, including feelings of rejection, alienation, abandonment, yearning for love, and loneliness, according to the participants, impacted their identity development. Internalized stigma often precipitated by common biases towards the mothers', and words of discouragement by caretakers exerted a negative toll on their sense of self-efficacy. Although previous studies showed that stigma wounds self-esteem and weakens self-efficacy (Rüsich et al., 2006; Watson, Corrigan, Larson, & Sells, 2007), child welfare studies have not looked at the collective impact of attachment, identity, and self-efficacy theories on educational outcomes among PPTs. Altogether, the mothers' narratives do not single out one of these individual theories as solely playing a direct role in influencing their engagement in educational processes and academic outcomes. Rather, as the quotes in Table 1 delineate, the integration of the tenets and main ideas of each of these theories more fully capture their experiences.

While the utility of these theories were validated by the participants, one critical difference related to identity theory must be underscored. Data reveal that the tenets of Erikson (1968) epigenetic theory of Adolescent Identity and Confusion should be adapted to incorporate PPTs' emphasis on devaluation of identity from experiences of stigmatization. That is, it was all too common for them to experience internalized stigma due to societal stereotypes and biases related to being placed in foster care while pregnant and experiencing motherhood. Grappling with learning difficulties and mental health problems placed them further at risk of victimization and devaluation, even by their foster care providers. Erikson's theory, while it expands on adolescent stage of identity and confusion, it does not delve into stigmatizing experiences of PPTs that inherently may take a negative toll on their identity engagement in school and academic performance. Tenets of Erikson's adolescent identity can be refined to encompass the impact of stigma and oppression.

4.6. Limitations

As rich as the mothers' narratives collected for this study were, recall bias may be a significant limitation in two ways, namely aged-out PPTs may be unable to fully remember complex details of their past experiences and tend to exaggerate their experiences stemming from, perhaps, remembered frustration or pain, or, conversely, attempt to minimize their experiences in order to suppress any painful memories. While we concede recall bias is a limitation, the rationale for interviewing women who exited the foster care for several years was to gather data from a racially diverse pool of women who had time to reflect upon how their foster care experiences influenced their well-being (i.e., their sense of identity, self-efficacy, and ability to form healthy attachments); and how, in turn, their well-being influenced

their educational engagement.

Scant information on the impact of racism and ethnic discrimination on aged-out PPTs' school engagement seems to be a limitation on this research. As pervasive and critical an issue as racism is in American society, further research, with a larger sample, may yield more information on the contributing role of racism and discrimination in school disengagement. Another limitation is the fact that convenience sampling might have limited the range of experiences we were able to collect from the different participants, as some PPTs may have considered participating but didn't follow through.

4.7. Implications for practice, policy, and research

4.7.1. Practice

This in-depth analysis of the pregnant and parenting teens' narratives has validated and expanded upon various tenets of attachment, self-efficacy, identity, and critical race theories, revealing how critical it is for child welfare agencies to meet with and work in collaboration with PPTs in foster care in order to help promote attachment and relational connections, positive identity formation, enhanced self-efficacies, and racial/ethnic inclusion toward boosting school engagement. The mothers' narratives, for example, revealed their feelings of paralysis caused by discouraging words, which evoked feelings of ineffectiveness and inadequacy, whereas encouraging words reinvigorated some mothers' and elicited the development of self-efficacy. Therefore, collaborating with PPTs to promote the use of realistic and encouraging words, as opposed to belittling PPTs with disparaging words, will enhance self-efficacy development and positive identity achievement among PPTs.

It is crucial for child welfare administrators to have regular meetings with PPTs to gain first-hand insights into their needs in an effort to help address those needs. It is also critical to invite PPTs to program meetings to hear PPTs' input about their own needs. Lincoln (1995) stated, "Adults often underestimate the ability of children to be shrewd observers, to possess insight and wisdom about what they see and hear, and to possess internal resources we routinely underestimate" (p. 89). One of the respondents underscored the need for the child welfare system to support and empower PPTs instead of putting them down. The respondent further pointed out that belittling PPTs only cripples their abilities to better parent their children, and their children will bear the brunt of and suffer from their parents' incapacities and continue this debilitating cycle "until someday, somehow, somebody breaks the cycle."

