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FROM DEFICIT TO STRENGTH: THE EDUCATIONAL
INFLUENCE OF SINGLE BLACK MOTHERS ON THEIR
SONS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

By

TYRE' D'VALLION JENKINS

A dissertation proposal submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

XAVIER UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA
Division of Education and Counseling

MAY 2021

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Xavier University of Louisiana
New Orleans, Louisiana


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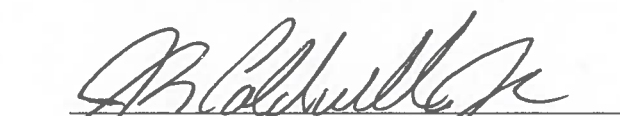
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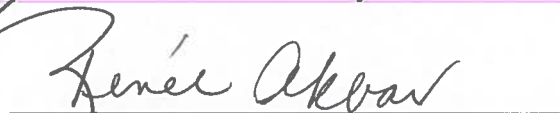
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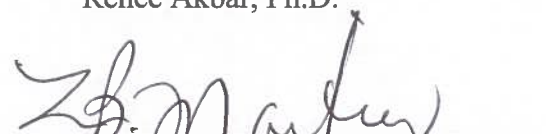
TYRE' D'VALLION JENKINS


has been approved by the examining committee for the dissertation requirement
for the Doctoral Program in Education Leadership in the Division of Education
and Counseling, May 2021.


Timothy Glaude, Ph.D., Chair


Jimmy Caldwell, Ph.D.


Renee Akbar, Ph.D.


Zwiła Burks-Martinez, Ed.D.


Associate Dean of Graduate Programs

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my grandfather, the late Lester “Baba” Jenkins. I know you would be proud if you were able to see me at this point in my educational journey. Also, this is dedicated to the women that raised me to the man that I am today. I appreciate you, Mama, Momo, Pastor, and Tee Tee.

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and later at the doctoral orientation, I knew that Xavier University would be my home. Thank you for your warm, motherly welcome and encouragement. Dr. Zwila Burks-Martinez, I would have not made it within the three years if it was not for you! Thank you for your mentorship, conversations, network, and everything that you have contributed during this process. You were God-sent.

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To my nonprofit organization, Coaching Kings, Inc., I have not forgotten about you. I had to sacrifice building you in order to get to this point. However, this program has prepared me to better serve and lead you to the future. I would like to thank my coworkers and administrators from the schools that I worked at while being in this program. Thank you for being flexible and understanding when I could not attend certain events because I was writing. Dean Mendrek

Solite, I am forever grateful for you, your support and flexibility. I don't think I could have completed this dissertation within one year, if you did not extend grace and provide me with a flexible work schedule.

To all of my participants, I appreciate you for your voices. Your stories helped me develop and complete this research. I wish each of you the best.

FROM DEFICIT TO STRENGTH: THE EDUCATIONAL
INFLUENCE OF SINGLE BLACK MOTHERS ON THEIR
SON'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Abstract

by Tyre' D. Jenkins
Xavier University of Louisiana
May 2021

Chair: Timothy Glaude

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experience of single Black mothers' in supporting their sons' academic achievement and to better understand their overall success. Historically, research that has been conducted on single Black mothers is viewed from a deficit lens (Copeland, 1977; Grier & Cobbs, 1968; Karon, 1958; Moynihan, 1965; Pettigrew, 1964). The role of single Black mothers has been grossly misunderstood, insinuating that they would be economically poor, uneducated, and lacked effective parenting skills.

This study incorporated phenomenological and narrative methodologies, such as semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and observational field notes to capture the participants' experiences. The results of this study yielded six themes related to the perceived educational influence of single Black mothers and the contributing factors of their influence on the overall academic performance of their son(s). Based on the research findings, this in-depth study revealed that single Black mothers are resilient, and their role is pivotal in their sons' long-term achievement.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Fredrick Douglass, a towering figure and prominent activist known for his relentless work in abolishing slavery, made the following statement: “it is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men” (Douglass, 1855). This statement can be linked to some of the social and educational issues that Black males face today. In a time of evident racial disparity and discrimination, Black males are at greater risk to be impacted by racism, higher risk of imprisonment, higher chances of being unemployed, higher chances of being killed by another Black man, and less likely to graduate from high school and pursue post-secondary education opportunities (Bryant, Harris, & Bird, 2013; Bynum, Best, Barnes, & Burton, 2008; Gantt & Greif, 2009; Noguera, 2003). Houston, Pearman, and McGee (2020) stated that:

Negotiating academic achievement for Black males is no small task amidst the lasting legacies of slavery, racial segregation, Jim Crow, police brutality, and the War on Drugs. These legacies have collectively established appreciable fault lines that continually distinguish the Black male experience from the experiences of their racial and gender counterpart. (1)

The aforementioned historical legacies are also aspects of school life that are rooted in unjust and inequitable problems and practices that Black males are forced to confront that other groups rarely encounter (Houston, Pearman, & McGee, 2020). Many Black parents believe that education stands as a key for many Black males to build a future that exists to break the systems of inequality that plagues this vulnerable racial subgroup from birth (Franklin, Boyd, & Draper, 2002; Lynch, 2017; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016).

While there is an overwhelming amount of literature (Brown & Davis, 2002; Davis, 2003; Howard, 2008; Noguera, 2003; Price, 2000) that conclusively addresses the academic achievement of Black males in schools, this study examined the lived realities of single Black mothers and their efforts to push and assist their sons to achieve academically, despite the odds. Currently, it is more prevalent for Black households to be led by single mothers than it is by a single father (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). To date, there is limited research that speaks to the positive influence of the single mother in rearing a Black son to educationally advance himself.

Black Males

To understand Black males, Toldson's (2019) contributions to the literature have led to many controversial issues on whether or not humanistic interpretation is utilized. Researchers routinely separate numbers from people, which marginalizes them and separates them from human experience (Toldson, 2019). Historically, in the academic arena, Black males have been labeled as illiterate, left-behind, problematic, and lacking social values (Howard, 2014; Martino & Meyenn, 2002; Milosky, 1974; Oakes, 1985). It can be argued that these labels are built on and reinforces stereotypes and do not meaningfully represent the Black males' experiences in the classrooms. Toldson (2019) mentioned that it is even worse that these attitudes towards Black males reinforce systemic inequities.

The academic performance and educational debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006) of Black males have been a discussion in research for the past several decades (Howard, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Noguera, 2003). Ladson-Billings (2006) coined the term "education debt" to describe the increasing impact of the inequities, fewer resources, and other maltreatment directed at students of color. This is significant in understanding Black males because they face many challenges as they matriculate through school (Bryant et al., 2013), along with historical, economic,

sociopolitical, and moral decisions and policies considered by society that are made on their behalf (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Along with many negative stigmas, racism, and stereotypes, these negative attributes have been ingrained within the educational system and a contributing factor that influences how Black males interact with, experience, and approach learning (Martino & Meyenn, 2002). Robinson et al (2014) asserted that the academic performance of Black males is significantly related to the social, personal, and familial factors that often interrupt their academic progress. Commencing with pre-school, Robinson et al. found that Black boys have a difficult time grappling with systemic disparities that lead to the overrepresentation of suspensions, expulsions, non-promotions, dropouts, and special education assignments.

Poverty is a factor that also impacts the school success of Black boys. Students who live in impoverished neighborhoods are more likely to experience poor living conditions, crime, inadequate school facilities, and are less likely to have access to proper health care (Kozol, 2005; Robinson et al., 2014). In addition to the impending issues of poverty, Black males struggle with a sense of identity. Society targets Black males with different stereotypes that are grounded in racism and oppression that results in a reduction in their self-efficacy and self-concept (Ford & Moore, 2006; Milner & Ford, 2005; Robinson et al., 2014; Ogbu, 1994; Steel & Aronson, 1995).

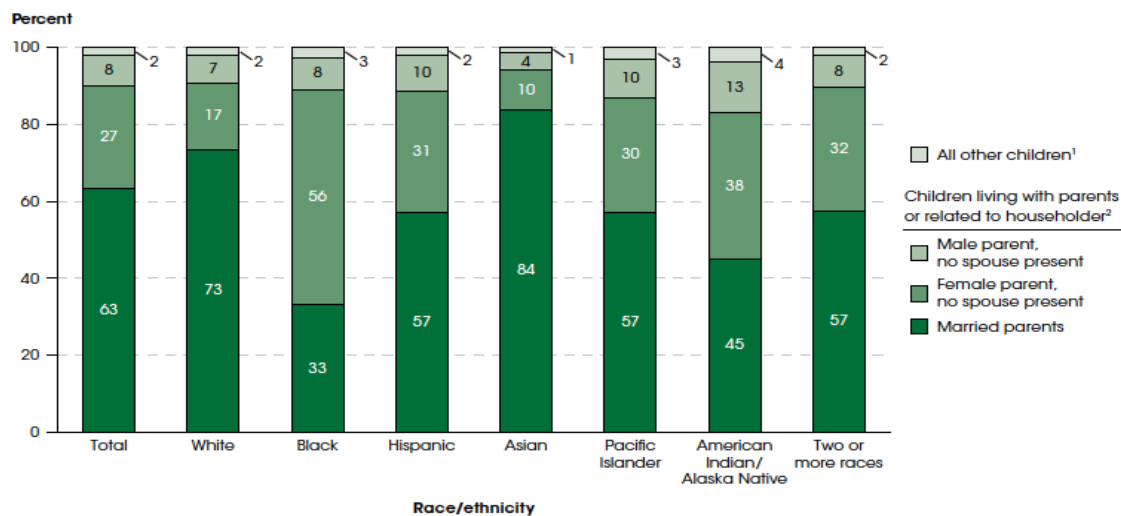
Within the context of social demonstrations, police brutality, and protests following the deaths of many Black males, the cycle of Black misandry viciously perpetuates. Despite these challenges, Black males still overcome great odds and advance academically. This research intends to shift from the problematic narratives, which emphasize the Black males' shortcomings and deficiencies, and move towards redefining the knowledge base on how Black males achieve positive educational experiences, and the parents' capability to make it work.

Single Black Mothers

Notwithstanding problems that may be confronted by single females heading households in the Black community, great credit and recognition should be given to single Black mothers who strive to coach, nurture, educate, and love their sons through the true culprit of these social and educational issues—Black misandry (Curry, 2017). Table I data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2016) indicates that the percentage of children living with married parents was the lowest for Black children at 33%. It also shows that 56% of Black children live in a female-parent household, and 8% of Black children live with a male parent. In comparison to other racial/ethnic groups in 2016, the child poverty rate for Black children was at 31%, which was higher than the rate for Hispanic children (26%). The rates for both groups were higher than those for White and Asian children (at 10% each). In 2016, the poverty rate of Black families with a single mother in the U.S. was 31.6%, which decreased to 27.3% in 2019 (Statista Research Department, 2021).

Table 1

Percentage distribution of children under age, by race/ethnicity and living arrangement



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2016

This data reflects that there is a disproportionate rate of Black children being raised by their mothers. These figures represent an example of the data that has been presented in different ways in the literature to portray single-parent households as a crucial element of the downfall of the Black community.

Multiple meanings can define a single mother. For this study, single mothers are defined as the custodial parent that identifies as a Black woman where no male lives in the house. The mother may be unmarried, widowed, or divorced. According to Jackson & Scheines (2005). The responsibilities of being a single mother, no matter the race, often result in emotional difficulty, including low self-efficacy, depression, and embarrassment (Haleman, 2004). Financial hardship and inadequate employment circumstances only add to the stress and difficulties that single mothers face (Hilton & Desrochers, 2000). Higher education for single mothers is one of the keys to reducing poverty and creating a more favorable and successful outcome for them and their children (Haleman, 2004).

In much of the literature about single Black mothers, the Moynihan Report (1965) is a seminal report that is often critically referenced. The Moynihan (1965) report claimed that there is a link between father absence and community dissonance. Early in this section, poverty was indicated as a barrier that single mothers faced as a challenging issue. Moynihan argued that growing up without seeing men as the breadwinner of the household contributes to the inability of Black children to climb out of poverty, “that the spread of such families would make it hard for blacks to take advantage of the legal and institutional changes flowing from the civil rights revolution” (McLanahan & Jencks, 2015, p. 15). Moynihan, who was a White sociologist that focused his research on the deep roots of Black poverty in the United States, further claimed that raising Black children in a fatherless home would reduce the chances of their educational and

economic success (McLanahan & Jencks, 2015; Acs et al, 2013). Many critics scrutinized his work and considered him to be a racist. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention conducted a study in 2013 and corrected the misconception that Black men disproportionately avoid their fatherly duties. Black men are generally more likely than any other race to read, bathe, and play with their young children daily (Jones & Mosher, 2013).

Fifty years later, researchers still revisit the Moynihan report. Since then, the percent of Black children being raised by their mothers-only has increased. Sociologist, William Julius Wilson, and activist, Eleanor Holmes Norton, former President, Barack Obama, are just a few people that support the report and its findings. Some people considered him to be prescient. However, some researchers argue the current validity of the report. In 2015, The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) and Council on Contemporary Families (CCF) conducted a study and concluded that Moynihan's report does not explain the recent trends in poverty and inequality. The researchers believed that Moynihan did not have the foresight to see that single Black mothers would increase their education and income to provide a way out of poverty for their children whether they are married or not. Even though there are still pervasive problems within the Black family structure, some of the social ills like poverty, school failure, crime, and violence have decreased since the report. Based on the predictions of Moynihan, the researchers also argue that marriage does not increase the economic status of all families. McLanahan and Jencks (2015) argued that it is a misconception to view marriage as the answer to eradicating the issues of single motherhood. In the findings of their analysis of the Moynihan report and current trends in data, children would not necessarily benefit from their parents being married. Nonetheless, it is inarguable that Black families, especially Black males and single mothers, are

still disproportionately impacted socially, economically, educationally, and politically than their counterparts.

Statistics on single parents have been represented in various ways by the media to shed light on the issues within the Black community. However, this kind of data is seen as negative and perpetuates negative stereotypes. To get an accurate picture of the Black community, it is important to differentiate “good” stats from “good” data (Toldson, 2019). Good data is comprehensive, holistic, and provides a complete picture of important issues and is pulled from various publicly accessible sources that can help develop a comprehensive picture (Toldson, 2019). In doing so, it allows the researchers to provide in-depth information about the statistics being collected and enables the researcher to subjectively connect to the research. Good stats concerning Black people cannot be defined by the White oppressor’s standards. When delving into statistics in questioning whether single parents can raise a Black child, it is significant to understand that "The United States has nearly 4 million more White children in single-parent households than Black children" (Toldson, 2019, p. 57). Toldson suggests that if White families did not divorce, have children out of wedlock or abandon their children, there would be a 40% reduction in the total population of children living in single-parent and no-parent households. However, in comparison, even though Black people only make up 25% of the population of children in single-parent homes, this statistic is still three times higher than Whites.

Toldson (2008) highlighted some interesting facts after reviewing the advantages of Black children from two-parent households over Black children from single-parent households. The results from his study (see Table 2) suggested that Black students' grade point average (GPA) from two-parent households is slightly higher than that of mother-only, father-only, or no-parent households.

Table 2

National Household Education Survey (NHES)-Parent and Family Involvement Survey

Parent and Family Involvement	Grade Point Average (GPA) of Black Students
Two-parent homes	3.1
Mother-only homes	3.0
Father-only homes	2.9
No-parent homes	2.7

Source: Toldson, I. A. (2019). *No BS (Bad Stats)*. Brill | Sense.

Additionally, he used the American Community Survey to determine the impact that household composition has on the Black male's persistence through grade school. The results indicated that Black males from the two-parent household were more than two grade levels behind at 7.7 percent compared to those from single-mother households at 10.7 percent (Ruggles, Sobek, Alexander, Fitch, Goeken, & Hall, 2009). However, what is interesting is that Black males from single-mother households were significantly more likely to be on-track academically than Black males in households with a father-only. Even though two-parent households may make a difference in the academic achievement of Black males, single Black mothers make a significant contribution to their academic growth.

Problem Statement

The academic challenges of Black males are prominent in scholarly discourse by educational researchers, leaders, and politicians (Brown & Davis, 2000). Davis (2013) highlights that there has been little knowledge or understanding of practical steps that could redirect these students' educational path. However, research (Harris & Goodall, 2008; Fan & Chen, 2001; Auerbach, 2007) has also shown that parental involvement has a significant impact on student's academic achievement. Regardless of the outlook on Black male academic achievement, there is still a significant number of them who are academically excelling (Pearman, Houston, and McGee, 2020).

There is little research that explores the ways that single Black mothers influence the academic achievement of their sons. Studies have shown that involved parents that take time to focus and assist in their children's schooling are more likely to comprehend the educational practices better (Delgado, Huerta, & Campos, 2012). The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the mothers' lived experience in supporting their sons' overall academic achievement.

Research Questions

To better understand how single Black mothers support their sons' academic achievement, the following research questions guided this study:

1. How do single Black mothers perceive their experiences as influencing the overall academic achievement of their son(s)?
2. What factors contribute to single Black mothers' influence on their sons' overall academic achievement?

Significance of Study

The present study contributes to the literature by shedding light on the experiences and the influence that single Black mothers have on the academic achievement of their sons despite barriers and challenges. Limited information is available about successful single Black mothers in this regard. The result of this study is significant for other single Black mothers, researchers, educational leaders, school counselors, mental health professionals and community-based organizations. The narratives from this sample of mothers provide information for researchers to combat the pervasive deficit model that is often applied to single Black mothers. This study's results are also beneficial for teachers and principals searching for ways to engage parents in their child's learning, particularly single Black mothers. Counselors and community-based

organizations can glean from this study many practical ideas, strategies, for promoting educational and social change within the community and society at large.

There is no blueprint of evidence-based practices to support single Black mothers who are intrinsically involved in their son's education. This study contributes to filling the gap in the literature with regards to single Black mothers and their sons by illuminating the stories of the academic achievement of Black males through the voices and perceptions of their mothers. The study also highlighted the strategies and approaches that mothers employ to assist their sons in their educational journey. In an attempt to change the narrative of Black males and single motherhood, it is significant to explore and share the experience of those mothers who have resiliently overcome adversity and whose sons excelled educationally.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks for this study are situated among two distinct, yet amalgamated theories concerning mothers who raise their sons to academically achieve. Resilience Theory (Rutter, 1999) and Motherwork (Collins, 1994) represent the foundation on which this study formulates its scope and purpose.

Resilience Theory

The Resilience Theory is one of the theories that will guide the theoretical framework for this study. Rutter (1999) postulates that individuals can have positive outcomes despite the adversities of life that may be presented. According to Seccombe (2002), resilience studies have revealed that an individual's ability to prosper in the face of hardship is partly dependent on the individual but also on the support structures of that individual's own family and community networks. Resilience can also be characterized as a child's ability to achieve despite factors that

increase his or her risk of failure, such as being raised in a single-parent household (Bernard, 1991; Schwartz, 2002; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1998).

The field of resilience focuses on individual traits and patterns of invulnerability or coping, to explain better-than-expected development outcomes for children living in stressful environments (Anthony, 1987; Murphy & Moriarty, 1976). This study examined the perceived experiences of single mothers and the contributing factors that led to the son's academic achievement despite adversities and challenges. Lester (1999) advises that the utilization of phenomenological research methods challenges structural or normative assumptions about the experiences in that it elicits the experiences and perceptions of participants from their perspectives. This approach does not verify or validate the theory, but it provided an understanding of what it is like to live resiliently through a single Black mother's experience.

Motherwork

Motherwork (Collins, 1994) provides a theoretical foundation to situate and establish a deeper understanding of the economic and social contexts relating to single Black mothers who are raising Black sons. Often, mothers have to coach their sons through certain challenges like racial tokenism, racial microaggressions, and racial discrimination that sometimes Black males face in school and society. Dow (2016) claims that African American mothers usually teach their children, especially their sons, about racial socialization to prepare them to address racism and discrimination. These mothers are most likely to be single and responsible for the decisions related to the children's educational, social, and cultural resources and experiences (Dow, 2016). Given the stereotypes and misjudgments by teachers, Black mothers often use certain strategies to make sure they push the success of their children. This theory assisted in illuminating contributing factors that mothers employ in pushing the academic achievement of their son.

Overview of Methodology

This qualitative study investigated the experiences of single Black mothers who propelled their sons to exceed beyond high school. A phenomenological approach was used to gain insight into the mothers' lived experiences. Moustakas (1994) created the phenomenological design and methodology that would inspire researchers and studies to lead to vital new information of the experiences, behaviors, and relationships of humans in their everyday lives. Phenomenology is defined by the knowledge as it appears to consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one's immediate awareness and experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). Leedy et al. (2016, p. 265) define it as a study that "attempts to comprehend the thoughts of others and is unique to their specific situations" (qtd. in Mohajan, 2018).

This study provided an examination of real-life experiences of single Black mothers by employing a qualitative phenomenological methodology centered on the utilization of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and observational field notes. The interaction with the participants allowed the researcher the opportunity to understand their experiences and perceptions firsthand. This phenomenological approach helped the researcher acquire a better understanding of the contributing factors associated with the mother's influence on her son's academic achievement.

