

## ABSTRACT

Title: **THE OPTIMISM TO OVERCOME: EDUCATIONAL BELIEFS AND STRATEGIES OF RESILIENCE AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLEGE GRADUATES WHO ARE FORMER TEENAGE MOTHERS.**

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The purpose of this study is to examine the real-life experiences and narratives of African American, former teenage mothers who have earned college degrees. The Resiliency theory and the Intersectionality paradigm provide the framework for this qualitative research study. The Resilience theory explores the processes employed by the women in this study to successfully balance the multiple demands of being a parenting-student. Through the lens of Intersectionality, this study examines how issues of race, class and gender impacted the academic trajectories of African American, former teenage mothers. The 20 women in this study participated in an interview about their experiences as students before, during and after their first childbirth. In addition, the women discussed the impact motherhood had on their academic ambitions. The data first reveals that the attitudes, beliefs and values held about education by the women were not negatively impacted by their pregnancies or childbirth. Instead, early childbearing strengthened their desire to academically excel. In addition, this research shows that the women utilized a variety of strategies of resilience created by both their internal support systems and offered by external structural opportunities, as they successfully managed the numerous and sometimes competing demands of being parenting-students. Lastly, the study examines the psychosocial impact of academic success and social mobility on these women.