Ongoing psycho-educational trainings and coaching, at least quarterly, on attachment, identity, self-efficacy, and critical race theories should be promoted among educators, foster parents and child welfare staff to help increase their understanding of these conceptual frameworks. Their understanding may foster healthy attachment relationships among youth in foster care, boost positive identity formation, and increase competencies and self-efficacies. Part of the training may include offering tips and strategies on how to tailor assessments that are informed by the core tenets and principles of these theories. Responders, for example, must be encouraged and trained to ask questions that (1) assess attachment histories and patterns, (2) illicit experiences of stigma and oppression that play a fundamental role in identity development, and (3) unravel to what extent these experiences influence self-efficacy. This holistic assessment may then help them develop evidence-informed strategies to address factors cited herein that hinder academic engagement among current and former PPTs in foster care.

Self-stigma was reported to be a major problem and needs serious attention from child welfare administrators and stakeholders. Training staff and mentoring them on how to mitigate negative self-stigmas among PPTs in foster care are necessary to build a generation that feels

empowered and has a strong sense of self and feels valued and belonging in society.

4.7.2. Policy

The mothers' narratives revealed a pattern of school disengagement and poor academic outcomes as a result of numerous foster and group home placements. Thus, instability or lack of permanence influenced academic outcomes. It is therefore important that child welfare administrators enforce Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015), which specifies that unless it is deemed not to be in the child's interest and well-being, children should be able to continue with their original school prior to placement. School stability will go a long way in fostering academic success among PPTs.

The formation of foster youth advisory boards should be encouraged to lend a legal voice to pregnant and parenting teens and all children in foster care. Policies that recognize the unified voice of foster children should be implemented to improve the increasing challenges and problems of the foster care system. As with work unions and advisory boards (Ferris & Stein, 2014), foster care government would serve to empower foster children and help them fight for recognition, their human rights, and social justice.

4.7.3. Research

Further research on racial and ethnic discrimination is necessary to determine the extent to which it impacts school engagement of PPTs in foster care and to shed more light on how to combat and address it. Future studies on discriminatory practices toward LGBTQ youth in foster care and their effects on educational outcomes should be undertaken, as participants in this study revealed experiences of LGBTQ discrimination. Moreover, researchers should explore the impact of Every Student Succeeds Act, (ESSA, 2015) on PPTs academic outcomes. Namely, efforts should be devoted to identifying how effective ESSA is on holding school staff accountable to providing PPTs equal opportunities to thrive in school. Finally, research is needed to integrate the stories of PPTs formerly placed in foster care with that of their relatives, caregivers, and service providers.

4.8. Conclusion

This study showed the extent to which mothers' narratives of motherhood while in foster care validate attachment, identity, self-efficacy, and critical race theories, particularly as they pertain to the enhancement and inhibition of school engagement among PPTs formerly placed in foster care. This study also adds to the limited research into how the issues addressed by these theories collectively impact educational outcomes among the target population, while proposing best clinical practices, policy improvements, and further research toward the goal of fostering healthy attachment relations, developing a positive sense of self-identity, and enhancing self-efficacy among PPTs in foster care. The study also provides impetus to advance research into identifying how racial and ethnic discrimination may impact school engagement and school or vocational achievement among PPTs in care.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank the aged-out pregnant and parenting teens whose courageous voices provided insight to their experiences in foster care and how they impacted school engagement.

Appendix A. Demographic questionnaire and in-depth interview guide**A. Demographic Questionnaire**

1. What is your gender? Please circle your answer.
 1. Male
 2. Female
 3. Other

2. What is your age (in years)? _____

3. Which one or more of the following would you say is your race/ethnicity? **(Check all that apply)**
 1. White
 2. Black or African American
 3. Asian
 4. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 5. American Indian, Alaska Native
 6. Hispanic or Latino

Or

 7. Other [specify] _____

4. What is the highest grade or year of school you completed before aging out of foster care?
 1. Up to Grade 8
 2. Grades 9-11
 3. Grade 12 or GED (High school graduate)
 4. Vocational Training / Alternative School
 5. College 1 year to 3 years (Some College or Technical School)
 6. College 4 years or more (College graduate)

5. What is the highest grade or year of school you completed after aging out of foster care?
 1. Up to Grade 8
 2. Grades 9-11
 3. Grade 12 or GED (High school graduate)
 4. Vocational Training / Alternative School
 5. College 1 year to 3 years (Some College or Technical School)
 6. College 4 years or more (College graduate)
 4. Master's degree
 5. Doctoral degree

6. What is your current employment status?
 1. Full Time
 2. Part- Time
 3. Per Diem / Seasonal Jobs
 4. Self-Employed
 5. Not working

7. How long have you been employed in your current work setting (in months or years)? _____

B. In-depth interview guide**Introductory – Pregnancy and parenting experience**

1. Describe what your experience has been like from the time you realized that you were pregnant while in foster care and until you aged out of foster care.
2. How did your experience of being pregnant and or parenting teen affect your school attendance?