Definition of Key Terms

For consistency of interpretation, the following terms are defined:

1. Academic achievement: The matriculation from high school to a post-secondary institution.
2. Fatherlessness: Used interchangeably with absent fathers; recognizing the mother as the custodial parent.

3. High-Poverty Schools: High-poverty schools are defined as public schools where more than 75% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRLP) (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).
4. Historical Black College and University (HBCU): a college or university that was established before the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 for African American students (Merriam-Webster, 2021).
5. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): a law that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).
6. Lifeworld: A phenomenological term used to describe the experience of a phenomenon by individuals in their everyday world (Creswell, 2013; Eddles-Hirsch, 2015).
7. Lived Experience: The subjective perceptions of a group of people involving a unique and complex phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).
8. Motherwork: A feminist theory of motherhood that reflects the experiences of marginalized women. Three themes that characterize the experiences of women of color are survival, power, and self-identity (Collins, 1994).
9. Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO): An organization that gives parents and teachers an opportunity to collaborate on enriching the educational experience for students.
10. Phenomenology: Knowledge as it appears to consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one's immediate awareness and experience (Moustakas, 1994).

11. Resilience: The capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten the viability, the function, or the development of that system" (Masten, 2014a, 2014b, Southwick et al., 2014).
12. Resilience Theory: the conceptual framework for understanding how some individuals overcome adverse situations in life through a strength-focused approach.
13. Single Mother: For the sake of this study, "single" when used in the context of "single-parent family/household," means that she is the custodial parent without the financial, emotional, and physical help and support of the child's father. The mother may be unmarried, widowed, or divorced.

Delimitations

Delimitations, defined by Simon (2011), is a boundary and choice that the researcher controls for the study. The study is restricted to a sample of single Black mothers in a southern region of the United States. This delimitation may not necessarily lend itself towards a generalization of the findings to a larger population beyond this subgroup in this geographical location. Also, the study examined mothers whose sons have completed high school and have either obtained a postsecondary degree or are currently enrolled in a degree program from a postsecondary institution. The findings of this study, however, have implications for all mothers who are seeking effective strategies and approaches to propel their children beyond high school.

Limitations

A limitation of the study is the exclusion of the voices of Black males. Even though Black males are significant factors to this study, their voices through the interviewing process are not needed. The focus of this research was not fatherlessness; therefore, this research was not conducted on the lived experiences of the Black males, but single Black mothers.

Although raised by a single Black mother, the researcher was aware of his potential bias and reframed from “interpreting” responses received from participants. Asking for clarity helped to keep the researcher’s biases in check. It was the desire of the researcher to capture the personal accounts, narrow the participants of single Black mothers to those who respond to the invitation, and control for specific characteristics. In ensuring internal validity, triangulation of the data, bracketing, and member checking was utilized. The protocol in this study was used to ensure external validity was the provision of rich, thick, detailed descriptions so that anyone interested in transferability will have a solid framework for comparison (Merriam, 1988; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The data collected helped the researcher: gain a better understanding of the single Black mothers’ lived experiences in educating their son; identified ways mothers perceive their experiences as influencing the overall academic achievement of their son; and identified factors that contribute to their influence on their sons’ overall academic achievement.

Assumptions

The researcher assumed that the participants were honest and detailed in their responses during the interviews. It was also assumed that the researcher was able to conduct the interview in a safe and empathic environment for participants to voluntarily provide the self-reported information without feeling coerced or intimidated.

Another assumption of the researcher was that the semi-structured interviews contained more than adequate information for capturing the lived experience of the participants. With this assumption about the semi-structured interviews, the researcher hoped to obtain the types of responses that provided answers for the study’s research questions.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditionally, the research and literature concerning the resiliency of the single Black mother are limited. Research that has been conducted on single Black mothers has a history of having a negative connotation (Copeland, 1977; Grier & Cobbs, 1968; Karon, 1958; Moynihan, 1965; Pettigrew, 1964). In past research, literature that used the term single parent, in association to Black mothers, was an insinuation that the mother would be economically poor, uneducated, and lacked effective parenting skills. There is a vast amount of research about the unfavorable outcomes of children raised by single Black mothers (Brodsky et al., 2002; Jackson, 1993; Jarrett, 1994; Kogan & Brody, 2010; Mandara & Murray, 2000; Wasserman, Rauh, Brunelli, Garcia-Castro, & Necos, 1990). However, there is an emergence in research that is focusing on single Black mothers built on strength-focused and culturally sensitive foundations (Massey, 2015).

Health science professionals, educators, psychologists, and sociologists have contributed to current literature using both qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate the well-being of mothers and their children (Brodsky & DeVet, 2000; Murry, Bynum, Brody, Wilbert, & Stephens, 2001, Massey, 2015). Resiliency has been explored and noted to be positive in the development of both children and adults, but there is still limited research that emphasizes the resiliency and strength of the single Black mother and the positive outcomes of her children (Constantine & Sue, 2006, Fleming & Ledogar, 2008, Massey, 2015), especially her sons. Rutter (1999) argued that resilience is not an individual trait, but a process that is initiated by protective factors. Through the process, measurable outcomes should include building a positive self-image, reducing the effect of the risk factors, and breaking a negative cycle to open new

opportunities for the individual (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008; Rutter, 1990). There is still a need for knowledge about the successful adaptations to stressful situations, which will be important for understanding and possible future interventions (Yates, Tyrell, and Masten, 2014).

Organization of the Chapter

This research represents an effort to fill the empirical void in the literature about the resiliency of single Black mothers concerning their son's academic achievements. The literature search strategy is presented first, followed by the theoretical framework. Then, a literature review provides key variables and concepts in the current literature related to resiliency, as it relates to single Black mothers, Black males that have graduated from high school, Black motherhood, single Black motherhood, and Black parental involvement. A review of past studies and what remains controversial regarding the phenomena of resilient single Black mothers is provided. In the last section, a summarization, with an emphasis on the importance of single Black mothers regarding their son's education is presented.

Literature Search Strategy

The initial literature search strategy consisted of a general library database search using the Xavier University of Louisiana EbscoHost to locate journal articles related to single Black mothers, Black males, academic achievement, and resilience. The literature was obtained in the database such as ProQuest, Journal of Negro Education, and Academic Search Complete. The literature search strategy was expanded to several online internet sites including Google Scholar and SAGE Journals. In an attempt to move beyond the limited research on the subject, literature was also obtained from various reference books.

Keywords include *single Black mothers, resiliency, resiliency model theory, Motherwork Black males, academic achievement, phenomenological research, qualitative methods, parental involvement, racial socialization, racism, and Black families.*

Theoretical Orientation

Resiliency Model Theory

Resilience is a profound construct that is used across multiple disciplines. The concept of resilience began over 50 years ago when psychologists began to investigate children growing up in high-risk environments and demonstrating positive outcomes despite the unfortunate adversity that life presented to them (Rutter, 1999). Over the past two decades, a rebirth in research concerning resilience has emerged by a variety of educators, scientists, environmentalists, social workers, psychologists, sociologists, and human service providers examining the ability of individuals to achieve positive outcomes notwithstanding the hardships of life that may have been present (Kjellstrand & Harper, 2012; Masten, Herbers, Cutuli, & Lfavor, 2008; Rutter, 1999; Southwick, Bonanno, Masten, Panter-Brick, & Yehuda, 2014; Ungar, 2010; West-Olatunji, Sanders, Mehta, & Behar-Horestein, 2010). Resilience is defined as a phenomenon of overcoming stress or adversity despite the experience of situations that have been shown to carry a major risk for the development of psychopathy (Rutter, 1999).

During a discussion forum with multidisciplinary panelists on the definitions, theories, and challenges of resilience, Dr. Southwick mentioned that "most [people] think of resilience as the ability to bend but not break, bounce back, and perhaps even grow in the face of adverse experiences." However, he explains that that definition may be useful, but it does not explain the complex nature of resilience. He proceeds to suggest that "determinant of resilience includes a host of biological, psychological, social and cultural factors that interact with one another to

determine how one response to stressful experiences" (Southwick, Douglass-Paulmber, & Pietrzak, 2014, p. 2). For example, the way that resilience is determined in the field of medicine may be different than how resilience is described or defined by a cultural context. Conversely, Ungar (2010) argued that different disciplines that deal with individuals and principles of development make it complicated to determine what is and is not positive development under stress (Massey, 2015). Within the construct of the resilience theory, there has been a paradigm shift from a deficit lens of the negative consequences of trauma toward the inclusion of strength and competency-based models that focus on prevention and methods of enhancing resiliency (Southwick et al., 2014). Because it is a broad term, the definition of resilience is scalable across disciplines. However, for the sake of this study, resiliency refers to "the capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten the viability, the function, or the development of that system" (Masten, 2014a, 2014b, Southwick et al., 2014). In terms of system levels, this definition of resilience can be used across system levels including families, peer groups, schools, communities, and societies (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Masten et al., 2008).

The purpose of resilience research is to ascertain how individuals adapt and adjust to different risk factors and challenges in life (Brown and Davis, 2000; Shene, 1999). The characteristics of resiliency and how it occurs within the lives of single Black mothers are central to this study. The resiliency model clarifies the links between risks and the protective process at the individual and familial levels. This theoretical approach also elucidates why single Black mothers, and their children accede to rise above the circumstance they face, and others do not (Kjellstrand & Harper, 2012; Mendenhall, Bowman, & Zhang, 2012), and why and how their sons have grown to academically excel beyond high school. The perceptions and experiences of

single Black mothers and their influence on raising their sons that academically achieve was identified qualitatively.

Risk and protective factors. Risk factors refer to any measurable predictor of an undesirable outcome (Masten et al., 2008). According to Masten (2001), the role of risk factors has been studied in the context of chronic conditions of disadvantage and adversity (Diehl, Hay, & Chui, 2012). For the single Black mothers, these could include, financial hardship, low educational attainment, low income, unemployment, and raising their children without the presence of their father. Research has shown how single mother families typically encounter economic, work-related, and family-related difficulties, which ultimately have an impact on their mental health (Brody & Flor, 1997; McLoyd, 1990; Robinson & Werblow, 2012).

Protective factors are defined as “individuals or environmental characteristics that enhance one’s ability to resist stressful events, promoting adaptation and competence” (Murray et al., 2001, p. 137; Garmezy, 1983; Steinbert, 1996). For example, self-confidence could be a protective factor against adversity by allowing people to feel proud, in control, and respected, even when their environment is harsh and stressful (Li, Nussbaum, & Richards, 2007). Because many single Black mothers deal with emotional difficulties through the high levels of stress and depression, protective factors help to become resilient and view their situation from a different lens.

Motherwork

According to McMahon (1995), parenting as a mother varies based on ethnicity. Collins (1994) posits that "Black mothers have to negotiate racist social contexts while fighting for the physical survival of their children, struggling to balance child-rearing with work completely outside the home, while reconciling their maternal instinct with the powerless position they hold

in a White society" (Warner, 2020, p. 26). Regardless of social class and status, many Black mothers carry a different burden for their children (Dow, 2016; Ferguson, 2000). According to Dow (2016), Black mothers, as opposed to their Black fathers, are more likely to engage in the racial socialization of their children to prepare children to address experiences of racism. These mothers are also more likely to be single; thus, principally responsible for decisions related to their children's educational, social, and cultural resources, and experiences (Dow, 2016; McHale, Crouter, Kim, Burton, Davis, & Dotterer, 2006; Thornton et al., 1990). Participants in Dow's (2016) study also feared for their son's physical safety and believed that they would face harsher treatment and be criminalized by teachers, police officers, and the public because of their racial identity and gender. Regardless of their class, these mothers believed that their class does not trump their race and gender; being a Black boy is associated with poverty and crime.

Another example, Crowley and Curenton (2011) conducted a study on a sample of members of a national organization, known as Mocha Moms, Inc., that offered maternal social support and provided parental educational resources to cater to the needs of ethnic minority women. In raising their Black children, these women felt like their parenting challenges were different from White parents. These challenges included: (a) preparing their children to face bias, (b) promoting Black culture and heritage, and (c) supporting a positive African American self-image (p. 7). The most common concern was preparing their children for bias because these mothers felt a responsibility to foster proper behavior as a way to avoid future discrimination and increase their chances for lifelong success (Crowley & Curenton, 2011).

Cooper (2007) suggests that Motherwork includes three mechanisms: (a) ensuring the physical and emotional survival of the child; (b) empowering the child's life outcome; and (c) nurturing their child's racial identity positively. For women of color, Cooper (2007) believed that

Motherwork is anchored in the mother's quest to ensure that their children can prosper through a racist society through their racialized concepts of survival, power, and identity. This framework allowed the researcher to examine the Black mothers in a way to understand the importance of race, gender, and class concerning their experience of being a single mother raising their sons. These variables are key factors in understanding some of the struggles that may have contributed to their process of pushing their sons through school despite adversity, stereotypes, and misconceptions.

Black Motherhood

Historical Experiences of Black Motherhood

Black women have been depicted by their maternal role, which is a role defined and imposed on women as their sole source of identity by society (Ghasemi & Hajizadeh, 2012; O'Reilly, 2004). Households managed by mothers have been a significant part of American society since it was colonized by the Europeans in the 1600s and have been the connection of race, gender, and class within the United States (Moehling, 2007; Warner, 2020). From slavery until now, Black mothers have always been faced with oppression. Warner (2020) explained that Black mothers can be best understood through a representation of the historical circumstances that thrust them into a unique position relating to race in the United States. The Africans that were enslaved in America were natives of the western part of Africa, where there had been a long history of cultural contact and widespread similarities in certain institutions (Herskovits, 1958; Surdarkasa, 2001; Warner, 2020). Understanding the historical and societal perspective of Black motherhood is relevant and vital to this study. Billingsley (1992) affirmed that one cannot understand contemporary patterns of Black family life without placing them in the broad historical, societal, and cultural context.

It is imperative to note that racism and discrimination against Black mothers began during the time of slavery, which may be the origin of the inferior treatment of Black women (Boyd-Franklin, 1989). The institution of slavery was an economic enterprise for European countries that lasted for over four hundred years. The social, psychological, cultural, and history of Black families were disrupted and impacted by the grisly scars of slavery (Billingsley, 1968). At times, Black mothers were burdened by the dual role of being a laborer and mother. In some instances, they were also burdened with the responsibility of raising their children and those of their white slave masters (Schweitzer, 1997). Unfortunately, slavery also systematically denied their right to motherhood and sometimes alienated them from their children by selling them to other slave owners after childbearing. Crenshaw and her colleagues (1995) noted that Black women's historical deviation from the traditional female role has been denied and mythologized.

Contemporary Views of Black Motherhood

To this day, there are still myths and stereotypes about Black mothers. Patricia Collins, a social theorist and Black feminist penned: "Portraying African American women as stereotypical mummies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mommas helps justify U.S. Black women's oppression" (Collins, 1990, p. 69). Moynihan (1965) accused Black mothers of failing to discipline their children, emasculating their sons, defeminizing their daughters, and retarding their children's academic achievement. According to Dickerson (1995), this cultural deviant paradigm does not allow for a fair, holistic interpretation of this phenomenon. This approach is rooted in scholarship developed by Eurocentric models and theories, which tends to result in many distortions, myths, and stereotypes. One of the reasons for the distorted image of Black families, Black men, Black women, and Black children is because of the Eurocentric perspective of the society that normalizes Western system values and behaviors as a ubiquitous standard to

societal stability and harmony. The literature on Black women offers two differing views of Black women as it relates to motherhood. One argument is that Black women are officious, emasculating females whose hand the Black family and community are falling apart. On the other hand, Black women are romanticized, strong, self-sufficient, and self-reliant females who are responsible for the survival of the Black family and Black community (Collins, 1990; Jenkins, 2005). However, neither views are authentic representation nor accurate images of Black motherhood.

Within the last three decades, several scholars have emerged to offer a positive outlook that reflects a more strength-based viewpoint of Black mothers (Anderson, 1993; Billingsley, 1992; Collins, 1991; Dickerson, 1995; Jenkins, 2005; Mossell, 1984; Williams, 1991). The literature presented by these researchers has been rooted in Black feminist thought, Afrocentrism, and relevant elements that add to theory-building in the investigation of Black motherhood (Burgess, 1995; Jenkins, 2005). These scholars are cognizant of the sociocultural, historical, economic, and political contexts of the Black family life (Dickerson, 1995). Committed to demystifying the pervasive negative connotations of the Black families and Black mothers as weak, unstable, and pathological, these scholars recognize the resiliency and ingenuity of Black mothers.

Contrary to the cultural deviant approach, scholars within the past decade have provided relevant lens to observe and understand the persistent resiliency of Black mothers, especially in raising her sons (Crowley & Curenton, 2011; Danforth & Miller, 2018; Henderson-Hubbard, 2012; Jarrett & Rodriguez, 2017; Jenkins, 2005; Joe, Shillingford-Butler, & Oh, 2019; Leath, Marchand, Harrison, Halawah, Davis, & Rowley, 2020; Robinson & Werblow, 2012, 2013; Wilson, 2014). Crowley & Curenton (2011) study revealed the extent and challenges that

mothers go through to provide the support, education, and resources for their children. Through the sample of single Black mothers, that were working professionals, created an organization to offer maternal social support and provisions of parenting education resources designed to cater to the needs of their ethnic minority group. Danforth & Miller (2018) revealed that mother's high expectations and demands regarding their sons' academic needs and social practices, marked by love, open communication, mutual respect, and understanding are healthy parenting strategies that their sons highlighted as motivational factors for them through their matriculation through college. Holland (2009) and Wilson (2014) confirm that it is a cultural value to rely and depend on familial support in raising their children, especially when mothers are raising their children alone.

Black mothers persist in navigating through oppressive structures and dominant ideologies of power that do not authentically reflect the experience of Black motherhood. Black mothers have a cultural history of being able to be resilient and maintain their families through heeding cultural values of respecting wisdom from elders, gleaning from commonality provided by extended family, relying on spiritual ethics, and collective survival ethos (Dickerson, 1995). Despite the effects of the stratification systems of American society, Black mothers continue to find the strength to overcome the onslaught of racism, sexism, and class inequality. However, Dickerson (1995) pointed out that we fail to understand the experience from their viewpoint because their voices and experiences are analyzed and interpreted by scholars whose observations and understanding of them are restricted by their cultural deviant perspective.

Single Black Mothers

Kjellstrand and Harper (2012) stated, "A persistent conceptualization of single-mother families as the 'problem family' pervades Western culture and public policy, yet a myriad of

single mothers utilizes resiliency factors that help their families to cope and thrive amidst the challenges of single parenting" (p. 313). Single-parent families have been stigmatized as abnormal, broken, deviant, and nontraditional, and have been charged with being responsible for the decline of traditional two-parent families (Atwood & Genovese, 2006, Kjellstrand & Harper, 2012; Murray, 2000). According to the latest data from the U.S. Census, there is a disproportionate number of Black children under 18 living in single-parent homes (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The United States also leads the world in the number of homes with absent fathers along with the decline in the marriage rate, according to Kramer (2019).

Regardless of deficit thinking discourse in the literature, it is evident that single Black mothers play a vital role in their son's life and educational outcome. Research reveals that there is a strong correlation between a mother's expectation and the academic performance of their child (Jackson & Remillard, 2005). Mothers value their children's education. Robinson and Werblow's (2012) research found characteristics of single Black mothers of academically successful males in low-performing schools. Those characteristics included 1) using their skills and resources to teach their sons how to be successful; 2) motivating their sons by nurturing their passions and strengths, while constantly "redirecting" them away from negative influences; and 3) providing financial, psychological, and emotional support to their sons at the level they needed. The sample of students in Robinson and Werblow's research was 11th-grade students. For the current study, it was important to not only shed light on the mothers' practices and strategies but also to investigate the influence from the mother that encouraged and pushed the son to further his education beyond the secondary level.

Black Male Achievement

Traditionally, Black males have been viewed as a high-risk population (Brown 2017; Ferguson, 2001; Rhode, 2018). Ferguson (2001) noted that an immense number of Black males have either dropped out of school, have been imprisoned, or died too young due to gang violence. Wolfers, Leonhardt, and Quealy (2015) analyzed the number of missing African American men from the 2010 census. Through this analysis, the researchers concluded that 1.5 million Black men from the age of 25 to 54 years old are missing largely because of early death or incarceration. The term “missing” is described as the inability to account for this disparity of Black men in the data presented from the census. The data results indicated:

- For every 100 Black women in the 25-54 age group living outside of jail, there are only 83 Black men. Among Whites, for every 100 women, there are 99 men, nearly parity.
- More than 1 out of every 6 Black men between 25 and 54 years old have disappeared from daily life.
- Almost 1 in 12 Black men in this age group are behind bars, compared with 1 in 60 non-black men in the age group.

Mortality rate, homicide, heart disease, respiratory disease, and military deployment are other contributing factors that drive this gender gap. However, the implications of the disappearance of these men validate that their absence disrupts family formation, leading both to lower marriage rates and higher rates of childbirth outside of marriage (Charles & Luoh, 2010).