Module 1: Factors related to school engagement and educational outcomes among PPTs in foster care

3. What motivated you to go to school while in foster care? What did not motivate you to attend school?
4. In what ways did your group home or your foster home environment impact your education?
 - (a) What were conditions that contributed to your school engagement?
 - (b) What were the not too favorable conditions that contributed to your lack of school engagement?

- (c) What factors impacted your educational outcomes or well-being (e.g., attendance, grades, aspirations to further educational trajectory)
- (d) How would you say the foster home or group home influenced your decision to stay engaged in school and your overall educational outcomes?

Module II: Attachment Theory and educational engagement/outcomes among PPTs of color

5. Describe your relationship with your parents or guardians before you were placed in foster care? In what ways did they influence your motivation to attend school and your educational outcomes?
 Prompt: Tell me about a single episode that you felt a sense of belongingness in your foster home or group home? How did this episode impact your motivation to attend school and your educational outcomes?
 Prompt: Tell me about a single episode that made you not feel accepted in the foster home or group home? How did this episode impact your motivation to attend school and your educational outcomes?
6. Describe your relationship with your foster parents? In what ways did they influence your motivation to attend school and your educational outcomes?
7. Describe your relationship with social workers and other professionals. In what ways did they influence your motivation to attend school and your educational outcomes?
8. Tell me about the people that supported you prior to aging out of foster care. How did they contribute to your school engagement and outcomes?
9. Tell me about the people that supported you while you were pregnant. How did they contribute to your school engagement and outcomes?

Module III: Identity Theory and educational engagement/outcomes among PPTs of color

10. Tell me how being a pregnant and parenting mother in foster care impacted your identify and well-being. How did your relationship with your foster parents, caseworkers, staff, and/or other professionals affect your identity
11. How did any changes in identity influence your motivation to attend school and achieve good educational outcomes?
12. In what ways did your educational experience impact your identity?

Module IV: Self-Efficacy Theory and educational engagement/outcomes among PPTs of color

13. How do you understand words of encouragement? Describe how important it is from your perspective
 Prompt: Can you tell me about a single episode that you received positive and constructive feedback on an action you took while in care as a pregnant or parenting teen? How did this episode impact your motivation to attend school and your educational outcomes?
 Prompt: Can you tell me of a single episode where you received negative feedback on an action you took while in care as a pregnant or parenting teen and what were your reactions? How did this episode impact your motivation to attend school and your educational outcomes?

Module IV: Experiences of perceived racism, macroaggressions, and discrimination

14. Think about a time in foster care when you might have experienced some form of racism or felt discriminated against by a childcare worker, social worker, therapist, foster parent, or teacher? Would you be willing to describe one incident? If so, how would you describe your feelings? How this experience and other experiences like these might impacted your identity and self-worth? How might they have impacted your school engagement and educational outcomes? Conclusion
15. Since you aged out of care, have you gone back to school? If so, tell me what your interest are and what you hope to do in the future. If not, tell me if you hope to go back to school.
16. What are your future academic or career plans?
17. Do you have anything else to tell me?

Thank you for taking time off your busy schedule to interview with me. Are there any questions you would like me to ask me before we bring this interview to an end?