The results from Wolfers, Leonhardt, and Quealy (2015) analysis are not a matter of new discovery. The measure of the deep disparities that afflict Black men has been stated throughout historical and current literature. Brown’s (2017) study uses historicizes knowledge (Popkewitz,

1997) as a methodology to help understand that the conception of history is a belief that trajectories of the past inform how to present ideas are constructed. Brown (2017) proposed that Black males' present experiences are obliquely tied to problematic narratives of deviance and difference, and the past illustrates two important ideas about this group. The first important idea is that implicit bias has to be understood when relating it to the history of "making and remaking black male subjectivities," which ontologically situates Black males within the "proverbial societal problem." Secondly, the meaning of Black maleness is informed by different systems of thought. However, Brown (2017) also recognizes that the discourses about Black males are endemic to different periods and able to sustain the black male trope of the archetypical menace and societal problem. There has been a large amount of research and literature focused on Black boys through a deficit lens (Brown & Donnor, 2011; Ferguson, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Noguera, 2008). Historically, scholarship concerning Black males has negatively imaged Black males in American education that have permeated the public domain has ultimately impacted the perceptions of educators, and most importantly, Black males themselves (Rhode, 2018).

Within the past few decades, there has been a shift in scholarship concerning Black males from a deficit lens to a more positive strength-based lens (Baldrige, Hill, & Davis, 2011; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Davis, 2003; Fergus, Noguera & Martin, 2014; Noguera 2008; Toldson, 2008, 2019). Ladson-Billings (2006), Toldson (2019), and Noguera (2008) have provided a significant scholarship that challenges the deficit-based narratives of early research that has circulated through the public domain. Much of their research is fixated on the strengths of positive achievements of Black males. Rhode (2018) believes that:

The prevailing belief is that deficit-based thinking has hampered policymakers, educators in many ways, Black males themselves, into believing their deficits

were too significant to overcome, and most importantly said criticisms were accurate. Therefore, the belief is that a self-fulfilling prophecy helped reinforce in many young Black male students that there was little hope of attaining positive academic achievement. (p. 52)

Nonetheless, Black males are making strides towards a better future for themselves by academically excelling and overcoming the odds and systems that were created for them to fail. Toldson (2019) exclaims that the issues with the educational system are more of an American problem than it is a Black male problem. The issues of Black male education are real and pervasive, but it is not necessary to harvest negative propaganda of low-test scores, high dropout rates, maladaptive behaviors, zero-tolerance policies, and high referrals of special education to promote change. Using assessment measures and deficit statistics to undermine Black male achievement is a way to falsely promote Black inferiority and neglect the social forces like social inequities and institutional racism that hinder them from success (Toldson, 2019).

High School Black Males

Previous research has identified and highlighted many struggles for Black students, especially Black males. Amid a pandemic, pervasive racial discrimination, civil unrest, and a complex transition from traditional brick and mortar setting to virtual learning, the struggles, and hard conditions have not made it any easier for students, especially Black students to perform well. The Condition of Education (2020) report, an annual report prepared by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and mandated by the U.S. Congress to monitor the educational progress of all students K-12, provided a grim image of the current state of Black students. The data from the Condition of Education (2020) reported:

- The poverty rate is still the highest for Black students. In 2018, nearly 32% of Black students lived in poverty, compared with 10% of white students in families living in poverty (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020; Cai, 2020).
- A lack of internet access at home has become a barrier for Black students to learn. In 2018, 90% of Black students had home internet access compared to their peers who were Asian (98%) and white (96%) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020; Cai, 2020)
- A high percentage of Black students attend high-poverty schools. Forty-five percent of Black students were enrolled in high-poverty schools, compared with 8% of white students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020; Cai, 2020).
- More Black students with disabilities receive services for emotional disturbances. In the 2018-2019 school year, 16% of Black students were served under IDEA. Of all services, 5% received services for emotional disturbances, but 7% of Black students served under IDEA received services for emotional disturbances (Cai, 2020).
- The disproportion between Black students and Black teachers has not been improved. From 1999-2000, Black teachers made up 8% of the teaching force. In 2017-2018, there were only 7% of Blacks that were public school teachers. Yet, more than 15% of Black students attended public schools (Cai, 2020).
- The school dropout rate is high among Black students. The nation's overall dropout rate decreased from 9.7% in 2006 to 5.3 in 2018. However, during this time, the dropout rate for Black students decreased from 11.5% to 6.4%. Nevertheless, the dropout rate for Black students remained higher than that for

white students by 4.2%. Also, 22% of Black from age 18 to 24 years old were neither enrolled in school nor working, which was still much higher than the 14% percentage of all U.S. youth in the same age range (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020; Cai, 2020).

- High school graduation rates and college enrollment rates remain low among Black students. In 2017-18, the national adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR) for public high school students was 85%. The ACGR for Black students was 79%. However, it should be noted that there has been an increase in college enrollment for Black males in 2018 at 33% than in 2000 at 25% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020; Cai, 2020).

Even though the data demonstrate disappointing and discouraging information concerning Black students, it should also reflect the reason why Black males should be commended for when they can academically excel. They are more likely to withdraw from school and fail academically (Bell, 2009; 2010; Osborne, Walker, & Rausch, 2002). Anthony, Kritsonis, and Herrington (2007) proposed that “one harmful reality is that teachers and staff who work with Black males in the classroom may lack the capability and disposition to work with them effectively, leaving them misguided and facing mental and emotional challenges” (qtd. in Bell, 2014). Strayhorn’s (2008) study suggested that teachers have low expectations for the achievement of their Black male students. Bell (2014) conducted a qualitative study to investigate and understand the reasons that some Black male students drop out of high school in North Carolina. Bell (2014) results concluded that there was not an overwhelming number of students that dropped out of school due to academic reasons. Twenty-six percent of the participant dropped out because of academic factors; 74% dropped out because of nonacademic

factors, such as health and home problems; and less than 1% were on probation. Criminality was not a dominant theme as one may have expected.

Graduating high school is an important accomplishment and a step toward success for many young people (Bryant, Harris, & Bird, 2013). Regardless of the negative narratives concerning Black males, there are achievements that Black males are making that should be applauded. According to the recent data from the Current Population Survey (CPS), within the last ten years, there has been an increasing number of Black males graduating from high school. Toldson (2019) suggested that:

The achievement gap, for instance, results from between-group analyses that make the erroneous assumption that one group needs measured characteristics that are statistically compatible with another race to achieve equity. This shortsighted view typically positions White achievement levels as a standard for Black students to attain, and masks resilience and unexpected levels of success among Black students. (9)

In light of these comments, when highlighting the achievements of Black students, particularly the Black males in this study, their achievements will not be compared to the standards or achievements of White students.

There has been a dramatic improvement in educational attainment in the United States; about 90% of the population graduated high school in 2019. However, one of the most striking shifts is the shrinking of the high school attainment gap between the Black population and the national average (Day, 2020). According to the Current Population Survey for 2019, 88% of Blacks, age 25 or older, have a high school diploma; 87.1% of Black males and 88.6% of Black females. The U.S. Census Bureau in 1940 indicated that the educational attainment for Blacks

with a high school education was at 7% compared to the national average at 20%. This analysis did not include people who considered themselves to be in combination with another race. It is focused on students who identified themselves as “Black alone” (Day, 2020).

The educational success story for Black students does not cease at the increased rate of high school attainment. The high school dropout rate has declined, and the college enrollment has been increasing steadily, even though past research has emphasized high school dropout rates and lack of college enrollment of Black males. The U.S. Census Bureau (2018) has shown that the national average dropout rate has declined from 19% to 6% in the last fifty years. However, the dropout rate for Black students dropped from 33% to 5%, which places them at the level of the national average. When comparing the data of Black students, especially Black males, to other subgroups, it is easy to point out the deficits and disparities. Through this study, the objective is not to highlight the gaps of achievement or stagnant mobility in the data. However, it is to reflect on the positive movements that Black males are making towards progress despite the odds against them.

Black Parents and Racial Socialization

In nations whose systems include racial stratification, such as the United States, a common parenting practice in families of color is racial socialization (Hughes, Rodriguez, Smith, Johnson, Stevenson, & Spicer, 2006). Racial socialization was a cultural model that African American parents adopted, in response to slavery and racism to inform their children’s knowledge and worldviews about the importance of race, racism, and racial disparities. Research and theory identify parents as critical socializing agents for their children. The transmission of the parent's values, perceptions, behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs, even those related to academic

achievement, implicitly shapes their children of a sense of identity (Parsons, Adler, & Kaczala, 1982; Marchand et al., 2019).

In the literature on racial socialization, there seems to be a general agreement that racial socialization is a meaningful construct that promotes the academic achievement of Black children (Boykin & Ellison, 1995; Bowman & Howard, 1985; Cooper et al., 2015; Hughes et al., 2006; Marchand et al., 2019; Miller, 1999; Peters, 1985). Peters (1985) defined racial socialization as the "task Black parents share with all parents—providing for and raising children [. . .] but [they] include the responsibility of raising physically and emotionally healthy children who are Black in a society in which being Black has the negative connotation" (p. 161). The tenets of racial socialization include (1) cultural socialization or teaching children about their race and instill racial pride; (2) preparation for bias or teaching children about racism and preparing them to face discrimination; (3) egalitarianism (Suizzo, Robinson, Pahlke, 2008). Miller (1999) indicated that racial socialization is a protective factor of resiliency, in which it protects urban Black children against the harmful effects of a discriminatory environment. Bowman and Howard (1985) conducted a study of 377 Black youth and found that resiliency was promoted among academically achieving adolescents as an outcome of proactive socialization by their parents. The parents expressed to their children the significance of ethnic pride and self-development, and an awareness of racial barriers.

While there is a broad agreement that racial socialization is an effective parenting technique and that there are measurable results to affirm it, views differ on whether the youth interpretation of racial socialization is the same as the parent's reports of racial socialization. A recent longitudinal study conducted by Bañales and her colleagues (2019) explored the development of Black adolescents' critical reflection, a tenet of critical consciousness, conceived

as an individual (i.e., blaming Black people) and structural (i.e., blaming systemic racism) attributions of the racial disparities in academic achievement. Using a sample of 454 (254 girls, 200 boys) Black adolescents and 310 of their parents, the researchers wanted to investigate developmental changes of the attributions from 10th grade to 12th grade because this is the age range that youth are "making important decisions about their lives, such as whether to continue formal education versus [joining] the workforce" (p. 404). According to Brown and Bigler (2005), because of normative development increases in abstract thinking and social perspective during adolescent years, as well as a better understanding of race in America, youth may be able to think about race in more sophisticated ways than in childhood. Contrary to the study's hypotheses, parents' reports of racial socialization did not predict the youth's structural and individual attributions. Modest correlations between parents and youth reports of parent socialization are common in the literature (Hughes et al., 2009; Peck, Brodish, Malanchuk, Banerjee, Eccles, 2014; Tran & Lee, 2010). However, despite the correlations, Bañales et al. (2019) results showed that this disconnect may be because youths' reports of parent racial socialization are interpreted differently than parent actual behaviors. Neblett, White, Ford, Phillip, Nguyen, and Sellers (2008) suggest that adolescents may interpret parental racial pride and preparation for bias messages as a general conversation than a distinct message on racial socialization.

Although there are different stances on the youths' perception of racial socialization strategies employed by their parents in the literature, it is inarguable that racial socialization is an effective construct and strategy that prepares Black children to deal with racial issues in America. Parents that utilize racial socialization techniques reported their children to have stronger cognitive skills (Caughy, O'Campo, Randolph, & Nickerson, 2002), a positive sense of

self (Murry & Brody, 2002), positive academic achievement (Murry & Brody, 2002), Racial coping and competence (Johnson, 2001) and fewer problems with behavior (Caughy, O'Campo, & Muntaner, 2004, Butler-Barnes, Richardson, Chavous, & Zhu, 2019).

Black Parental Involvement

Various studies define parental involvement as acts of engagement. For instance, assisting their child with homework, volunteering in the schools, participating in parent groups and school governance, investing financial resources to support educational activities, or attending parent-teacher conferences are considered to be involvement (Abel, 2012; Howard, 2015; Jeynes, 2010; Noel, 2014; Posey-Maddox, 2012, Ross, Marchand, Cox, & Rowley, 2018). Studies based on those measurements are often based on broad and abstract ideas of parental involvement but fail to include culturally distinct parenting styles and techniques (El Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drazil, 2010; Howard, 2015). For instance, Black parents use different techniques in raising their children to encourage behaviors that develop and promote their child's educational outcome (Howard, 2015; Marchand, Vassar, Diemer, & Rowley, 2019; Neblett, Chavous, Nguyen, & Sellers, 2009). However, Roberts (2011) argues that much of the culturally distinct behaviors of Black parents are often not reflected in parent involvement literature, which could be the reason that the perception of Black parents are considered to be uninvolved, apathetic, and disengaged. Oreopoulos, Page and Stevens (2005) postulated that growing up in a single-parent family has different economic and social consequences, and a majority of all Black children are affected by this because more than 64% of them are being raised in a single parent's home. In the past, educators have viewed working with Black parents from a deficit perspective (Collins, 1994; Cooper, 2009; Downey, Ainsworth-Darnell, & Dufur, 1998; Ross et al., 2018; Marchand et al., 2019). Black parents are often stereotyped and blamed by educators for their

child's academic failure and not reflective of how they perpetuate these stereotypes (Blair, 2001; Cooper, 2009; Wilson, 2019).

There is growing evidence that highlights the positive characteristics and strategies that Black parents do embody and employ (Allen & Smith, 2017; Bañales et al., 2019; Leath et al., 2020; McKay et al., 2003; Robinson & Werblow, 2013). McKay et al. (2003) and Robinson and Werblow (2013) believe that Black parents are willing to be involved in their child's education; however, they lack the knowledge of how to get connected with the school. Ogbu (2003) once theorized that Black parents mistrust the educational system because it is considered a profoundly "White" institution, which may be the reason that many of the parents struggle to secure the educational rights for their children. For many Black parents, education is viewed as the greatest weapon against the issues of racism and oppression, even when they have to sacrifice personally to ensure that their children are receiving their education (Franklin, 2000; Robinson & Werblow, 2012; Robinson & Werblow, 2013).

Allen and Smith (2017) examined parental involvement practices and the cultural wealth of poor and working-class mothers of Black boys. In this ethnographic study, Allen pointed out the structural factors that contribute to the uneven school outcomes for the sons of Black parents. With a myriad of issues that the literature presents concerning Black boys, Allen mentioned that "there is a growing evidence of how Black males succeed in school despite these conditions [. . .], it is clear that certain school policies and practices limit Black students' opportunities to learn and contribute to inequitable stratification" (Allen & Smith, 2017, p. 2). One result that Allen and Smith highlight that is pertinent to this study is the information of high school parent involvement for Black parents. Allen and Smith (2017) posited:

High school exacerbates these challenges as its structure and form make school-based involvement more difficult than elementary schools, and also because some parents might perceive the academic content to be too challenging for them to provide adequate academic assistance. Because school personnel often consider a parent's school presence and homework supervision as indicators of good parenting, many Black poor and working-class parents who cannot engage in school-based activities are assumed to be uncaring and absentee and are positioned through school discourses as unsupportive of the school's norms and functions. (3)

Therefore, school-based parental involvement and home-based involvement are not used synonymously as a form of educational support provided by Black families, which is often ignored. It's necessary to understand that the parenting styles of Black parents are different from that of their counterparts. Black parents may often seem like they are not actively involved in their children's education, but their tactics and strategies are tailored to fit their cultural experience. For example, Williams and Sanchez (2012), Gutman and McLoyd (2000) believes that Black parents manage their children's education by ensuring that they have proper care at home; Black parents set high expectations for their children, and make sure that they are involved in the community, church, and leadership-based activities. The premise of this reasoning is because Black parents have to prepare their children to respond to interpersonal and institutional racism. Unfortunately, Black parents have the burden of raising their children in a racist society that they are pathologized and discriminated against, which forces them to teach their children to navigate, manage, and resist racist marginalization (Allen & Smith, 2017; Mandara, 2006; Vincent, Rollock, Ball, & Gillborn, 2012). Therefore, teaching them positive

racial messages and instilling in them techniques and strategies will help them to resist racial hegemony (Allen & Smith, 2017; Friend, Hunter, Fletch, 2011; Vincent et al., 2012). In most case, Black parents have to be an agent of advocacy and activism on behalf of their education.

Single Black Mothers and Parental Involvement in School. Black mothers are necessary images for their sons, especially in the absence of their sons' fathers, given the tropes and misrepresentation of society around the Black males and family structures (Griffin & Allen, 2006; Warner, 2020). Black mothers have a deep influence on the family, social, and educational development of Black males (Warner, 2020, p. 19). Mothers are a dominant influence in the lives of Black males because mothers tend to the strength of the family (Greif et al., 2000; Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 1996). Kwesisi Mfume (1996) once said: "Most people fail to celebrate the virtues of many Black mothers who over the years have functioned—even thrived—in the dual roles of mother and father. They have provided generations of black boys with the crucial range of skills essential for survival" (p. 32). Most of the time, parents are blamed for the poor academic performance, behavior, and actions of their Black male children. However, people oftentimes underestimate the potential of Black students and their success (Ferguson, 2003).

Leath et al. (2020) explored through qualitative methods the Black mother's gendered constructions of their children and their parental school involvement. Using a sample of 76 Black mothers raising first graders, the researchers considered how Black mothers constructed their children as learners across an academic, social, and emotional domain. The findings suggest that, even in first grade, mothers of boys were more concerned about race and gender bias more than mothers of girls, especially concerning special education placement and the misdiagnosis of developmental disabilities. The findings revealed that mothers are more intentional about school choice, facilitating positive relationships with their child's teachers, serving as their child's

advocate, and when possible, selecting a same-race teacher for their child, and fight to get appropriate learning and developmental assessments for their special needs child.

Robinson and Werblow (2013) conducted a study on the ways single Black mothers contributed to the educational success of their 11th-grade sons, although their sons are enrolled in a "failing school." The results of the study indicated that high-performing Black males attribute much of their academic success to their mothers because they hold high expectations, help them develop a vision for the college, and have consistent and meaningful conversations. This study also noted that mothers act as strong authority figures in their lives. In a previous study of Robinson and Werblow (2012), they noted that Black mothers use a "no-nonsense" or authoritarian parenting style that is deeply influenced by their religious values, which is also linked to Brody and Flor's (1998) study that revealed that the family process model "that linked maternal education, maternal religiosity, and the adequacy of family financial resources and psychological competence in their children" (qt. in Robinson & Werblow, 2021, p. 54).

The results of Allen and Smith's (2017) study indicated that even though mothers were supportive of their son's education, the structure of the high school placed limitations on how mothers could be involved. This is significant to this study because it is important to understand how single Black mothers pushed the educational advancement of their sons beyond the secondary educational level despite odds, adversity, and even racism. Mothers seem to find it difficult to navigate through institutional bureaucracy and feel disconnected from the school. However, mothers will find ways to use their cultural wealth (Allen & Smith, 2017) to support their son's education differently. For example, being that Blacks children are raised in a society where they are racialized and discriminated against, Black mothers teach their children to navigate, manage, and resist racial marginalization. Speaking up for their children when racist

policies are enforced, educating themselves on strategies and approaches to combat any form of discrimination, teaching their children how to handle racial microaggressions, and practicing racial socialization.

Despite the plethora of issues that single Black mothers and their Black sons face, it should be noted that mothers will take any measure to provide the support needed for their sons despite the deficit narrative that precedes them. Racism, economic and school barriers will not cease single Black mothers from enacting as an agency is using their navigational capital in school choice and advocacy for their sons against the school's failure to provide equitable opportunities for them (Allen & Smith, 2017; Cooper, 2005; Oakes, Rogers, & Lipton, 2006).

Summary

The literature review presented many studies that have been conducted on Black males and single Black mothers from a deficit lens. It is the desire of the researcher to add to the emerging body of literature that focuses on the strength and competency of both the mothers and the sons. Black males can succeed, and mothers can raise a successful son. With the increasing rate of single-mother households (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016), there is a need for literature that will guide parents, educators, school leaders, community leaders and organizations, social workers, and members of the helping field that contributes to educating or helping Black males and single Black mothers. Providing support could potentially change the trajectory of many of their lives.

Chapter Three focuses on the methodology and research design of the study. A qualitative interview was utilized to share the lived experiences of single Black mothers who have raised sons that have graduated high school and pursued postsecondary education. The mothers had the opportunity to share their experiences and contributing factors that were used to

rear their sons and instill the value for academic excellence. The role of the researcher as well as the research questions that guided this study is also be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

The central focus of this qualitative phenomenological study examined the lived realities of single Black mothers. Through an understanding of their lived experience in raising their sons and identifying the mother's influence on her son's academic achievements, this study contributed to the body of literature in shifting the deficit narratives of single Black mothers to a more positive outlook. This chapter includes a discussion of the study's methodological plan. The first section contains a discussion of the selected research design and the rationale for its appropriateness. The second section includes the methodological procedures of the study. The third section involves identifying issues on trustworthiness, including ethical considerations relevant to the study. The chapter ends with a summary of the key features of the methodology.