References

- Adamson, L., Hartman, S. G., & Lyxell, B. (1999). Adolescent identity – A qualitative approach: Self-concept, existential questions and adult contacts. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology, 40*, 21–31.
- Ainsworth, M. D., Behlar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1978). *Patterns of attachment: Assessed in the strange situation and at home*. Hilldale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Alfaro, E. C., Umaña-Taylor, A. J., Gonzales-Backen, M. A., Bámaca, M. Y., & Zeiders, K. H. (2009). Latino adolescents' academic success: The role of discrimination, academic motivation, and gender. *Journal of Adolescence, 32*, 941–962.
- Aparicio, E. M., Gioia, D., & Pecukonis, E. V. (2018). "I can get through this and I will get through this": The unfolding journey of teenage motherhood in and beyond foster care. *Qualitative Social Work, 17*(1), 96–114.
- Aparicio, E., Pecukonis, E. V., & O'Neale, S. (2015). "The love that I was missing": Exploring the lived experience of motherhood among teen mothers in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review, 51*, 44–54.
- Apfel, N., & Seitz, V. (1996). *African American adolescent mothers, their families, and their daughters: A longitudinal perspective over twelve years*. New York: New York University Press.
- Bandura, A. (Ed.). (1995). *Self-efficacy in changing societies*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: Freeman.
- Bandura, A., Barbaranelli, C., Caprar, G. V., & Pastorelli, C. (1996). Multifaceted impact of self-efficacy beliefs on academic functioning. *Child Development, 67*, 1206–1222.
- Basch, C. E. (2011). Teen pregnancy and the achievement gap among urban minority youth. *Journal of School Health, 81*(10), 614–618.
- Bass, S., Shields, M. K., & Behrman, R. E. (2004). Children, families, and foster care: Analysis and recommendations. *The Future of Children, 14*(1), 4–29.
- Bergin, C., & Bergin, D. (2009). Attachment in the classroom. *Educational Psychology Review, 2*(21), 141–170.
- Blaustein, M. E., & Kinniburgh, K. M. (2018). *Treating traumatic stress in children and adolescents: How to foster resilience through attachment, self-regulation, and competency*. Guilford Publications.
- Boonstra, H. D. (2011). Teen pregnancy among young women in foster care: A primer. *Guttmacher Policy Review, 14*(2).
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Separation: Anxiety and anger*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1973). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 2. Separation: Anxiety and anger*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1982). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1: Attachment* (2nd ed.). New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1988). *A secure base: Parent-child attachment and healthy human development*.

- New York: Basic Books.
- Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (1998). The ecology of developmental processes. In W. Denton (Series Ed.) & R. M. Lerner (Vol. Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 1: Theoretical models of human development* (5th ed., pp. 993–1028). New York: Wiley.
- Brosch, J., Weigel, D., & Evans, W. (2007). Pregnant and parenting adolescents' perception of sources and supports in relation to educational goals. *Child Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 24, 565–578.
- Burley, M., & Halpern, M. (2001). *Educational attainment of foster youth: Achievement and graduation outcomes for children in state care*. Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy.
- Caraway, K., Tucker, C. M., Reinke, W. M., & Hall, C. (2003). Self-efficacy, goal orientation, and fear of failure as predictors of school engagement in high school students. *Psychology in the Schools*, 40, 417–427.
- Chin, D., & Kameoka, V. A. (2002). Psychosocial and contextual predictors of educational and occupational self-efficacy among Hispanic inner-city adolescents. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 24(4), 448–464.
- Connolly, J., Heifetz, M., & Bohr, Y. (2012). Pregnancy and motherhood among adolescent girls in child protective services: A meta-synthesis of qualitative research. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 6, 614–635.
- Courtois, C. A. (2014). *It's not you, it's what happened to you: Complex trauma and treatment*. Dublin, Ohio: Telemachus Press, L.L.C.
- Currie, J., & Widom, C. S. (2010). Long-term consequences of child abuse and neglect on adult economic well-being. *Child Maltreatment*, 15(2), 111–120.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Plenum.
- DeGarmo, D. S., & Martinez, C. R., Jr. (2006). A culturally informed model of academic well-being for Latino youth: The importance of discriminatory experiences and social support. *Family Relations*, 55, 267–278.
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2012). *Critical race theory. An introduction* (2nd ed.). New York: New York University Press.
- Duchesne, S., & Larose, S. (2007). Adolescent parental attachment and academic motivation and performances in early adolescence. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 37(7), 1501–1521.
- Dworsky, A., & Courtney, M. E. (2010). The risk of teenage pregnancy among transitioning foster youth: Implications for extending state care beyond age 18. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 32, 1351–1356.
- Eastman, A. L., Palmer, L., & Ahn, E. (2019). Pregnant and parenting youth in care and their children: A literature review. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 36(6), 571–581.
- Edwards, L. M., & Romero, A. J. (2008). Coping with discrimination among Mexican descent adolescents. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 30, 24–39.
- Erikson, E. H. (Ed.). (1963). *Youth: Change and challenge*. New York: Basic Books.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- ESSA (2015). *Every student succeeds act (2015) U.S. department of education* <https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=m>.
- Fass, M. E., & Tubman, J. G. (2002). The influence of parental and peer attachment on college students' academic achievement. *Psychology in the Schools*, 39(5), 561–573.
- Fernandes, A. L., & Gabe, T. (2009). *Disconnected youth: A look at 16–24-year-olds who are not working or in school*. Washington DC: Congressional Research Service.
- Ferris, K., & Stein, J. (2014). *The real world: An introduction to sociology* (4th ed.). New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Finn, J. D., & Rock, D. A. (1997). Academic success among students at risk for school failure. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 82, 221–234.
- Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 74, 59–109. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543074001059>.
- Garcia, A. R., Kim, M., & DeNard, C. (2016). Context matters: The state of racial disparities in mental health services among youth reported to child welfare in 1999 and 2009. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 66, 101–108.
- Graneheim, U. H., & Lundman, B. (2004). Qualitative content analysis in nursing research: Concepts, procedures and measures to achieve trustworthiness. *Nurse Education Today*, 24(2), 105–112.
- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18, 59–82.
- Haight, W., Finet, D., & Helton, J. (2009). The beliefs of resilient African American adolescent mothers transitioning from foster care to independent living: A case-based analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31, 53–62.
- Halliday, A. J., Kern, M. L., Garrett, D. K., & Turnbull, D. A. (2019). The student voice in well-being: A case study of participatory action research in positive education. *Educational Action Research*, 27(2), 173–196.
- Harden, B. J. (2004). Safety and stability for foster children: A developmental perspective. *The Future of Children*, 14(1), 30–47.
- Heijnders, M., & Van Der Meij, S. (2006). The fight against stigma: An overview of stigma-reduction strategies and interventions. *Psychology, Health & Medicine*, 11, 353–363.
- Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277–1288.
- Josselson, R. (1994). *Interventions for adolescent identity development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Kools, S. M. (1997). Adolescent identity development in foster care. *Family Relations*, 46(3), 263–271.
- Kruger, L. (Ed.). (2011). *Teen pregnancy and parenting*. Farmington Hills, MI: Greenhaven Press.
- Laser, J. A., & Nicotera, N. (2011). *Working with adolescents: A guide for practitioners*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Lincoln, Y. (1995). In search of students' voices. *Theory into Practice*, 34(2), 88–93.
- Manlove, J., Welti, K., Mc-Coy-Roth, M., Berger, A., and Malm, K. (2011). Teen parents in foster care: Risk factors and outcomes for teens and their children. Retrieved from https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Child_Trends-2011_11_01_RB_TeenParentsFC.pdf.