Nature of the Qualitative Methodology

A qualitative phenomenological and narrative approach was used to conduct this study. Researchers use the literature to justify the need to study the research problem. Qualitative research is a type of scientific research that consists of an investigation that: (1) seeks answers to a question; (2) systematically uses a predefined set of procedures to answer the question; (3) collects evidence; (4) produces findings that were not determined in advance; and (5) produces findings that are applicable beyond the immediate boundaries of the study. This study is rooted in qualitative inquiry because the researcher seeks to understand a given research problem from the perspectives of single Black mothers. Qualitative research is the appropriate design because it is effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of single Black mothers (Mack & Woodson, 2005).

Phenomenological Research Design

To guide human science research, Moustakas (1994) distinguished his design and methodology from other qualitative models. Moustakas (1994) used Edmund Husserl's philosophical method, "the fountainhead of phenomenology in the twentieth century," to develop his approach of the phenomenological design that would inspire researchers and studies to obtain vital new information of the experiences, behaviors, and relationships of humans in their everyday lives. Phenomenologists are interested in the analytical and descriptive experience of phenomena by individuals in their everyday world. The phenomenological term for this term is "lifeworld" (Creswell, 2013; Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). Phenomenologists are more interested in the description of the life experience than they are in resolving why the participants experience life the way they do. For example, this phenomenological study will explore and concentrate on single Black mothers and what it was like to raise and influence the academic achievement of their sons from their point of view and try to describe how she interprets her lifeworld.

The interaction with the participants enabled the researcher to understand the experience and perception being described firsthand. The goal was to acquire sincere and honest responses from the participants based on their experiences. Their story, beliefs, and experiences were valid by exposing the mothers' shared experiences that assisted in the sons' academic achievement. According to van Manen (1990), this research design allowed for the focus to be on the descriptive of events but also serves to help the researcher interpret or decipher the meaning of the participants' shared experiences (as cited in Clark, 2016, p. 27).

Narrative Research Design

Narrative research was used to understand participants' experiences within this phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). According to Creswell (2012), "narrative researchers collect

stories from individuals and retell or restore the participants' stories into a framework such as a chronology of the characters, the settings, the problem, the actions, and a resolution of those actions" (p. 517). The narrative component of this research depicted the participants' actions, which creates discourse on the phenomenon of single Black motherhood. Hearing the participants' voices, their experiences, and their stories are crucial when conducting this study and provide insight into single Black mothers. This phenomenological inquiry is rooted in the philosophical principle of allowing single Black mothers' voices to become the conduits of change. Finally, this study is rooted in the premise that single Black mother participants in this study have a story to tell that adds to the scholarly knowledge base of how single Black mothers support their Black sons' overall academic achievement throughout their high school and postsecondary matriculation.

Research Setting

Two southern states were the sites for this study. The research was announced through a network of mothers that the researcher was affiliated with through his job, church, and former students to participate in a Zoom conference meeting. Zoom video conferencing provided a way for the researcher to connect to the participants where they resided. In the context of a global pandemic, video conferencing was the most preferred and safest communicatory platform for the researcher and participants. All participants were not from the same state. The states in which the participants resided were ranked in the bottom twelve of the fifty states. One of the states, State #1, is one of the leading states in America with a high rate of children being raised in single-parent households (National KIDS Count, 2020). Also, State #1 has been ranked within the last five years as one of the worst economic places to live. State #2 has shown exponential

growth economically and educationally. In the past eleven years, their percentage of children in single parent families has only increased by one percent (National KIDS Count, 2020).

Participants

Purposive sampling was used as the strategy to compose the target sample of nine single Black mothers. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), phenomenological studies usually range from 3-10 participants. The participants of this research were single Black mothers whose sons have completed high school and either have obtained or currently pursuing post-secondary education. Purposive sampling was used as the strategy to compose the target sample of single Black mothers due to their familiarity with the single motherhood phenomenon. This type of selection technique is important because it investigates experiential phenomena by the participants (Collingridge & Gantt, 2008; Patton, 2002; Caldwell, 2017).

The use of purposive sampling is a non-probability technique that emphasizes the participant's characteristics that need to be satisfied to be included in the study (Palinkas et al., 2013). According to Merriam (1998), purposive sampling is based on the assumption that one wants to discover and gain insight. Therefore, one needs to select a sample from participants that will provide the most valuable experience.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria. The inclusion criteria for this study were single Black mothers who are custodial parents and who have raised a son that has matriculated through high school and is now either currently, or has obtained, a postsecondary level education; and the son's father was not actively involved throughout their high school or college matriculation. The exclusion criteria for this study include the following disqualifiers:

1. Participants who do not self-identify as Black American.
2. Participants who do not have a son

3. Participants whose sons did not complete high school.
4. Participants whose sons are not currently enrolled in or have obtained a post-secondary education.

Data Collection

Utilizing multiple data sources to enhance data credibility is a distinguishing characteristic of qualitative study research (Patton, 2009; Yin, 2009). After IRB approval was obtained, the prospective mothers were recruited. To obtain the richest possible understanding of this study, the researcher used the following methods to collect and triangulate the data:

Instruments

- Participant Demographic Information
- Interviews with each mother
- Focus groups
- Qualitative observations during interviews

Participant Demographic Information. Once the participant consented to participate in the study, they were identified as an active participant. Each participant completed a participant demographic sheet (Appendix B), which was used to gather demographic information (name, contact information, household income), information regarding their sons, and their level of educational attainment. This document also asked questions about their education level and profession.

Interviews. Due to the present context of a global pandemic and complying with the guidelines from the Center for Disease Control (CDC), interviews were held virtually through the ZOOM conferencing platform, a cloud-based video communications app that allowed the researcher to set up virtual video and audio conferencing, webinars, live chats, screen-sharing,

and other collaborative capabilities. For this study, interviewing allowed the participants to express their stories. According to Moustakas (1994), the qualitative analysis provides opportunities to capture the authenticity of lived participants' own words. Interviews were one-to-one interaction by the researcher. There were fifteen open-ended interview questions (Appendix D) that obtained information regarding the interviewee's personal history, perspective, and experience of single Black motherhood. The interviews helped to answer the following research questions:

1. How do single Black mothers perceive their experiences as influencing the overall academic achievement of their sons?
2. What factors contribute to single Black mothers' influence on their sons' overall academic achievement?

Focus Groups. Researchers use focus group discussions to assemble groups of individuals to discuss a topic that aims to draw from the complex personal experiences, beliefs, values, perceptions, and attitudes of the participants through moderate interaction (Cornall & Jewkes, 1995; Hayward, Simpson, & Wood, 2004; Nyumba et al., 2018). The researcher conducted three focus group discussions through Zoom to establish a meaningful connection with the mothers and to develop rapport. According to Caelli (2001), a meaningful rapport-building session allows participants and the researcher to establish a connection that facilitates understanding the phenomenon being examined. It is essential in developing an open and honest dialogue with the participants (Seidman, 2012). These focus groups elicited data on the cultural and social norms and a broad overview of issues, perspectives, parenting styles, and experiences of single Black mothers. In addition to the focus group discussions, observational field notes were taken.

Qualitative observations. Creswell and Creswell (2018) describe qualitative observations as the field notes of individuals' behavior and activities at the research site (p. 186). They have detailed written accounts of what is being observed, along with the researcher's interpretation of the observation (Merriam, 1998). The field notes were taken during the interviews and focus groups to collect both descriptive and personal notes throughout the research. The descriptive notes included descriptions of the participant's behavior during the interviews. These notes were handwritten in a personal journal so that the researcher could reflect and make any additional notes about the participants.

Procedures

This phenomenological study involved interviewing a group of nine single Black mothers to gain insight, by interpreting each participant's perspective of the experience of raising her son and pushing him to academically excel beyond high school. The researcher collected data using the following steps:

1. The researcher created a flyer (Appendix H) and placed the flyer in churches, community centers, and local organizations for mothers. The flyer included the requirements for participation. The flyer was also posted on social media sites, such as Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Participants were able email the researcher to express their interest in participating in the study.
2. Participants were selected using purposive sampling. Participants were prescreened and given an overview of the research study.
3. Participants that met the qualifications received a consent form (Appendix A) and Participant Demographics Form (Appendix B) via email. A consent form was designed to provide information to potential subjects about a research study so they could make an informed

decision about their participation. The Participant Demographics Form collected background data on each participant. Included in the consent form was detailed information concerning the purpose of the study, procedures, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality, and ability to withdraw from the study. Once the consent form was signed, the researcher stored it electronically on his personal computer. Interviews were not scheduled until the consent forms were completed, signed, and thoroughly understood through discussion.

4. When the completed forms were received and reviewed by the researcher, the date and time was scheduled for a Zoom conference for interviews due to the current context of a global pandemic and enforced social distancing policies. The researcher interviewed each participant once during this study. Before the interview begins, an interview protocol (Appendix C) was read to the participants and they were informed that there are no right or wrong responses to the interview questions. The participants were also be reminded of their rights to terminate participation at any moment. The researcher informed the participants that their identity and their sons' identity would be protected by anonymity and pseudonyms. Each interview was recorded. Participants were apprised that the entire conference will be recorded. The interview lasted between 45 to 60 minutes
5. After each participant's interview, the researcher scheduled three focus groups (Appendix E) through Zoom that included three subjects each. The sessions lasted for about 60 to 75 minutes to create a contextual understanding of their lives. During the focus groups, the researcher collected field notes from the participants in the study.

Data Analysis

The researcher used Rev, a transcribing software tool, to transcribe the recorded data from the interviews and focus groups. Transcription is defined as “the process of converting

audiotaped recordings of field notes into text data” (Creswell, 2008, p. 246). The use of interviews in a phenomenological inquiry is a practical tool that enables the researcher to richly describe the experiences of the participants (Kvale, 1996; Caldwell, 2017). The researcher used a modified version of Moustakas’ (1994) recommendations of the data analysis process.

1. The first step required the researcher to list and preliminary grouping every expression that is relevant to the experience. This is considered horizontalization. According to Moustakas (1994), it is significant to illustrate the importance of being receptive to every statement, granting each comment equal value and thus encouraging a rhythmical flow between the research participant and research; it inspires comprehensive disclosure of the experience (p. 130).
2. Secondly, the researcher analyzed the data, which is known as reduction and elimination. Reduction and elimination are used to determine what is relevant for the use of the research. If it is horizontal of the experience, then expressions that do not meet the requirements should be eliminated. To obtain precise and descriptive terms, then overlapping, repetitive, and vague expressions should be eliminated also.
3. Next, the researcher established the theme's credibility. The researcher compared the codes that were extracted from each full account of experiences. If it was not explicit or compatible, then it was not relevant to the experience and was eliminated.
4. The next step required the researcher to use relevant, validated themes to construct the individual structural descriptions of the participant’s experience(s). The individual structural description for each experience was then constructed based on the individual textural description.

5. Lastly, the analysis concluded in the creation of a composite description of the entire group of single mothers that gave meaning and themes to each of the participant's textual-structural descriptions, using the invariant constituents and theme (Moustakas, 1994).

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as an essential instrument for data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2003). Human instruments have the potential to be influenced by their own bias. According to Merriam (1998), "all observations and analyses are filtered through that human being's worldview, values, and perspective" (p. 22). As it pertains to this research project, the researcher was a participant-observer.

The researcher is a Black male educator who has been teaching for seven years. He has spent the past seven years working in rural, urban, and alternative school settings that service a predominately Black population in low socioeconomic environments. Observing-the complexities, struggles, and challenges of Black students, especially Black males, in these predominately Black communities, motivated the researcher to establish a nonprofit organization geared to serving fatherless Black males in the areas of mentorship, academic enrichment, and soul care. This desire to serve this subgroup of students was also rooted in his personal story of being raised by a single Black mother. His work as an advocate for Black males has shaped him into an organizational leader, educational advocate, and mentor for marginalized youth, but also for mothers that need help in raising their sons.

Validity

Validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and is determined whether the findings of the research are accurate from the researcher, participant, or the reader's standpoint

(Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Miller, 2000). Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest that there are eight primary strategies to ensure qualitative validity: triangulation, member checking, rich and thick description, clarify researcher's bias, negative or discrepant information, prolonged time, peer debriefing, and external auditing. To ensure trustworthy and reliable results, the researcher applied procedures to strengthen the credibility of the study's results and to reduce any distortions made through biases. The following strategies were employed:

Triangulation of data—Data was collected through multiple sources to include interviews, observational field notes, and focus groups (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Zohrabi, 2013). By examining these sources, it builds a coherent justification for themes.

Member Checking—Participant served as a check throughout the analysis process. An ongoing dialogue regarding the researcher's interpretations of the participant's reality and meanings ensured the true value of the data.

Participatory modes of research—To minimize the influence of the researcher's personal beliefs, assumptions, or values, the researcher involved his doctoral committee members to review his findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Zohrabi, 2013).

Researcher's bias—To remain unbiased and impartial, the researcher adhered to ethical rules and principles from the Belmont Report (1979) through the data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data as accurately as possible (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

External auditor—Distinct from a peer debriefer, the researcher allowed an external auditor to review the accuracy of the transcriptions, the relationship between the research questions and the data, and to level of data analysis from the raw data through interpretations to enhance the overall validity of this study.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher ensured that precautions were taken into consideration to protect the identity of the participants and that no pertinent information was compromised. The project nature, research site, method of collection of data, and participant's demographic datasheet was all a part of the research data. All recorded, transcribed, and documented data was stored on a password-protected computer that is only accessible by the researcher. Data will be stored for a minimum of three years. At the end of the data storage line, the researcher will shred field notes and erase all computer files. As a safeguarding measure, the researcher offered participants therapeutic services following the interview.

Summary of the Chapter

Through a phenomenological approach, the researcher examined the lived realities of single Black mothers and their influence on the academic achievement of their sons. This approach provided an opportunity to gather thick, descriptive perceptions of single Black mothers raising Black sons who are academically successful. This chapter explained the intent of this research as it relates to the research design, instruments to be used, and ethical considerations. Detailed information regarding all aspects of data collection (forms, focus groups, interviews, and observational field notes) is included in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The lived experiences and perceptions of single Black mothers raising sons were collected in this study. In this chapter, a detailed look at the findings of the experiences of single Black mothers has been discussed. Phenomenology is the study of lived experiences, a research design that explains the perception and contributing factors of the phenomenon's educational influence. The participants' words were used to tell their story to provide a rich representation of the ideas presented. Each story is reflected through the data from individual interviews, focus groups, and observational field notes. Chapter Four begins with a description and background of participants. Following the background information, themes were arranged categorically, supported by the interviews' data and overall responses to the research questions.

Even though the mothers were in different geographical locations, their words were repetitious and rhythmic. For example, the mothers spoke about their financial struggles, their dependence on God and their faith to carry them through some of their challenges as single parents, the benefits of obtaining an education, and their support from their support community. Through an analysis of thick, rich descriptions of experiences that overlapped other experiences, it became the researcher's desire to express the mother's voices with the same passion and emotion observed during the interviews. The two overall arching research questions to guide this study were:

1. How do single Black mothers perceive their experiences as influencing the overall academic achievement of their son(s)?
2. What factors contribute to single Black mothers' influence on their sons' overall academic achievement?

The 15 individual interview questions were semi-structured and open-ended in nature (see Appendix C). They were formulated according to the research questions. The individual interviews and focus groups allowed the mothers to individually and collectively share their stories and perceived experiences related to raising their sons and having an educational influence on their academic achievement.

Participant Descriptions and Profiles

The participants were nine single Black mothers of sons who graduated from college or currently pursuing post-secondary education. Participants were all from the southern region of the United States. The participants are anonymous, and pseudonyms were assigned to each mother and their son. Table 3 provides demographic information on participants, including an overview of participants' age, educational attainment, annual income, and family demographics.

Table 3

Participants' Demographics

Subject name	Age	Educational Attainment	Annual Income	No. of children	No. of sons in college or have obtained a degree
Alicia	38	Master + 30	\$50,000-\$100,000	3	1
Brandy	43	Associate degree	\$50,000-\$100,000	2	1
Christy	43	Bachelor	\$25,000-\$50,000	3	2
Dianna	43	Doctorate	\$50,000-\$100,000	3	1
Erica	45	Master x 2	\$50,000-\$100,000	2	1
Felicia	48	Bachelor	Prefer Not to Say	1	1
Gwen	50	Some college	\$50,000-\$100,000	2	1
Helen	62	Bachelor	\$50,000-\$100,000	2	1
Irene	73	Doctorate	\$50,000-\$100,000	2	1

Alicia's Background

Alicia is a 38-year-old mother of three, Jared (23), Saniya (19), and RJ (15). Although Alicia bore Jared at nineteen, she graduated number three in her high school class. In her

interview introduction, Alicia frequently acknowledged the assistance and encouragement that her mother provided throughout her high school experience. After being viewed differently by some of her teachers for being pregnant at an early age, her mother continued to encourage her to pursue her educational and professional goals. Alicia also comes from a family of educators that graduated from Historically Black College and Universities (HBCUs)—her mother, sister, brother, and cousins. Alicia attended an HBCU on a full education scholarship, where she obtained her bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in educational leadership. She also took some additional courses beyond 30 hours in curriculum and instruction. Professionally, Alicia serves as the Dean of Instruction for elementary level grades at a charter school about thirty minutes from her hometown. She has spent most of her professional years leading and coaching teachers in the public school system in curriculum and instruction.

Table 4

Alicia's Son

Name	Age	Educational Attainment	Major
Jared	23	Pursuing Bachelor's degree	Mechanical engineering

Alicia believes that one of her greatest accomplishments is being a mother. She has three children, two boys, and one girl. Alicia's oldest son, Jared, is classified as a junior at the same university that Alicia received her degrees. Alicia loves the relationship that she has with all of her children, but especially Jared. He went to a school that has a strong academic emphasis on math and science. Along with being an outstanding student, he was also a stand-out basketball player.

Brandy's Background

Brandy is a 43-year-old mother with two, Myles (24) and Kayla (19). Brandy had Myles at the age of nineteen years old. She found out she was pregnant after moving from home and attempting to join the military. After her discovery, she decided to return home. However, that did not stop her from finding a job and going to work. Brandy acknowledged that she had a great support system—her mom, father, and siblings. Her mother and father helped raise Myles while she worked multiple jobs. She obtained her associate's degree in criminal justice from a local community college. Professionally, Brandy is currently working as an account specialist at a telecommunications service company.

Table 5

Brandy's Son

Name	Age	Educational Attainment	Major
Myles	24	Bachelor of Arts	Business Management

Both of Brandy's children are grown. Her daughter, Kayla, is classified as a sophomore at an HBCU in a neighboring state. Her oldest, Myles, is a May 2020 graduate with his Bachelor of Arts degree in Business Management. She described Myles as well-mannered, driven, respectful, and a great role model for his little sister. While in high school, Myles was active in football, baseball, track, and BETA club. She mentioned that she thought he would make it to the National Football League (NFL). He was a passionate athlete with a solid academic record as well. Myles has his own house and his own detailing business. When expressing her love for Myles, she got teary-eyed and commented while laughing: "*You better not laugh at me when we get off this conference for crying. I just really love my son.*"

Christy's Background

Christy is 43-years-old. She is from a small, rural town where she has lived all of her life. She has three children, Jacob (23) and a set of twins, Jeremiah (21) and Jalacia (21). Christy grew up in a supportive, religious two-parent household, where her parents were hard-working people in the church and their career field. Even though they did not graduate college, they provided the best nurturing and loving home for her and her brothers. Christy's parents were also very supportive of her when she had her oldest son, Jacob, while pursuing her degree. She was a nineteen-year-old sophomore at an HBCU when she became pregnant. She temporarily dropped out of school to have Jacob and then quickly returned to complete her degree. Christy graduated with her Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science with a minor in criminal justice, with an additional 36 hours in psychology. She has been serving as an educator for the past five years at the high school she graduated from. She is certified in health, physical education, and history. She is pursuing her master's degree in clinical mental health counseling and is expected to finish in May of 2021.

Table 6

Christy's Sons

Name	Age	Educational Attainment	Major
Jacob	23	Pursuing Bachelor's degree	Criminal Justice
Jeremiah	21	Pursuing Bachelor's degree	Business Management

All of Christy's children are enrolled in a post-secondary institution. Her eldest son, Jacob, is a senior at the same HBCU that she graduated from. He is majoring in criminal justice for forensics. While in high school and college, he was a student-athlete. He received a full scholarship to play baseball on the university level. Being an athlete did not work out for him on the university level, so he decided to quit and start working while obtaining his degree.

Christy describes Jacob as independent and self-reliant. She believes that since he is the oldest, he is more mature. She talked about how close their relationship is because he was the first to make her a mother. She also mentions that he is one of her best friends. They have an open and transparent relationship.

Her youngest son, Jeremiah, is a senior in college, in which he is obtaining his bachelor's degree in business. He also received a full athletic scholarship to play baseball at a community college and university. He began his first two years at a community college in a neighboring state, where he received his associate's degree in science. After obtaining his associate degree, he moved back to his home state to play baseball on the university level. He plans to graduate in May 2021. He also has plans to return to school for another season of baseball after he completes his bachelor's degree. Academically, he will pursue a master's degree in business administration.

Christy noted that her relationship is a little different with Jeremiah. They have a great relationship, but he is not as consistent as Jacob. Jeremiah loves to travel and check with Christy periodically. She described Jeremiah as a social butterfly, intelligent, very athletic, and hard working. During the interview session, Christy mentions that Jeremiah is not as independent as his older brother. However, her expectations for them both are to do great things with their lives given the education they have obtained and the life experiences that they have endured.

Danielle's Background

Danielle is a 43-year-old mother of three, two boys and a girl. She currently lives in the metropolitan area of a major urban city in the southern part of the United States. Danielle considers herself to be more spiritual than religious. She was born into a family of educators. Her father, mother, and siblings all have obtained advanced degrees in their respective fields. She graduated from one of the top HBCUs in the United States with her bachelor's degree. She also

received her master's and doctorate degrees from a university in a southern state. While speaking with Danielle, it is clear that she is a woman of influence and intelligence. She is a principal of an elementary school, published author, and entrepreneur.

Table 7

Danielle's Son

Name	Age	Educational Attainment	Major
Shayland	20	Pursuing Bachelor's degree	Mass Communication

Danielle's oldest son, Shayland (20), is a sophomore at an HBCU in the United States' southeastern region, majoring in mass communications. He obtained a full scholarship from the institution. In high school, he participated in lacrosse and different school organizations. He graduated with a 3.2 grade point average. His mother believes that Shayland *"is the type of person who can do with very little effort. And that's exactly the amount of effort that he, in [her] opinion, wants to put in."* Shayland loves to express himself through photography, film and video and desires to be an entrepreneur. Danielle is convinced that he is only in college because she is pushing him to be in there.

Erica's Background

Erica is a 45-year-old mother to a son, Kyle (25), and daughter, Bailey (14). While interviewing Erica, it was intriguing to listen to her strong southern Creole accent as she warmly expressed her love and pride in raising her children. Like most of the other participants, Erica had Kyle at the age of nineteen but had the support of her family in raising him. Erica was adamant about overcoming the stereotypes and myths that were associated with the narrative of being a young, single Black mother. Despite the challenges of being a young parent, she decided to pursue her education goal. She was the only one in her immediate family to pursue higher

education. Her father quit school the first day of 12th grade, and her mother stopped going to school in 10th grade. She was not pushed to go to school, but it was a strong desire to be educated and set an example for her children and the outcome that she desired for them to have.

Even though she is well-credentialed, Erica did not finish her first degree until she was 28 years old. Nonetheless, nothing stopped her from being the leader and model for her children. Educationally, Erica obtained her associate and bachelor's degree in general studies, a certification in special education, a Master of Arts in Teaching, and a Master of Education in Educational Leadership degree. She has taught special education for the past fourteen years. Erica enjoys reading and spending time with her family.

Table 8

Erica's Son

Name	Age	Educational Attainment	Major
Kyle	25	Master of Science	Sport Medicine and Health Performance

Erica articulated her son's accomplishments with enthusiasm and pride. Kyle is a 25-year-old independent, self-reliant, and hard-working young man with three degrees and multiple certifications. While in high school, he was an active student. He played for the school band and local Zydeco band for several years. He has an associate degree in general studies, a bachelor's and master's degree in Sports Medicine and Health Performance. After graduating from college, he did not pursue a job in his field. However, he is a supervisor of an offshore company. He also has a certification in non-destructive testing (NDT).

Felicia's Background

Felicia is a 48-year-old single mother of one son, Joshua (21). She was one of the first participants to respond to the invitation to participate in the study. Felicia was born and raised in

a small, rural town. She, too, was raised by a single Black mother. She is the oldest of three siblings and the only one to complete a bachelor's degree in her immediate family. While in college, Felicia fell in love with her college sweetheart at a young age. She was pregnant with Joshua before she graduated and stayed with his father until Joshua was three. Despite the challenges of having a child in college, Felicia still managed to graduate with her Bachelor of Arts degree in Business Management. After obtaining her bachelor's degree, she went back to trade school to get a diploma in medical insurance, billing and coding, and countless other continuing education hours. She works as an office manager for a sanitation company in her hometown.

Table 9

Felicia's Son

Name	Age	Educational Attainment	Major
Joshua	20	Pursuing Bachelor's degree	Construction Engineering

Felicia laughed as she introduced her son, describing him as being spoiled. Spoiled is a term that she used to how privileged he was to get what he wanted. Joshua has his mother's undivided attention, with him being the only child that she gave birth to. Felicia considers herself to be a surrogate mother to Joshua's oldest brother, Cody (20), his father's oldest son. However, after splitting with Joshua and Cody's father when Joshua was three, Felicia still maintained a close relationship with Cody.

Joshua was a student-athlete in high school. He was highly active in sports and excelled in his academics. He was involved in various extracurricular activities and student organizations. Felicia stated that Joshua *"loves taking things apart and putting things back together. He asks a million and two questions because nothing seems to be the right answer for anything. But other*

than that, that's just him." Joshua is a junior engineering major at the same post-secondary institution where she obtained her bachelor's degree.

Gwen's Background

Gwen is a 50-year-old mother to two, Jacori (20) and Jakayla (15). Gwen was one of the most engaging participants that were interviewed. When soliciting participation for the study, she was beyond elated and enthused to share her story. Before beginning the interview, Gwen shared with the researcher about her day. With Gwen's personality, it was hard not to laugh. Gwen was reared in by military veterans, which she described as being raised in a strict home. Her father and mother were married and remarried to different partners, in which she has a good relationship with both of them. Throughout her interview, she gave credit to her mother and grandmother for helping her raise her children.

Gwen went to school but did not finish her degree. She has served as the assistant to the Vice-Chancellor of Student Affairs at a community college in her home city. She has worked in this capacity for twelve years.

Table 10

Gwen's Son

Name	Age	Educational Attainment	Major
Jacori	20	Pursuing Bachelor's degree	Mechanical Engineering

When asked to describe her son, Gwen smiled and said, "He's *resilient*." He was raised by three strong women--his mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. She continued to describe him as a good kid: "He's *just a good child. I never had problems with him. He's a humble, good kid. Does everything that I ask him to do. Just he's not the type to follow. He's always been a leader, always set apart from other kids.*" Jacori graduated high school as the salutatorian of his

class. He was active in many academic and social organizations at school: BETA Club, History Club, Band Captain, All-Academic Scholar-Athlete, basketball, and Senior Class President.

Felicia spoke appreciated how independent, self-motivated, and driven Jacori was as he matriculated through high school. He was a student who took the onus and initiative to ensure that he did everything he needed to succeed in school. He developed a strong and healthy rapport with the faculty and administration at his school. Jacori is a senior at an HBCU, where he plays for one of the best collegiate bands in the United States, a member of a Black fraternity organization, and is expected to graduate a year early in the spring of 2021.

Helen's Background

Helen is a 62-year-old mother of two sons, Elisha (30) and Kenneth (27). She is from a small, rural town in a southern state, where she has resided all of her life. Helen has a warm and personable personality. It was apparent that Helen is a hard-working and dedicated woman. She was passionate about her job, being a mother, and being a change agent in her community. The researcher had to reschedule the interview with Helen a few times because she had a busy schedule between her supervisory position and leading as president of the local alumni chapter of her HBCU alma mater in her hometown. She is also known for her deep passion for the youth in her community. She has led different initiatives and projects to get students enrolled into post-secondary institutions, especially historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Helen is a proud graduate, where she obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree in Business Administration and Secondary Education. She works as a department learning leader at a paper mill in a neighboring city.

Table 11*Helen's Son*

Name	Age	Educational Attainment	Major
Kenneth	20	Master of Science	Agronomy

Helen's two sons are the center of her world. As she spoke about them, she articulated her love for them with a smile. Even though both of her sons grew up closely with the same religious foundation and parenting strategies, they did not have the same outcome. Elisha is Helen's oldest son that she adopted when he was three months old. Helen and Elisha's relationship were strong when he was growing up. However, she mentioned around the age of 15 years old, she saw that he began to be more influenced by hanging with his friends more than her. After graduating high school, he attended a community college but did not finish. Helen regretfully expressed that she was bothered that he did not finish and wished she would have done more. *"When my oldest son went to the junior college, I felt like I failed him somewhere because he didn't complete his studies there. And looking back on it, I always questioned myself, 'What could I have done more? And now that he has gotten older, we talked about it,"* she exclaimed. Elisha lives down the street from her and is currently unemployed.

On the other hand, her youngest son, Kenneth, has done exceptionally well for himself. Kenneth is Helen's biological son. Kenneth was active in sports and different organizations in high school. After high school, he pursued his Bachelor of Science degree in Animal and Plant Science at an HBCU. After graduating with his bachelor's, he attended a different HBCU in another state. He is working on his master's degree in agronomy and will defend his thesis to graduate in the Spring of May 2021. He is a soil conservationist in a state in the central region of the United States.

Irene's Background

Irene is the oldest participant in this study. Irene is a 73-year-old mother who reared two sons as a single mother, Bryan (37) and Bryce (29). Irene married at 36 years old and had her first son at the age of 37. Her first marriage ended in divorce; her oldest son was five years old. She remarried, and at the age of 45, her second son was born. Her second marriage ended due to her husband's death with her youngest son at 14. In both marriages, Irene was left with the responsibility of rearing her sons. Her task was not easy because she was not fortunate, like the other mothers, to have the extended support of her parents or other family members to help raise her son. Irene was deeply rooted in her faith. Throughout most of the interview, she referenced how she depended on her faith in God to help her navigate through parenting and life.

Irene was reared by a single mother who did not have any formal education. She did not have a relationship with her father. Out of her six siblings, she is one of two that is still alive. Irene prides herself in being a Christian believer, where she actively serves as a Sunday School teacher and licensed and ordained minister in the Baptist denomination. While raising her sons, Irene put herself through her bachelor's and master's programs. At the age of 71, Irene graduated with her Doctor of Philosophy degree in Public Policy. She works as the executive assistant to the law center's chancellor at the historically Black university (HBCU) that she graduated with all three of her degrees from.

Table 12

Irene's Son

Name	Age	Educational Attainment	Major
Bryce	27	Bachelor of Science	Speech Pathology

There is an 8 year age difference between Bryan and his younger brother Bryce. Irene mentioned that both of her sons performed academically well in high school. Like Helen's story, Irene's relationship with Bryan was a little different from his younger brother. Irene mentioned that "*[Bryan] was extremely smart, but he was lazy, and he did not want to go to school. He did not want to do homework and everything. So, I had to paddle his behind a lot. He was more laxadasy.*" Bryan received a full athletic scholarship for football, but he did not complete his degree.

On the other hand, Irene emphasized how Bryce was more consistent, independent, and disciplined. Bryce participated in sports and various extracurricular activities in school. He maintained a 3.7 grade point average throughout his high school years. Even though it took him a while to settle on the degree path he wanted to pursue, he graduated in Fall 2019 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Speech Pathology. Bryce is now an elementary school teacher and has plans to pursue a master's degree.

Thematic Analysis

This study's results are presented in this chapter and include common themes and subthemes that emerged from the data obtained from interviews between the researcher and participants. Data from the focus group sessions and observational field notes that answered the research questions were also used in the analysis. This section analyzes each theme and answers each research question. The following phenomenological themes emerged from conversations with the participants: (1) supportive, (2) challenging, (3) achievement mindset, (4) supportive community, (5) spirituality, and (6) keep son involved (See Figure I and Figure II for Themes and Subthemes). This section includes analyses of each of the seven themes that emerged during

the research study that answers each research question. The analyses' results are the participants' experiences as having an educational influence and contributing factors as a single Black mother are presented through dialogue and casual conversations.

Figure 1

Thematic Diagram: Research Question 1

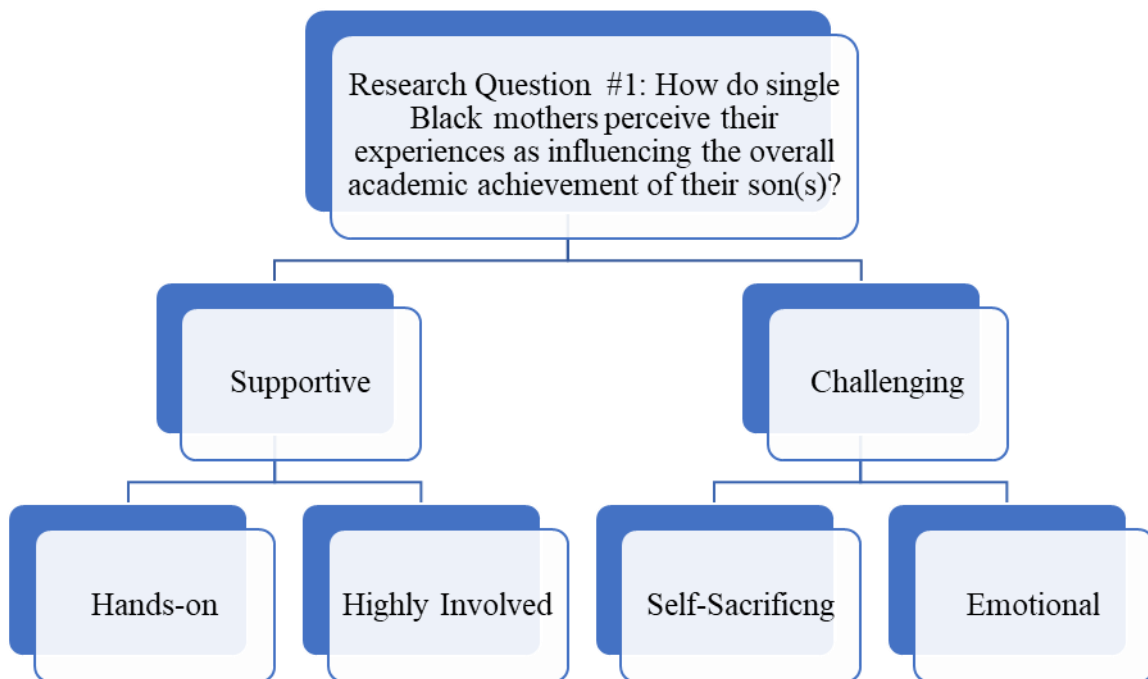
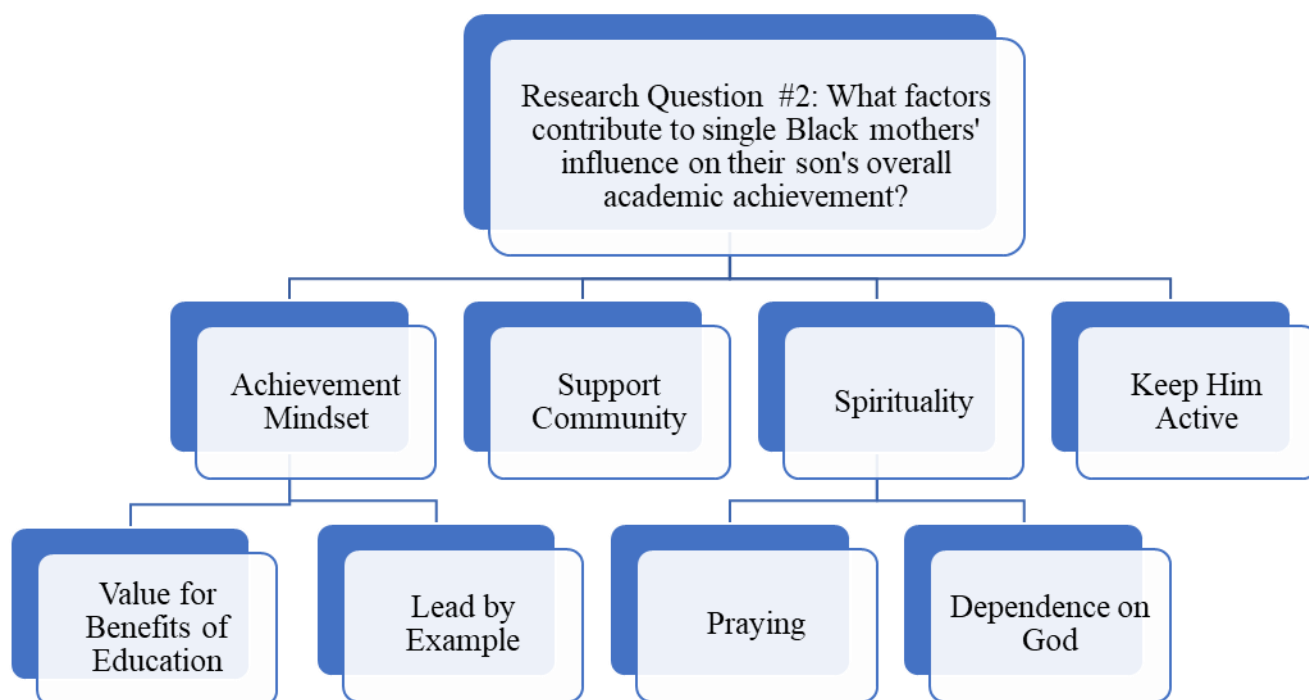


Figure 2

Thematic Diagram: Research Question 2



Research Question 1

How do single Black mothers perceive their experiences as influencing the overall academic achievement of their son(s)?

Theme: Supportive

It is without any doubt that each mother that participated in this study loves their son. When speaking with each of the mothers about their relationship with their son(s), each of them shared with enthusiasm and confidence about how bonded they are with him. Raising a son was not an easy task for them, especially while most of them raised their son at a young age. All nine participants revealed ways that they supported their sons academically. Hands-on and highly involved were two subthemes that emerged from this theme. The findings of mothers being supportive through being hands-on and highly involved is consistent with the research (Allen &

Smith, 2017; Danforth & Miller, 2018; Leath et al., 2020). Additionally, the participants in this study and previous studies (Allen & Smith, 2017; Danforth & Miller, 2018; Leath et al., 2020) felt that being involved in their sons' school experience is just as significant as home involvement. Another factor that was revealed through this research that aligns with the findings of Leath et al. (2020) is that Black mothers are more engaged with the critical forms of involvement with their sons. While conventional forms of their involvement include attending field trips, attending parent-teacher conferences, volunteering, and helping with homework, Black mothers also have to build positive relationships with their sons' teachers, be intentional around school choice, be an advocate for their child's education, and choose a same-race teacher when possible.

Subtheme: Hands-on. Eight of the nine mothers elaborated on how they were hands-on parents. They described hands-on support as the conventional form of involvement like helping their sons with homework, finding them tutors when they needed assistance that they could not provide, creating their high school schedules for them, and building relationships with their teachers and school community. Alicia mentioned that she had just begun her professional journey in education, so she could not join any parent organizations when her son was in high school. However, she was still able to be hands-on with his schooling. She stated:

I actually worked in the same district that he attended middle school and two years of high school. I was very active as far as supporting him for honors programs, after school events related to academics or basketball. I attended parent teacher conferences. I guess I started to build relationships with some teachers more than others. But I was a very active parent as it relates to his schooling, just not officially a part of a PTO.

Brandy raised Myles in a small, rural town that did not have many job opportunities. She worked out of town and had to commute every day to work. However, with the help of her support community, she was able to make sure that her son had what he needed for school. Regardless of

the sacrifices that she had to make, she attended his games and communicated with his teachers concerning his academics. Brandy emphasized how she wanted to make sure that he knew that she supported him in everything that he did:

I wasn't part of the PTO or any other parent groups at the school. I was very active in his football career from a freshman year to senior. I was at every game, never missed a game. Got off at work to personally to be at the game, even if it was in [a far city], I was going, I was traveling. His baseball games, I was at every game. Didn't miss a game. His teachers, all of his teachers loved him. All of his teachers loved me. They knew me personally. They had my cell phone number personally. If Myles talked too much in class, I got a phone call.

During one of the focus group sessions, Erica, Christy, and Irene laughed at each other regarding how hands-on they were in their sons' academics. Each of the participants are employed in the education field in some capacity, with Erica and Christy being special education teachers. With many head-nods and "amens," Erica stated:

I was a hands-on parent. I had all of the passwords to everything to check grades, assignments, teacher's cell phone numbers, their planning period hours. I was on top of everything because since I'm an educator, I'm one that loves to be on top of things. I don't want to wait till March or April to know that my child is failing. So, I get on the scene early on. As soon as school starts, I'm present. So, I was always aware of what was going on, grades, behavior, everything.

Even after high school, Erica continued to make sure that she was involved in his college journey. She continued by saying:

I was always hands-on. I even in college, emailed professors. I did that. I emailed teachers at the beginning [of the year] to let them know to contact me if anything was needed. I had passwords to the JCampus [software for checking grade] where I could check his grades at any time. I was just always involved with his grades. So, I knew what he had before he knew what he had, even in college. There were some situations where I checked his grades, and they were not up to par and I emailed his professors. I was told that he's 18. They can't give me any personal information. I said, 'Well, I don't need you to give it to me because I can see it.' But I told him if my money is going to [the university], I should be able to know anything that's going on in the class.