- Martin, P. Y., & Jackson, S. (2002). Educational success for children in public care: Advice from a group of high achievers. *Child and Family Social Work*, 7, 121–130.
- McDermott, E. R., Umaña-Taylor, A. J., & Martinez-Fuentes, S. (2018). Family ethnic socialization predicts better academic outcomes via proactive coping with discrimination and increased self-efficacy. *Journal of Adolescence*, 65, 189–195.
- Miranda, M., Molla, E., & Tadros, E. (2019). Implications of foster care on attachment: A literature review. *The Family Journal*, 27(4), 394–403 1066480719833407.
- Mooney, C. G. (2010). *Theories of attachment. An introduction to Bowlby, Ainsworth, Gerber, Brazelton, Kennell, and Klaus*. St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press.
- Noonan, K. G., Matone, M., Zlotnik, S., Hernandez-Mekonnen, R., Watts, C. L., Rubin, D. M., et al. (2012). Cross-system barriers to educational success for children in foster care: The front line perspective. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34(2), 403–408.
- Odaci, H., & Kımık, Ö. (2019). Evaluation of early adolescent subjective well-being in terms of submissive behavior and self-esteem. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 45(4), 558–569.
- Okpych, N. J., & Courtney, M. E. (2014). Does education pay for youth formerly in foster care? Comparison of employment outcomes with a national sample. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 43, 18–28.
- Palinkas, L. A., Fuentes, D., Finno, M., Garcia, A. R., Holloway, I. W., & Chamberlain, P. (2014). Inter-organizational collaboration in the implementation of evidence-based practices among public agencies serving abused and neglected youth. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 41, 74–85.
- Paranjpe, A. C. (1975). *In search of identity*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Patrick, H., Ryan, A. M., & Kaplan, A. (2007). Early adolescents' perceptions of the classroom social environment, motivational beliefs, and engagement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 99, 83–98.
- Patterson, D., Day, A., Vanderwill, L., Willis, T., Resko, S., Henneman, K., et al. (2018). Identifying the essential competencies for resource parents to promote permanency and well-being of adolescents in care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 88, 457–466.
- Pecora, P. J., Kessler, R. C., O'Brien, K., et al. (2006). Educational and employment outcomes of adults formerly placed in foster care: Results from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 28(12), 1459–1481.
- Pillow, W. S. (2015). *Expectant and parenting youth in foster care: Linking education to well-being through intentional and caring praxis*. New York, NY.
- Rivas-Drake, D., & Umaña-Taylor, A. (2019). *Below the surface: Talking with teens about race, ethnicity, and identity*. Princeton University Press.
- Rose, T., Joe, S., & Lindsey, M. (2011). Perceived stigma and depression among black adolescents in outpatient treatment. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(1), 161–166.
- Rüsch, N., Lieb, K., Bohus, M., & Corrigan, P. (2006). Self-stigma, empowerment, and perceived legitimacy of discrimination among women with mental illness. *Psychiatric Services: A Journal of the American Psychiatric Association*, 57(3), 399–402.
- Sartor, C. E., & Youniss, J. (2002). The relationship between positive parental involvement and identity achievement during adolescence. *Adolescence*, 37(146), 221–235.
- Sengupta, S., Banks, B., Jonas, D., Miles, M. S., & Smith, G. C. (2011). HIV interventions to reduce HIV/AIDS stigma: A systematic review. *AIDS and Behavior*, 15, 1075–1087.
- Solorzano, D. G. (1997). Images and words that wound: Critical race theory, racial stereotyping, and teacher education. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 24(3), 5–19.
- Steinberg, L., Lamborne, S. D., Dornbusch, S. M., & Darling, N. (1992). Impact of parental practices on adolescent achievement: Authoritative parenting, school involvement, and encouragement to succeed. *Child Development*, 63(5), 1266–1281.
- Stone, S. (2007). Child maltreatment, out-of-home placement and academic vulnerability: A fifteen-year review of evidence and future directions. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29, 139–161.
- Stone, S., & Han, M. (2005). Perceived school environments, perceived discrimination, and school performance among children of Mexican immigrants. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 27, 51–66.
- Svoboda, D. V., Shaw, T. V., Barth, R. P., & Bright, C. L. (2012). Pregnancy and parenting among youth in foster care: A review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34, 867–875.
- Vacca, S. J. (2008). Breaking the cycle of academic failure for foster children – What can the schools do to help? *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30, 1081–1087.
- Wang, M. T., Dishion, T. J., Stormshak, E. A., & Willett, J. B. (2011). Trajectories of family management practices and early adolescence behavioral outcomes in middle school. *Developmental Psychology*, 47, 1324–1341.
- Wang, M. T., & Eccles, J. (2012). Social support matters: Longitudinal effects of social support on three dimensions of school engagement from middle to high school. *Child Development*, 83(3), 877–895.
- Wang, M. T., & Holcombe, R. (2010). Adolescents' perceptions of classroom environment, school engagement, and academic achievement. *American Educational Research Journal*, 47, 633–662.
- Watson, A. C., Corrigan, P., Larson, J. E., & Sells, M. (2007). Self-stigma in people with mental illness. *Schizophrenia Bulletin*, 33(6), 1312–1318.
- Whitman, T., Borkowski, J., Schellenbach, C., & Nath, P. (1987). Predicting and understanding developmental delay of children of adolescent mothers: A multidimensional approach. *American Journal of Mental Deficiency*, 92(1), 40–56.
- Witkow, M. R., & Fulgini, A. J. (2011). Ethnic and generational differences in the relations between social support and academic achievement across the high school years. *Journal of Social Issues*, 67(3), 531–552.