During the focus group session, Christy agreed by indicating:

As far as me being a part of their lives of their high school journey, as Ms. [Christy] said, I was hands on. Wherever they were, I was there. It was like I was a net for them. I knew what they were doing when they were doing it. So, it wasn't much they could do without mom being there or without mom knowing about it. And especially me being on the campus. I had a perfect relationship with all of their teachers, all of their friends, their friends' parents. So, it was okay for me and it was okay for them to even know that I had that type of relationship with their friends' parents, their teachers and everything like that. So, I think it was a pretty good relationship and journey for them throughout their high school journey or career.

Felicia called herself "*the homework person.*" During the summers, she brought teacher books for her son that would help him learn content that would be presented and assessed on the high-stake state assessment. She felt like working with him over the summer influenced how well he did in school. She said:

I would go and get those workbooks and we will work X amount of pages each day in the summers. So, when he would go to the next year, he would already be familiar with some of the things that they were already learning. So, he actually did very well in school. He did very, very good in school.

Even though the onus is on him to take responsibility for his college education, she reflected on how intentional she was during his high school days. She continued to elaborate:

Now he's in college, so that's a little more on him. I cannot control that, but I checked homework. I checked calendars each day that the teachers had, they wrote down what they did that day or whatever, what the next assignment was. And I made sure those things got done. So, I checked his work to make sure that he was understanding and doing right. And if he wasn't understanding and doing right, then I made sure that he talked to the teacher and asked questions. I've had meetings with teachers. I went to parent-teacher conferences, to parent-teacher nights at school, and talked to the teachers to see if there was anything going on, or anything he needed, or anything that I could help with. So, I did all that all the way through school.

Danielle is an educational leader that is passionate about education and her child's education. She valued building positive relationships with her son's teachers. When she received calls about her son, she would make classroom appearances without him knowing. She recounted

a time that she had to go to the school to check his behavior. She giggled while retelling her story:

I was very active, just because I know that a lot of times when parents get to the high school point, they feel like, "Oh, they don't need me anymore. They got it," and then they kind of back off. So, I made a conscious effort not to do that. I remember, one day, he was in maybe 11th grade. And he walked to his class and I was sitting in the back, my legs crossed. He was like, "Ma?" And I'm like, "Mm-hmm (affirmative). I hear about how you've been acting in here." And he was talking and laughing and joking with his friends or something, but that was pretty typical for me to do.

While Danielle made sure that she made random pop-up visits to check her son's behavior, Helen ensured that her sons were enrolled in the right high school courses. Helen was a strong advocate for her sons' education, and she did not want them to be allowed to be complacent with settling for anything less than what she felt was best for them. Helen was adamant about ensuring that her sons were being challenged and did not take any courses that she felt were irrelevant to their academic growth. Every year in high school, she would create their schedules for them. Her voice escalated with passion and force when she explained to the researcher her reason:

With each one of my sons, I was there when they got to the high school level, they can attest to this. They never made a high school schedule. I always picked every class for them. I always said I didn't want them in what I call junk courses--courses that waste a waste time for students. And I said because in life you can pick that up and learn that, too, at home. I call them junk courses that were a waste.

Subtheme: Highly Involved. Being highly involved could be also interpreted as being hands-on. Many of the conversations about being hands-on overlapped with the subtheme, highly involved. However, in the interviews, the participants considered being highly involved with a little more emphasis than just checking homework, creating schedules, and making visits to the classroom. Each mother was involved in every aspect of their son's academic and extracurricular activity. Even though they worked multiple jobs, and some worked out of town, they still

supported every endeavor, activity, or idea that their son was involved with. It was obvious that whatever their son's passion was, it became their passion. Brandy's son was involved in multiple sports. She gladly expressed how she attended every game. She said:

He was an athlete. He played football. He ran track. I would think I was at every game except one track game and one football game. Even with the football games, we went to Monroe. They had a game; he caught the ball and got an interception. And I think I ran across the bleachers with him, with the interception. Everybody was just hollering. That's [Myles'] mom. So yeah, that just excited me. Cause that was something that he was passionate about---football.

Even though Felicia worked more than one job out of town, she took a reduction in pay to find a job in her hometown so that she could attend her son's games. She even decided to become an assistant coach to the high school girls' basketball team because their schedule would be similar to her son's schedule. She commented:

I even started helping out on coaching basketball because he played basketball. So, I helped out with the basketball team; well, the girls team. At that time, the girls and boys used to play pretty much at the same time. That doesn't happen anymore now, but back then, they were still kind of playing together.

Gwen's son went to a small laboratory school on the campus of a historical Black university (HBCU). She bragged about how small and close-knit the school was; the culture was great, and it felt like a close-knit family. Her son was highly involved in multiple social and academic organizations, which made her just as involved. Gwen jokingly stated:

Because it is such a small school, I was active as a parent. And I tried not to go to school with him. I didn't do that. If I could, I would, but I was very active. He was in the band; I was the band parent. He played basketball. I was the basketball mom. So, I was there pretty much all the time. My daughter tells me all the time, because she dances on the school; she always tells me, "You don't come to the school with me as much as you did with him." I was like, "Girl, I'm retired. I'm older and I'm tired."

Irene shared the same sentiments. Her sons were highly involved in academics and extracurricular activities, which made her just as involved. With a motherly tone and warm

demeanor, Irene explained how she use to attend all games, opened her house to her sons' teammates, and cooked for team before their games:

I was a football mom. I was a basketball mom. I was at every basketball game. I cooked food for them when they were playing ball. I've stood on the corners of Courage and Hope Road and shook cans to raise money for their little teams and stuff. I've had those stinky boys laying all over my floor, sleeping until we go to the next game. I fed them and I got along with the parents. The parents just left their kids with me because they knew I was going to take care of them.

I cooked the food, I brought the food, I set it up. I gave them menus that what we were going to have for the kids. And most of the time, I cooked most of it myself. So, I was a part of that, too. Again, I don't know how I did it, but I did it.

Although Christy was a girls' high school softball and basketball coach, co-sponsor of her daughter's dance team and a teacher at her sons and daughter's high school, she did her best to be as active as she could. She attended the parent-teacher conferences and checked their grades, but she did not make it to every single game that her sons had. However, she coached her sons in baseball and basketball before they made it to high school.

Theme: Challenging

Research suggests that single Black mothers' responsibilities can create different types of challenges, especially emotional challenges (Jackson & Scheines, 2005; Kotchich, Dorsey, & Heller, 2005). All participants shared their experiences of challenges throughout the individual interviews and focus group sessions. When conversing in the focus groups, the mothers fluidly built off each other's stories. Some of their challenges included, but not limited to, raising their sons with little or no support from the child's father, developed strained relationships with their partners, parenting from a distance while their parents raised him, attended school while parenting, financial issues, working multiple jobs, having to take care of a sick parent, always being concerned about the safety and emotional well-being of their sons. In addition to their

perceived experiences, words such as tough, scary, overwhelming, emotional, and stressful were used to describe their feelings.

The challenges that single Black mothers face are not uncommon in the literature (Bowman, 2012; Bowman & Sanders, 1998; Mendall, Bowman, & Zhang, 2013; Rowley & Bowman, 2009). Using the role strain-adaptation model, Bowman and Sanders (1998) conducted a national comparative analysis study on unmarried Black fathers and described *provider role strain* as objective barriers (e.g., low income, underemployment, etc.) because it increases problems for the provider. They also consider it subjective because of the reactions to the problems, like discouragement and self-blame, increases the vulnerability of the person. However, Mendall, Bowman, and Zhang (2013) argued that when Black mothers encounter those same family economic provider role barriers, then it needs to be understood how mothers use protective cultural strengths to promote resiliency.

Subtheme: Self-sacrificing. The data revealed a consistent theme of self-sacrifice demonstrated by the participants. The participants' narratives elucidated patterns of working multiple jobs, parenting from a distance, financial struggles. Five of the nine participants had their son at the age of nineteen, either they had just graduated high school or was in their senior year. One participant conceived her son at an older age of thirty-seven and the second child by forty-five. Seven participants worked multiple jobs while parenting, while four of those seven worked jobs in another city because of the lack of job opportunities for them in the city that they lived in.

Alicia revealed that she was a senior in high school when she first had her son. The researcher asked her to share her experiences with the group, she articulated:

I was a young single parent. And so, I had my son when I was in high school when I was continuing on my journey to college. And I actually got into the College of Education on

a fully paid scholarship, including room and board. When I initially graduated, I didn't have a car, so I stayed on campus. And my son actually stayed with my mom. So, the challenge was being a mom from a distance.

At times I would go home and stay on the weekend to be with him. But there was distance during the week so that I can continue go to school and take my coursework, and then my mom had to take care of him while I was away. And then when it was time for him to go to school, my mom had to get him ready for school and take him to school with her because I was still in school. So that was a challenge for me, just having that distance during that time with me being away and him being at home with my mom.

For him, as a young child, it was a challenge not being able to be with his mom all the time. And not being able to understand that me going to college would allow for him to have a better life. So, there were times when I would leave to go back to school on Sunday, where he didn't understand why I had to go and wanted to know when I would be back home to be mommy.

Brandy was a member of the focus group session when Alicia shared her story of parenting from a distance. Alicia's narrative resonated with Brandy, as she articulated her similar experience:

Similar to [Alicia's] story as well, I was a single mom having to parent from a distance. Like I said, when my mom took my son and he stayed with her, I felt like that distance from us not being together all day, every day. I felt like he would get caught up in the wrong crowd, he would get caught up in the system, not having me present every day, 24 hours as I should have been.

At the age of 19, I was just fresh out of high school, looking for a job, wanting to go to college, but I had to stop because I had him and I was not able to go to college. So, I had to get a job overnight working and my aunt kept him in the daytime. So, it was some challenges as far as not being able to have a lot of money to provide at times when you have to have family members to help you. So, I think that that was one of the most challenging times of not being able to be financially stable, to take care of him at that time.

As mentioned before, five participants became mothers in college at the age of nineteen. In a different focus group session, Christy shared her story of commuting every weekend to check on her sons. She would drive an hour and a half every weekend to check on her son because he stayed with her parents while she was in school. Christy shared:

Looking back over the life of what I've those things that I've experienced, I wouldn't change my journey. I would change the journey for them. Being a mother was \when I

was 19 I was a student myself at [Brave University]. I was a sophomore when I got pregnant with [Jacob].

Wasn't expecting that part because I had so many more hopes and expectations for myself. But all of that changed and what I did was I changed my life to gear towards them. With that being said, like I began to travel back and forth instead of staying on campus to make sure that they were taken care of and not my parents' responsibility or anyone else's responsibility because I wanted to take care of them. Also being a parent was it made me grow up more. And I just wouldn't, I wouldn't change that part of it. I would just change what I did with them.

Financial insecurity was a challenge that was mentioned in every individual session and focus group session. All nine participants shared their experience with raising their sons-while simultaneously having to navigate financial instability, hence why most of them pursued or pursuing a second or third degree. Danielle is now a school administrator with a terminal degree, but she spoke about how finding more streams of income was needed for her because her children's father was incarcerated. When asked by the researcher, "Can you identify a major crisis as a single mother that you may have had and how you handled it?", she responded:

Probably finances. I'm a teacher. I just became a principal like two years ago. So, I love what I do and I'm glad that I made the choice that I made, but it's hard to take care of three children off of \$40,000, you know? And so probably just finances. I don't know what I did, but it worked out. Definitely always had a second job. Even now, I still work a second job. Just always have had something else going on, whether I was selling clothes on eBay or I have a second job working after school. I wrote a book; I just always figured out a way to make it work. Called home if I needed to; I always figured something out.

Irene also emphasized her struggle with finances. She wanted to do many things for her sons but could not afford to do it:

It's a struggle. It was a struggle. Many times, I didn't have. A lot of things I wanted to do for my kids, and I couldn't do it because I was robbing Paul to pay Peter. [I] Didn't have the money. And at that time, I didn't have the education. And so, it was a struggle, but it was an experience and always feel that the things that happens to you, it's not about you. So, I can encourage other young, black, single mothers, even though they're struggling, just keep moving. It's going to work. It's going to be okay. You have to have the tenacity to stand and to endure the storms because they're going to come.

I had to get a friend of mine to keep [Bryan] those four hours. I remember one day we went to the store. It was Winn-Dixie down here near [Broadway] and he asked me, say, "Mama, can I get this?" And I said, "No, we can't." And he said, "I forgot. We don't have any money." Do you know that broken my heart? That I could not give my child these things, but that was the challenge with [Bryan]. I remarried years later; [Bryce] had just made his 14th birthday. He was just getting into high school. And so, I had to finish. I've reared two sons really alone and it was always, more than anything, financial challenges of trying to make sure your child looked decent when they go to school, make sure that they had all of the things that they needed when they went to school.

Like most mothers, Gwen believed that her son deserved the best. She was willing to sacrifice whatever she had to provide for him what he needed. She explained:

He has his own apartment. And he doesn't work. So, I sacrifice a lot. My mom sacrificed a lot. So, he can have, he has a little independence because we know the type of child he is. Now, he wasn't a bad kid who wasn't grateful for the things that his mom and grandmother give. Then he'll probably be living at home with me, sleep in bed behind me. Because he's that good kid. We just sacrificing. Bought him a car, has own apartment and he don't work. So, we just, all we have to do just to make sure that he has what he needs, because at the end of the day, he deserves it. He really does deserve it. Because he has not given me no problems.

Even though these mothers were highly involved in their son's academics, two mothers still expressed that they wish they could have done more. However, the reason for some of their absence was because they worked out of town. In one of the focus group sessions, Felicia and Helen seemed to have already known each other's stories because of their personal relationship. They are from the same small, rural town. They commented on each other's experiences frequently throughout the session. Both of them commuted about a thirty-to-forty-five-minute drive outside of their hometown for better job opportunities. They mentioned how sacrificing it was for them because they were not able to be as present as they felt like they wanted to be.

Helen has worked shift work for the past twenty-two years. She expressed her disappointment:

I worked probably 22 years or so, shift work. And I missed out on so many of his ... because my son, the youngest was very ... he loves sports. He was involved in all sports. And I knew that couldn't be at every one of his games. That was a disappointment to me. There were some things he did and present and I couldn't be there. And when I did go,

you could just see, when he would look back and see. It's like he was saying, "Oh, my mom is in the stands."

Felica commented to Helen and said:

And like [Helen] said, you're missing this, and missing doctor's appointment or missing games, or missing awards ceremonies or whatever because you're at work because when I did come here, I'm working in [Hopeville], in [Courage City] to try to have a job worth anything.

Subtheme: Emotional. Each mother verbally expressed their level of emotion that they have encountered through their experience in raising their sons. Words like overwhelming, stressful, scary, tough, emotional, concerned were periodically used when asked to reflect on their experiences of being a single Black mother. None of the mothers gave an emotional response to any of the questions that they were asked. They answered them as overcomers and confident mothers that have endured various oppositions. However, there was a difference in how they perceived their experience as a single mother compared to being a single Black mother. When the researcher asked, "*How did it feel being a single mother?*", the responses were very moderate. The mothers did not consider it to be easy, but manageable because of their support system. However, when the researcher asked, "*How did it feel being a single Black mother?*", it was apparent that there are different emotion and level of challenge that stems from this intersection of being single, being Black, and being a mother. The emotions emanated from the fear of not being able to parent their sons without the help of his father, their Black sons struggling with identity issues because of the lack of a father figure in their life, the financial instability, relationships that ended in a divorce or death, and the safety and security in raising a young, Black son.

There were different responses to the different emotions. Brandy expressed how tough raising Myles was in the beginning. As stated before, Brandy had Myles when she was nineteen,

thinking that she was about to join the military until she took a test and found out that she was pregnant. She mentioned that she struggled financially, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. She stated: *“Sometimes it got tough. Sometimes, I wanted to give up, but I didn’t. I kept praying and asking God to give me strength, guide me, keep my mind strong, and keep me focused.”* It was evident through her expressions that it became a mental and spiritual issue for her as well. She questioned herself and God about her situation: *“Sometimes I didn’t believe in God. I questioned God, ‘Why me? Why am I single?’ I look at other people and say, ‘I’m doing the exact same thing as them and they’re married. Or they’re in a relationship, or their father’s kids is there. Why am I single? I did have some spiritual issues.”*

Christy, Gwen, and Denise expressed their concern and emotion with raising a son without their father being present. However, each of their responses were addressed from a different perspective. Christy described her experience as scary, with three different factors involved. The first factor that evoked fear was them not being protected:

Being a single black mother was scary, and it's scary for me because one, we live in a small town and I've always had both my parents and I still have both of my parents. And for a lot of it, I didn't really understand some of the things that my boys, and even my daughter, experience with an absent parent because I only wanted to be mom when I thought about having kids and stuff like that. I was expecting, the white house with the picket fence and all of those things. In my mind, that's what I was looking for. Now, it didn't happen that way for me. Okay? So, just looking back at being that mother and a single mother, I wanted to ensure that they were protected, ensure that they have those things that they needed.

Another factor was whether or not she felt like she was going to be able to provide them what they needed while she was still a student:

Because I didn't know that sometimes that if I would be able to provide for them because I was still a student. My parents were still taking care of me. And then I had to get, one job after getting out of college. Not only getting one job, because I had three kids at that time. I had to get a second job and then trying to make sure that they were getting all the academic things that they needed as far as school while working. So that was a scary factor too, because I didn't know if they were doing their homework, making sure that I had to provide as well. But instilling in them, make sure you get all these things done

before you can go outside and play because I have to do this, because we need to make it, because of these things. All of that was a part of being that single black mother but also instilling in them early that no matter what this looks like, I'm still gonna push for you. This is all for you.

The last factor was not having a male figure to be an example for them. She began to coach basketball and baseball because she did know if anyone else could fill that void in their lives. She said:

However, on the other end of it being not just scary, as they grew up, the small-town mentality of this is what it looks like for them. Where that's all they see is some of their friends had both parents and I would say it was about 50/50, where some of their friends had both parents end up and the other half didn't. They had single mothers, too. So, it was that part in looking for not only male, I guess, male figures or male role models because they had, they had my dad, they had my brothers they had when they were younger, males in the church that they would sometimes look up to. But all of that was just, it was scary for me---for them. So, it was harder for me to, or easier for me to keep them almost sheltered until I thought they were able to kind of go out on their own and do things. And that's another reason why I coach them in everything. I coached them in sports because I just didn't feel like anybody else could, could do that part of it.

Felicia and Gwen encountered similar experiences with their sons. Felicia felt like her son did not communicate with her the way she desired. Therefore, she thought it would be better for him to have his father or male figure to rely on to have certain conversations with him that he may not have felt comfortable having with her. She did not feel like she knew how to reach him the way a male can. When describing her experience as a single Black mother, she said:

Now that wasn't the best feeling at all. I never wanted that. Because my mom was a single black mother and I actually always told myself I was going to do whatever it took not to be. But, I had to decide what was actually best for me and my child, which was to be apart, to be a single black mother. There are things that mothers cannot teach their sons, period. I mean, I don't care how strong or superwoman we think that we are. We cannot teach our sons to be men, period. And that's hard for me, that's really hard for me. There are some communication things that are to me lacking because there are things that dads and sons bond over, not mothers and sons. So, it's hard, but it's life and you just have to live it.

Gwen was very candid about her feelings regarding being a single Black mother raising a young, Black son. She described it as being hard. Gwen questioned whether she was able to provide her

son with the example that she felt like he needed. She even divorced her last husband because he “*would not accept [her] son.*” Because she raised him with the help of her mother and grandmother, many people thought that he was going to be a homosexual. She sighed and stated:

Raising my black son is hard. And it was a lot of days that I second guessed myself, because I didn't know how he would, of course, become. But even as a little child, he didn't think he was good enough, because he didn't have a dad. So, he always thought that something's wrong with me, because everybody had their dad, and I don't. Because he felt that way that made me work even harder and become a stronger mother and to always support him in whatever he wanted.

Research Question 2

What factors contribute to the single Black mothers' influence on their sons' overall academic achievement?

Theme: Achievement Mindset

There were no reservations from the mothers when discussing the importance of education. Most participants believed that their educational trajectory influenced their son's academic achievement. Six of the nine participants work in the education field. Seven of the participants have obtained a college degree: one with an associate, three with a bachelor's degree, two with a master's with an additional 30 hours, and two with terminal doctorate degrees. The one participant that did not have a degree did attend college but did not finish. Six of the participants explicitly mentioned that their sons did not have a choice but to go to school. Two of the participants gave their sons an option to pursue a post-secondary education. Two participants also mentioned that even though they were flexible in their approach regarding education, they encouraged their sons to do what was best for them. The mothers believed that education is necessary for their future as a Black man and that it provides future benefits for them.

The mothers understood the benefits of education and the importance of leading by example. This is consistent with research conducted by Danforth and Miller (2018). In that study, the resiliency of Black men that eventually enrolled into a four-year college began as young boy that was initiated by mostly their mothers' non-negotiable expectations that they would pursue post-secondary education. In this study, the families demonstrated the expectations by setting an example by attending college themselves, practicing authoritative parenting, and providing hands-on assistance through the process. When asked what influenced them the most about their decision to go to school, the young men mentioned their family, specifically their mothers, influenced their decision by expressing their non-negotiable expectations. According to Wilson and Henriksen (2016), successful Black sons of resilient mothers were interviewed, and “acknowledging the importance of education” was a theme of the study. The participants noted that their mothers emphasized on the importance of education and the opportunities that having it would create for them.

Subtheme: Value for the Benefits of Education.

Alicia serves as a Dean of Instruction at an elementary school. She spoke about how she expected her son to go to school and “*never discouraged him or even gave him the option to not go to college.*” When asked the question, “How do you perceive education? Do it hold any value to you?”, Alicia commented:

Obviously, it holds a lot of value to me. I think it's one of the most important things in life is for someone to be educated, and especially a young black man to be educated or black men period to be educated. And so, I guess I'm in this role now to motivate and to ensure that our children are receiving the best education possible because without education today, our kids are limited basically to what they can do in order to be successful or have some success in life. So, education is one of the biggest things to me. I believe everybody should be educated and at least to graduate high school, because then they will have the tools that they need to just survive with basic needs in life.

Brandy believes that since Myles is a Black man that he needs to have an education. They were in school simultaneously. So, she used her experience as leverage to be a motivation for him to pursue a post-secondary education:

I motivated him because at that time, I was enrolled in my college classes as well. So I told him, you know, we're going to do this. We're gonna push. This is the only way that you can make it is what a college education. You are a black young man. A lot of young men do not graduate college, do not graduate high school. So that's very important for you to finish high school and finish college and get that degree.

Christy, who is also an educator, was very adamant about her children getting an education. All three of her children are in college pursuing their bachelor's degrees. She made sure that she did everything that she had to do so that they could focus on the main thing that she asked them to do, which was to get an education:

Education is the top of the line, right under---it goes God, family, education. And that's it. There's no other that there's nothing else because without God, without your family, without an education, you have nothing else. For me been an educator, I held my kids to a higher standard. I expected them to do what they were supposed to do because that's all they had to do. You didn't have to work; you didn't have to do anything else. You didn't have to be a single parent. You didn't have to do any of those things but do your schoolwork. So, I expected that of you. I've always told them, when they were in high school, your high school diploma belongs to me. I've got you through these first 12, 13 years that high school diploma belongs to me. Your next degree is your money maker. So that belongs to you, and you can choose however or whatever route pathway you want to take---that's on you.

She continued to convey her expectation:

I did give them an option of--well, not really an option. I just kind of told them, "Yeah, you going to college, that's the end of it. Now you do have the option of playing sports. Now you don't have to do that, but you're going to school. You will get a degree. Now, whatever that is, because one, you have to take care of your family. You saw me struggle. I don't want that for you. He saw what it looked like it. You see what it felt like. So, don't make it this hard for yourself."

For Erica, she had a difficult time helping her son to understand that she felt like he needed an education and to pursue a college degree. Erica is also an educator that believes that

everyone needs an education. When her son graduated high school, he wanted to go directly into the workforce because he saw his friends making money. She commented:

Education is number one. I always tell both of my kids without an education; you won't get far in life at all high school diploma. I mean, I'll never knock anyone that just have earned a high school diploma, but in this world at this time, you need so much more cause this even hard to get a job with a bachelor's degree. So just with a high school diploma, it won't work, and he wanted it to stop. As soon as when he seen his friends with the big trucks and them making money, as soon as they got out of high school. And that wasn't an option, you know? And I didn't want to be that parent where I'm educated, and my kids are not that's. What kind of parent would I be? So, it's like, they don't have a choice.

Conversely, Felecia, Helen, and Irene reflected on their personal reasons for getting an education and why it is necessary for Black people. Felicia explained:

My grandmother, my mom, me, his dad, all of us, we all have college degrees and continuing education from there. And it is very important that he gets everything as far as education wise that he needs. He's going to have to support himself and in this world, there are some things that you can do without getting a college degree that you can support yourself. But I think with that degree, it is a leg up especially for a black person, female, male, whatever. We are two steps behind already. So, we need every leg up that we can get to be able to take care of ourselves. And that's what the education will do for you.

Both of Helen's sons went to college, but only one of them graduated. However, her expectations for them have always been high. She stated, "*Education is the key to me. I always pushed them. We just don't do the 12; we take it to the next step because if you're going to be successful in life and being a black man, be an educated black man.*" Even with her youngest son that is pursuing his master's degree, she makes sure she reiterates the importance of him obtaining it:

I'm constantly, every time I've talked to him, "Have you worked on your paper? Are you talking with your professor?" Because my thing is, the key to things is education. And with us getting just a bachelor's degree, that's not enough. We got to take to the next level and all the way to the next level because we will be judged harshly. I was telling you you'll be judged harshly because you an educated black man. And you, when you get children, I want you to push that into your children as well. Education has always been the key thing in my home.

With Irene being the oldest participant, her perspective was a little different than the other participants. She frequently referenced herself as a disciplinarian, firm, and strict at times. When speaking about education, she recalled her experience growing up when Black women did not have the educational opportunities that their counterparts had. Since times have changed, she emphasized to her sons the need to get their high school diploma and college degree:

Education is number one when it comes to the physical things around even after you get an education, I've learned that you struggle because of the color of your skin, you struggle because of your sex. Females are just now getting to get into the corporate world and become managers and entrepreneurs and things of that nature. You know, it has been a blockade there for females, but now it's open-ended. And I guess Kamala Harris is one of the greatest aspirations that we can think of right now. If she can do it many more black, young ladies should be able to do it. Also, I'm too old for it now, but if I could start all over again, I guess I'd be running for vice president or president myself, because those doors are being opened now, which were never open. There were never open. So, it's a great opportunity.

Although Danielle's approach was compared to the other mothers, she still had an achievement mindset regarding her son obtaining his high school and college education. Similar to Irene, Danielle was firm in her stance on education but more flexible than the others. Just as significant as obtaining an education, she wanted him to have a plan for his life, she argued:

It definitely holds value to me. I'm an educator, but I don't think it's the end-all to be all. I don't think it's the only way to be successful or the only way to be happy. It's my way. But even with him, I've never preached that it's the only way. My thing is, you just have to have some type of plan. So, if you don't, then you have to go with my plan. But education definitely holds a lot of value in my opinion, because it was one of those things that no one can take from you. People can't take from you what, you know, and people can't take from you who you love. They can take the person, but they can't take the feeling. And so that's just kind of my philosophy on life.

She challenged her son to find and adapt to the best way that he would succeed and meet her expectation. She was a little more lenient in how met the standard, just as long as he did what she expected him to do. She asserted:

I tell him when he went into ninth grade that whatever worked for him, he could do. So, if he stayed up all night and could get up and go to school, that was fine. If he listens to

music while he's studying and he could understand it, that was fine. I told him if his grades dropped below a 3.0, then I was coming up with a program for him and they never did. So, if you just kind of whatever worked for him, I was fine with it. As long as I didn't get any phone calls from anybody from the school. And as long as his grades didn't drop.

When the researcher asked her to elaborate on the influence that she felt that she had on her son's education, she responded:

I think that I was the biggest influence on him educationally. And I think if I had to say, I would think that I was a positive influence on him, educationally. I think a part of his feeling about college now is because he doesn't know what he wants to do. So he feels like he's working toward, he doesn't, he doesn't know what he's working towards. So it's like you put me in this, in this position that I have to really work, but I don't even know what my goal is. And so I think that's more of a grown-up problem. I think before that his goal was just to get, make the honor roll or something like that. But now that he actually has to consider what he wants to do with his life. It's not as easy of a fix. But I think overall that I've had a positive influence on his education. And I think once he figures out what he wants to do, he's going to appreciate the influence that I've had on his education

He's in school probably more so because I'm pushing him than because he wants to be there. But I firmly believe he'll reap the benefits of it later on. He'll appreciate it more later than he does now

Opposite of the other mothers, Gwen was very lenient with her son. She believed that education is important, but she didn't want her son to feel like she wanted to force him to go to school beyond high school. When submitting the participant demographic form to the research, Gwen's son seemed to be the most actively involved son based on his academics and extracurricular activities. She stated:

I can say education is somewhat important. I didn't want him to think that he had to go to college, high school is a given. You have to do that. So, I didn't want him or my other child to think that you just have to go to college. Education is important for your future, for you to be successful. But I didn't want my kids to think that that was just...That you just had to do that.

Even though it was different than how the other mothers perceived achievement, after she realized how consistent and intentional, he was with his academics, she pushed him to pursue more:

Because he went through school and he was an excellent student throughout school. So, I expected him after he showed me that he can do the work, he made straight A's, he was a Salutatorian of his class. I expected him to go to college to do something. He's just that kid. So, when he showed me that he could do it and he loved school, I didn't have to get on him about homework and do this and do that, then yes, I did expect him to go be great at it. So, my expectations for education in college was high of him after he went through high school.

Subtheme: Lead by Example. One common subtheme that emerged from the data was the mothers leading by example. As mentioned before, eight of the nine participants received a college education and believed that it is beneficial for their sons to pursue it as well. When asked the question about contributing factors that influenced their sons' academic achievement, seven participants said leading by example. While pursuing their degree, they were also raising their children. Obtaining an education for these mothers was motivated by being able to provide a better life for their children. They believed that their sons were able to witness them and their success, in hopes that it would motivate them to do the same. This is also consistent with Danforth and Miller (2018). Participants in this study mentioned the influence of their mother's success was a motivational factor for them to pursue their college diploma and possibly attend graduate school.

Alicia believed that her journey, which her son was able to see, instilled a sense of pride and desire to do the same. From her perspective, *"Everybody won't be able to relate because people take different paths, but if a single parent has their own success, just instilling that in your child, or keep bringing back to what you were able to do for them to help motivate their children that pretty much anything is possible."* As this was a topic of discussion in one of the focus group sessions, Brandy agreed to Alicia's response: *"I pushed him and I motivated him because at that time, I was enrolled in my college classes as well. So, I told him, we're gonna do this. We're gonna push. This is the only way that you can make it is what a college education."*

Christy had all three of her children before she graduated high school. After her children graduated high school, she decided to enroll in graduate school to also journey with them through their experience in college. Christy believed that leading by example helped them to get where they are now:

I'm sure leading by example, help them to get where they are right now because there was... Again, I couldn't call their dad because he was incarcerated most of their lives. So, me doing what I did while they were young, and I had all three of my kids before I graduated and getting my bachelor's. Then they were really young at that point, but them seeing me and helping them to understand that you need to push. Even when times get hard, you have to push. Push past those things that you can't see because beyond that is something greater. And that was always something that I wanted them to know. I think leading by that example, along with so many prayers that you have to definitely have to pray that, that's where they are now.

There is a possibility that Christy and all three of her children will graduate with their degrees by Fall 2021.

Erica knew that her son was paying attention to her. She journeyed through her first master's while he was in high school. While taking care of her ill father and mastering a program, she wanted to demonstrate to her children that "*failure is not an option.*" Erica explained:

I was getting my first master's when he was in high school and a lot of times I wanted to stop, but because of him and my daughter, I kept going because I didn't want them to feel that failure was an option. So, although I was tired, because at the same time I was getting the first master's, my dad suffered a stroke which left him paralyzed on one side. So, it was just a lot going on in my world at the time but knowing that I had four eyes looking at me and they would pretty much mimic what they see the people in their lives do.

Felicia's perspective regarding influencing her son was from being an example also. Felicia stated:

I think that by him seeing as far as what I did, as far as education-wise and everything else on my work ethic and everything, I think that he sees what he should be doing. He sees that the importance of getting the education and being able because just looking

around us, other people who don't have education or whatever, the things that they are doing or the things that they are not doing, or not able to do because of not having the education. He sees that because looking at me, he sees the things that he needs, he sees that he needs to education to get to where he wants to be.

When explaining her feelings about having an influence on her son's academic achievement, Danielle passionately expressed, "You have to be who you want your kids to be." Danielle has been a model for many children. With her experience in the education field as a former teacher, and now administrator, she influences the educational perspective of young people every day. She believed that her son, and other children, are privileged to see the influence that she has on the achievement of the students and staff that she serves. She believes that her children take pride in the response of other students' reaction to her influence:

I think I set a good foundation when he was younger. They know that education is 100% important to me. They also see the role I play in a lot of my student's lives and I think that that means a lot to them. That's one of those things that people watch, but don't necessarily speak on. But as he's gotten older, he said, "Man, you know how much you mean to these people?" or "My teachers never cared that much about me" or "They're going to remember that forever, Mom." You know, what you just did. Things like that. So, I realized how much they realized the role that I've played in other kids' lives as well. And I think they take pride in that, which also helped shape their view of education.

When advising other single Black mothers, Irene urged them to be role models for their sons. She advised: "*You can't teach your kids to do something if you're not doing it. You can't lead them to a higher educational attainment, if you haven't done it. Kids are not like when I was coming up. My mother signed her name with an X, but one of the things that she instilled into all of us was to get an education. So, my thing is, you cannot look back at where you were. You got to look forward to where you want to go.*" Irene believed that she instilled those same principles into her sons. She did not attend school until she had both of her sons. She began to have her sons at a late age, but she preserved along with them through their journey. As of 2019, Irene

graduated with her terminal degree at 71, not allowing any of the challenges that she faced to hinder her educational aspirations or being the example that she desired to be for her sons.

Theme: Supportive Community

The researcher coded supportive community over thirty-five times when analyzing all transcripts. One of the most common themes—and one that is extensively documented in the literature (Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Brodsky, 2000; Carson, 2004; Holland, 2009; Kotchick et al., 2005; Robinson and Werblow, 2013)—was the inclusion of a supportive community. The support community, more commonly referenced as extended family in the literature, includes a larger family that plays a significant role in the well-being and care of the mother and son (Johnson & Staple, 2005; Jones et al., 2007). Extended family is an Afrocentric custom and value that is not limited to the nuclear family, but extended to family members, such as aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents (Johnson & Staple, 2005). Regarding this study, support community also includes church members and mentors. For many Black families, spirituality and church community are considered to be kinship (Brodsky, 2000; Ledford, 2010).

Eight of the nine participants mentioned the importance of their community throughout each interview and focus group session. The one participant that mentioned that she did not have a community was Irene. Of the six siblings that Irene had, only one of them lives. However, he did not live in the state that she resided in. She also mentioned that her mother and grandparents were deceased by the time she had her firstborn at 37. The family members that did live during the birth of her sons stayed in another state. After divorcing the first husband and the death of the second husband, while her sons were still young, Irene stated multiple times that she depended on her faith in God to carry her through every challenge that she faced because she did not have much help:

Really, to be very honest with you to look back at it now, I don't know how I did it. I mean, I stretched myself all over the place. There is not one game I did miss. There was not one time I didn't cook food for the kids after the game or anything like that. So, it was just a... I'm not trying to be over religious or whatever, but I can't do anything, but say it was all God, because it wasn't my strength that I was able to do this and to make it. And the more I look back at what I have accomplished and the things that I have done, I can't do anything, but just give God the credit for it. It was just him. I don't know. I can't explain it to you. I really can't. I don't know how to explain it to you, except that it was Him.

All the other parents had someone in their community to depend on—parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, and mentors. Three participants indicated that they received some type of support from their son's father. However, they felt like it could have been more intentional effort on the father's end.

Alicia's son had a great support system. Alicia never felt like she was alone due to the support of her family and many friends that assisted her children, especially her oldest son because he was the firstborn grandchild. The biggest influencer in her son's life was her grandfather. She believed that her grandfather attended to her son when he needed a strong male figure in his life.

Brandy's support system included her father, mother, sister, brother, nephews, and older cousins. While in high school, her son's father was not present. However, things changed for her son when he graduated from high school. He did not have the physical, financial, or emotional support of his father throughout most of his life. She never explained where the father was during his childhood. However, she appreciates how he has the support of his father, and father's brothers to support him at this point in his adulthood. Her son's biggest supporter and cheerleader was her mother, who passed in 2016. Brandy's parents were able to help raise Myles when Brandy temporarily moved to another city, approximately two hours away, to get a better job. She sent him to live with her parents for a while because she did not want him to stay in a

bad environment. She believed that the city was a place for economic opportunity but an unsafe place for her son to be raised.

After God, Christy believes that family is one of the most influential aspects of her sons' academic achievement. She relished how much her family supported her when raising her sons, and still receives support from them. Her children's father was incarcerated until they made it into their sophomore and junior year in high school. Christy had both of her sons while in college. So, her support community was essential to her and her educational outcome, even in her children's educational outcome. Christy is the only mother that mentioned the importance of mentorship in her sons' life. She asserted, "*If [the mentor] wasn't there, especially for [Jeremiah], when those times that he was struggling, I don't think that he would have been as successful as he was. So, mentorship is definitely a factor. Family is a factor.*" Around the age of fifteen, she saw a change in Jeremiah's behavior.

Even though he always excelled academically, she saw that he began to struggle with his behavior. She mentioned that he seemed to be angry and started to aggressive act out. Jeremiah was having issues with the fact that his father was not present in his life and wanted him to be there. Christy realized that he needed a positive male figure in his life and reached out to a positive male educator influence in her community. After connecting Jeremiah with him, she began to see a positive change in his behavior, academics, and even spiritual growth. She expressed her gratitude for the mentor because he was able to help her son to navigate through internal issues that she did not realize emanated from the absence of his father.

Danielle's children's father was also incarcerated. Her family and friends were an immense part of her community. She expressed a high regard of appreciation for her mother. Her

mother would visit during the summers to watch her children and give her a break. Danielle noted:

I don't see how I could've done it without even friends. I'll bring them over here to spend a night or...you know, my friend's husbands and they're going to a baseball game and stuff, "I'm going to take your son with me." Just different experiences that either I wasn't interested in or I just wouldn't have thought of. I had them going camping, which I absolutely hate, but it was for them. But just things like that, I couldn't have done it without other people helping me. So those people who say, "I don't need nobody. I don't need nothing. I could do it, myself," that's not true.

Felicia was present on the same conference call as Danielle. She concurred with Danielle's response about having a mother be supportive. Felicia's mother helped raise her son, taking him to school and picking him up from school. Felicia said:

Because being a single parent, black, white, or whatever, you have to have help. It takes a full village. And she was my backbone for a while because I worked out of town. She made sure [Joshua] got to school and got home from school because I was already either on my way to work by the time he had to go, or still at work by the time he got out of school. So, it really truly takes a village to raise, as a single black mother to raise a child. And when you actually have that support, that backbone, then it's everything. It really is everything.

Helen, who attended the same focus group as Felicia and Danielle, commented on how her mother was one of the reasons why her son pursued college. Her son had a strong relationship with his grandmother. When he completed his first degree, he dedicated it to her. Helen remarked:

You got to have the support. It's like I said, "It takes a village to raise a child"; that is true in some aspects. And my mom, the late [Mary Lee], she was definitely instrumental in their lives. She didn't get to see my youngest son graduate from college. She passed two years before he graduated from college, but that was the thing I had to support. I always had people around them, pushing them, telling them, "Hey, go on to college, make us proud of you. You know, we didn't do it, but we expect for you to go there and you take it to that level." So always had people around them, positive people around them, pushing them, telling them what they could do and what they could accomplish in life.

Gwen mentioned a few more members to her support community that some of the other participants did not make mention of—the people from the church and the pastor. She noted how

the church helped support her son in everything that he did. But most of all, she gave credit to her grandmother and mother. She indicated that he spent so much time with them that he emulated some of their old-fashioned mannerisms.

Theme: Spirituality

As in previous studies, the results of this analysis confirm that the institution of religion and spirituality is an essential value in the African American community (Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Brodsky, 2000; Henderson, Uecker, & Stroope, 2016; Frazier, 1964). According to Brodsky (2000), parenting is affected by religion. The findings of this study are also consistent with those of Wilson (2014), who found that the participants of her study spoke about religion in relation to their spirituality and strong belief in God. When the single mothers of her study discussed financial and emotional challenges, they pointed to part and their spiritual connection with God to them navigate through their problem. Wilson (2014) also found that mothers spoke about the importance of teaching their children about God. The participants of this study emphatically expressed that they were able to endure life's challenges and be resilient mothers because of their faith in God. They attributed their faith and prayers being the reason why their sons were able to excel in school. The reference to God was indicated fifty-five times overall in the interviews. The words pray, prayer, and praying, were mentioned twenty-nine times in nine interview sessions and three focus group sessions. One of the reasons why their sons excelled is because of (a) praying and (b) their dependence on God.

Subtheme: Praying. All of the participants talked about how praying is an important part of their lives and the lives of their sons. There were three instances in the interviews with Irene that she expressed the importance of prayer and how it is an intricate part of her daily life and parenting principle. During the focus group session, she admonished the other parents to pray:

The advice I would give, and this may sound forfeit, is to pray. This is the main thing. You have to pray; you have to seek God's guidance. Each of us that have been parents in rearing children, we have made mistakes. We have not been perfect parents. So, we've made mistakes, but we have to pray and ask God for guidance. We need to teach our children every morning before you leave, we're going to pray together. We're going to have this prayer. We're going to pray that God will protect you. And that God will strengthen you and that God will make you a student beyond students. You have to implement that into your child's everyday life.

Again, in her individual session with the researcher, she exclaimed:

My thing is to all parents. My recommendation is to be a praying parent. Be a praying parent. That is the top thing. That is the thing that will take you to the next level, take care of your children and give you the strength and an endurance to go ahead and rear your kids as they were to be reared. Train a child as you would have them to grow up and they will not depart from it. They may stray away, but they're going to come right back because you've taught them, and you have reestablished this... whatever they need to make it in this life.

Danielle's prayer to God concerning her son is, "*Just, Lord, please have the same grace on him that you had on me.*" Felicia also commented, "*You always lead out with prayer. You got to, that's for your sanity also.*" Christy believed that prayer should be a foundational principle taught to children:

Absolutely. You have to cover them in prayer, teach them to pray, teach them how to cover themselves in the classroom when they get on campus because there's a lot of the things that go on campus that parents never know anything about because the school's not going to tell them.

Subtheme: Dependence on God. Each participant expressed that they were able to survive as a single Black parent, raising their Black son with God's help. They depended on God for the financial provisions that were needed, the guidance on parenting at a young or old age, in directing and teaching their sons, and being the role model that they felt like they needed to be for their sons. Their faith in God is what kept them emotionally, mentally, and spiritually centered. Despite adapting to various situations, it was their faith that motivated them to continue to push and endure beyond the obstacle and circumstances that they had no control of. Each

mother vocally, passionately, and assertively expressed their stance on their faith and reliance on God.

Alicia taught her son how to refer back to the scripture, “*We can do all things through Christ that gives us strength.*” Helen stated, “*I always raised them to put Christ ahead.*” As Irene reflected on her experience in raising her sons, she wonders: “*And the more I look back at what I have accomplished and the things that I have done, I can't do anything, but just give God credit for it. It was just him. I don't know. I can't explain it to you. I really can't. I don't know how to explain it to you, except that it was Him.*”

Erica did not claim to be a perfect person, but she noted that she did the best that she could to put God first in her life and in everything situation she could. Erica stated:

I take it to God. I try to put God in everything that I do. Like I say, everything I try to do, and I'm not the perfect person, I'm not the holiest person, but I usually try to include God in everything that I do. Whether whatever I'm trying is meant for me, let it be shown somehow. And if it's not for me, let that be shown, so I can just walk away from it. Because sometimes, if it's too good to be true, you leave it alone before you even start. Or if it's something that you really have to work for, is it worth even doing that? Pretty much I just ask for guidance from God. So, "Give me a few signs or direction on what I should do."

Theme: Keep Him Involved.

The intentional involvement of the sons is the last theme that was extracted from the data. Each participant's son was involved in an academic organization and/or athletic team. Even though most mothers did not explicitly state their intentions to keep their sons involved in extracurricular activities, it was apparent that the sons benefited from being involved. Table 13 indicates the school academic and athletic organizations that the participants' sons were a part of.

Table 13*Sons' Involvement in High School*

<i>Mother's Name</i>	<i>Sons' Involvement</i>
<i>Alicia</i>	<i>Basketball</i>
<i>Brandy</i>	<i>BETA Club, Football, Baseball, Track</i>
<i>Christy</i>	<i>Baseball, Football, National Honor's Society, BETA Club,</i>
<i>Danielle</i>	<i>Lacrosse, Mentorship Program</i>
<i>Erica</i>	<i>High School band, Zydeco band</i>
<i>Felicia</i>	<i>BETA Club, Baseball, Football, Upward Bound, Track and Field</i>
<i>Gwen</i>	<i>Beta Club, History Club, Band Captain, All Academic Scholar Athlete, Basketball Team, Senior Class President, Mr. Freshman, Mr. Sophomore</i>
<i>Helen</i>	<i>Football, Basketball, Track</i>
<i>Irene</i>	<i>Basketball, Football, National Honor's Society, BETA</i>

Christy mentioned how she used athletics with her sons to leverage her influence on what she wanted academically from them. When asked the question about factors that contributed to the academic achievement of her sons, she replied:

Athletics. That part, because I held it over their head. You won't play a sport and you won't hit not one ball. You won't kick one, you won't put on a helmet until all your other stuff is done because you won't be that token kid running around, being all of that for them, if you can't get everything else done. Because that, right there, is going to go away, but this right here [academic] will never. So, I'm expecting for you to make sure you get all that you can in the classroom because on the field, on the diamond, on the basketball court, all of that, that doesn't matter to me. So, what factors in is because you want to play sports because you want all those things that you want, then you are giving me what I want. And if you can give me, if you can give me education, then we can, nothing else. You don't have to worry about anything else. And they never did.

Irene also kept her sons involved in sports because she wanted to keep them from being involved in the wrong activities and from following the wrong crowd:

I did not want them to end up getting into any trouble with like drugs and getting into trouble with the wrong crowds and things of that nature. And I guess that's why I kept them in sports. I kept them going so much until they didn't have time to get involved with kids that were not good for them.

Another reason that some of the participants' sons did their best in school is because they had to maintain a certain grade point average to participate in academic organizations and athletics.

Therefore, the parents would use that requirement to make sure that they stayed on top of their grades. If they did not make the required grade point average to participate, then they would take them off the team or be dismissed from the organization.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Overview

This study was a phenomenological examination of the educational influence and contributing factors that single Black mothers have on their sons' overall academic achievement. The study focused on the lived realities of the participants in efforts to reveal first-hand accounts of single Black mothers who have pushed their sons to academically matriculate beyond high school into a post-secondary institution. This research is warranted due to the scant attention given to the resiliency of single Black mothers and, its relationship with, the growth in the academic achievement of their Black sons. For years, publications regarding single Black mothers have been viewed from a deficit lens. Furthermore, it was important to examine the role of single Black mothers since data reflects the majority of Black children are being raised in single parent homes, with 56% being single Black mothers (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016). There exists a space and need for more research on the resiliency of single Black mothers and the influence that they have on their sons' education.

Review of Research Statement

The interest in this area of inquiry stems from my experience as a son who was raised by a single Black mother. My mother instilled a foundation in me to value education. Many of my former students have also been raised in single parent homes. I have been fortunate to see the resiliency and hard work that mothers use to push their sons and see the success of it. I am passionate about being a mentor and a catalyst for young men who have been raised without the help or lack of help of a father. I have also worked with mothers as an extended member of their support system and have adopted their sons into my life as my own.

Review of Methods

This research was a phenomenological study grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Resilience and Motherwork. Both frameworks assisted in identifying how mothers perceived their experiences in influencing their sons despite whatever adversities and oppositions that the mothers may have encountered in their own lives. Collectively, the frameworks posit that single Black mothers play a significant role in the educational, spiritual, and social well-being of their sons. The findings of this research support the tenets of both frameworks.

The qualitative tools used for this study were rooted in phenomenological and narrative inquiry (Creswell, 2018). The lived realities of single Black mothers whose sons had obtained a degree or pursuing post-secondary education was the phenomena investigated. This study extracted and examined data from individual interviews of nine single Black mothers. These interviews addressed the research questions:

1. How do single Black mothers perceive their experiences as influencing the overall academic achievement of their son(s)?
2. What factors contribute to single Black mothers' influence on their sons' overall academic achievement? Wording of research question different from p.9

The research participants were single Black mothers, ages 38-73, whose sons obtained or currently obtaining a post-secondary education. This study examined their lived experiences of raising their sons and the educational influence and contributing factors for their overall academic achievement. The participants were selected through purposive sampling and were recruited due to the familiarity with this particular phenomenon (e.g., self-identified as a Black American, have a son, son has completed high school, and son is currently pursuing or have obtained a post-secondary education).

Review of Findings

Six themes emerged from the participants' narratives regarding their experience in raising their son that has academically excelled. The six major phenomenological themes emerged in response to the two research questions: (1) supportive, (2) challenging, (3) achievement mindset, (4) support community, (5) spirituality, and (6) keep him involved.

Research Question 1: How do single Black mothers perceive their experiences as influencing the overall academic achievement of their son(s)?

Supportive. The narratives for this question indicated the importance of the mothers being supportive to their sons while raising them. The participants in this study have experienced many obstacles in their life while raising their sons; however, it was apparent that they did not slack in being highly visible and supportive in their sons' academics. In many instances, the mothers mentioned the word *supportive* and ways that they made sure that their son knew that they were going to be present, available and supportive to them. Within this theme, the mothers retold their stories of how they managed life while being hands-on and highly involved parents. Each parent expressed how hands-on they were in making sure they knew their sons' academic standing throughout the school year. They would make sure their sons received homework help and tutoring, summer enrichment programs, made school visits when needed, attended parent-teacher conferences, and even participated in parent-teacher organizations, if they could. Our findings are consistent with Leath et al. (2020). Black mothers are committed, highly invested and involved in their children's education despite the deficit-focused ideologies (Baquendano-Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Leath et al., 2020; Parson et al., 2018).

Alicia would have weekly conversations with her son about his schooling and subjects that he was struggling in. Brandy would leave work early on the Fridays that her son had a game

out of town to make sure that she made it. Throughout his entire high school career, she only missed one game. Christy coached her sons' baseball and basketballs team until they went to high school. By the time they started high school, she became a teacher there and made sure to keep up with the teachers every quarter on how she could support her sons' academic weaknesses. Danielle was a school administrator, yet still made time to make school visits when the teacher would notify her of her son's behavior, which did not happen often. Erica was actively supportive and present at the school where her son attended. She had access to his passwords and log-in information for school. Felicia considered herself to be the "homework person." She would make sure that taught him skills with teacher resources that she knew would be presented on the high-stake state assessment. Gwen and Irene were at the school weekly because their sons were active in various academic and athletic organizations. In some instances, they were the mothers that led the parent organizations (e.g., band club for parents, basketball moms, etc.).

In high school, Helen did not allow her sons to make their high school schedule. She did not want the school or her sons selecting courses that she did not think were challenging enough for them. She considered those type of courses "junk courses." She also mentioned how she believed that Black students have to work harder than their school counterparts. Therefore, she would make sure that her sons' teachers did not label them because of their race and place them in courses that she did not believe that were academically challenging. This is important because past research indicates that Black parents are uneasy about their children being "misrecognized" in school settings (Harris-Perry, 2006; Leath et al., 2020). Previous findings from Dancy (2014) and other scholarship demonstrated that Black children are disproportionately placed in special education classrooms, which is partly attributed to their race and negative academic stereotypes

associated with Blackness (Aranti, Wright, Cooper, 2011; Hibel, Farkas, & Morgan, 2010, Leath et al., 2020). When asked about their experience and how they felt that they contributed to their sons' academic success, with a sigh of relief, with all that they had going on, they did not know how they did it, but they made sure that their sons knew that they were there for them.

Challenging. Another theme that emerged from the data was the fact that the mothers felt like single motherhood was challenging in of itself. Self-sacrifice and emotional were two subthemes that emerged from this theme. Life inevitably presents many trials and situations. However, these mothers were resilient through the navigation of their “lifeworld” and still managed to be as active and involved as they were. When probed, the participants displayed a feeling of gratitude and appreciation to God and their supportive community. As indicated in the literature, the result of this analysis confirms that single Black mothers face different challenges from their other racial and gender subgroups. The parenting stress that is associated with single Black mother parenting includes, but not limited to, financial struggles, helping their sons navigate through racism, protecting them from microaggressions, emotional difficulties, being the sole provider, working multiple jobs, balancing parenting, work, and life, are just a few hardships that they encountered (Jackson, Choi, & Preston, 2015; Johnson & Staples, 2005; Powell & Coles, 2021).

Each participant had their own unique story of how they managed to influence their sons' overall academic achievement, but it did not happen without self-sacrifice and emotional challenge, which is why I call them resilient. In chapter one, I reiterated the definition of resilience from Southwick et al. (2014) as, “the capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten the viability, the function, or the development of that system. For the sake of this study, the system includes family and school. The majority of the

participants in this study worked multiple jobs or were enrolled in school when they were raising their sons. Moreover, there were different risk factors like economic, work-related, and family-related difficulties that impacted their emotional and mental health. However, their protective factor was their dependence on God, daily life of prayer, and confidence in themselves that their challenging situations were an issue that they knew that they possessed the internal power and stamina to overcome and endure.

Research Question 2: What factors contribute to single Black mothers' influence on their sons' overall academic achievement?

The participants recalled varying factors that contributed to their sons' overall academic achievement. The most common themes that emerged to answer this question were achievement mindset, supportive community, spirituality, and keeping their sons involved. The subthemes that emerged from these themes were the value of benefits of an education, lead by example, praying and dependence on God.

Achievement Mindset. Eight of the nine participants agreed that the value of an education was most important to them. Because of this mindset, these mothers took an authoritative parenting style and approach to education. Research suggests that authoritative parenting is a common African American parenting style that is known to have a positive correlation with academic achievement (West-Olatunji et al., 2010). Research also suggests that this parenting style, along with firmness, discipline, caring, and encouragement contributes to the success of the child (Mandara, 2006; West-Olatunji et al., 2010). Most of the parents mentioned that they set clear goals and have high expectations for their sons. Going to school every day and getting their education was their main priority. The value for the benefits of education and lead by examples were subthemes that were extracted from this theme. Eight of the nine parents had

degrees ranging from associate to doctorate in their respective field. The majority of them shared their experience of being in school while raising them so that they could see an example and model of what success and academic achievement should look like. For example, Irene pursued her master's degree while her son was in high school, and then pursued her doctorate while he was in college. She wanted her son to see that if she could do it at the age of 71, then he could do it, too. All of the participants expressed that they had open lines of communication with their sons coupled with encouragement and discipline. Danielle asserted that the only reason why her son is in college is because of her. Even though he does not understand the benefits of it now, she believes that he will understand why she pushed him later on.

Support Community. Undoubtedly, this theme is one of the most important contributing factors of the overall academic achievement of the sons, but support systems for the mother as well. Support community is indicated in the literature as extended support. It is almost inevitable to research single Black mothers and extended support is not a finding within the results. The support of a community of loved ones and family is essential to the success of single Black mothers (Brodsky, 2000; Holland, 2009; Kotchick et al., 2005, Wilson, 2014). This support consists of family members that play a vital role in the mother and the sons' well-being. Each participant retold the stories of having the support of their family and extended family, including mentors, church members, and pastors. One of the main family members that are often referred by the participants was their mothers. The role of the grandmothers of the sons was important to their stability and achievement. Eight of the nine participants mentioned how their mothers were highly engaged in their sons' life and schooling. Five of the participants retold the story of their mothers raising their sons at one point in their life while they pursued their education at a university that was not located in their hometown. Even with working multiple jobs, the mothers

talked about how their supportive community would watch their sons, pick them up from school, or even attend certain events in their stead. Christy also gave credit to a mentor that her youngest son had in high school. She had a few behavior issues with him and thought it would be a great idea to connect him with a positive male figure. Through the relationship with the mentor, she saw a change in his behavior, academics, and spiritual journey. These mothers agreed that they could not have been an effective mother without the help of people within their support community that assisted them.

Spirituality. Spirituality is a prominent theme in the literature regarding the African American family and single Black mothers. Spirituality is also considered a factor pertinent to resiliency (Massey, 2015; VanBreda, 2001). Praying and dependence on God are two subthemes that emerged from this theme. Each participant noted the significance of prayer and faith in God as being essential principles in raising their sons and the foundation for their spiritual, emotional, and mental well-being. Irene, a strong faith believer, referenced her stance on prayer and reliance on God more frequently than any mother that participated. However, when asked to give advice to other single Black mothers, each participant stressed the vitality of having faith and a prayer life in regard to raising their sons. It is also a principle that they have instilled in their sons as they journey through life and school.

Keep Him Active. Every participant's son was highly involved in an academic or athletic organization. As mentioned in chapter four, a few parents mentioned that they kept their sons active to keep them from hanging with the wrong crowd or to use it as leverage for them accountable to their academics. Five of the nine participants had concerns about their sons following peers that were not as academically focused or those that were involved in gang affiliations or drug-related activities. To make sure they stayed on their desired path for them,

they allowed them to be active in organizations and athletics that was going to keep their attention focused, in hope that the academic or athletic path would lead to a favorable outcome, such as a scholarship or other academic and/or athletic opportunity.

Recommendations for Single Black Mothers

The purpose of this research was to provide a platform for single Black mothers to amplify their voices on their experiences as having an educational influence on the overall academic achievement of their sons. Each mother spoke passionately about the love that they have for their sons and the contributing factors that played a vital role in their sons' achievement. When asked to provide advice to other single mothers that are raising their son(s), the mothers suggested:

1. Pray for them every day and teach them to put God first.
2. Be the shining example for your son. You have to lead by example and be who you want your son to be.
3. Keep a support system for yourself and your son(s). You cannot journey through life by yourself. Open yourself up to support and help.
4. Instill in your son(s) the value of having an education and having a life plan early.
5. Support your son; make sure that he knows that you are there for him.
6. Keep lines of communication open. Trust is a vital factor in any relationship. Your son needs to know that he can always be transparent with you in conversation.
7. Allow him to express himself; be flexible.
8. Be an accountability partner for your son. Help him to set goals for himself and stick with them.
9. Keep your son(s) active in something that he loves to do.

10. Affirm your son; speak positive and edifying words to him that would motivate and encourage him.

11. Correct, discipline, and protect your son in a loving manner.

Implications for Schools

Participants from this research provided potential advice to schools, teachers and administrators. The participants believed that schools could do a better job at providing ways to accommodate and communicate with single Black mothers. School systems work with diverse family structures, but the participants believed that communication has not always been conducive for them. As this study has indicated, many single Black mothers work multiple jobs and sometimes it is difficult for them to attend events in-person. Most of the participants would prefer if schools created ways of hosting different events, ceremonies, and conferences via livestream or virtual so that they may have an opportunity to participate even when they cannot be physically present.

The participants also believed that schools are not effective in their communication regarding education and educational opportunities. Some of the mothers felt like their schools did not provide them or their sons with information or resources of the opportunities that their school or universities had for them. Therefore, schools could do a better job with communicating in ensuring that all families have the information and resources that they need to support their sons in their educational endeavors.

Implications for Counselors and Mental Health Professionals

This study can inform the work of counselors and mental health professionals. One of the mothers pointed out that they prefer for mental health professionals and counselors to assist in providing services for them and their sons. A couple of the parents encountered behavior issues with their sons around the age of fourteen and fifteen. They mentioned that their sons

demonstrated aggressive and defiant behaviors because of anger. One mother recalled a time that she needed help because her son's grades declined, and anger outbursts became a frequent problem. These mothers concluded that the root of their son's anger stemmed from the lack of their father's presence. They found ways to navigate through it with the support of mentors. However, counselors could provide services to help Black boys (or any boy) that has grown up without one of their parents and have difficulty internalizing and externalizing this issue.

The literature provides clear and substantial evidence on the emotional and mental difficulties that single Black mothers encounter. Issues of financial hardship and other problems associated with raising a Black son have been demonstrated through this research. Mental health professionals could provide services to mothers that would assist them in coping with depression, anxiety, insecurities, and fear.

Implications for Community-based Organizations

This research presents a need for community-based organizations to provide local support for single Black mothers and their sons. These organizations could provide spaces for dialogue, workshops, and seminars rooted in Afrocentric strategies of parenting, approaches, and support for single Black mothers and their sons. Through culturally relevant materials and resources, an evidence-based curriculum could be designed to inform single Black mothers of the elementary of resilience and what it would take for them to overcome the different adversities and life's situations.

They could also use these organizations to establish support groups and mentorship. Some of the mothers mentioned the importance of having a mentor for themselves and the role and impact that a mentor had on the way that she successfully raised her son.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study the following are suggestions for further research:

1. Few researchers have examined the lived experiences of the sons that have been raised by resilient single Black mothers. This research would be beneficial to give voice and examine their perceived experience of their mother's influence on their overall academic achievement.
2. This study examined the contributing factors that single Black mothers used to raise Black males. However, it would be interesting to see if the outcomes are similar for single mothers and sons from other racial backgrounds.
3. The study demonstrated strong emphasis on the educational influence of single Black mothers on the overall academic achievement of their sons. However, a study focused on females to examine the comparisons and differences between the two subgroups.
4. Some mothers mentioned that they wished they could have had intentional mentorship from other single Black mothers. Future research will have to ascertain the veracity of mentorship for mothers and examine the factors that these mentors use to contribute to mothers' success.
5. Lastly, the mothers of this study emphasized the importance of the role of their mothers, the sons' grandmother, in their life. Future studies could shed light on the experiences, voices, and perceptions of grandmothers that have played a vital role in raising their grandsons.

Conclusion

Single Black mothers and their lived experiences served as the focal point for this research study. The goal of this study was to amplify the voices of single Black mothers and

present their experiences, in their own words. It is significant to incorporate the narratives of these mothers in educational research because it provides a candid reality of the challenges for single Black mothers to push the academic achievement of their sons.

This study also examined the contributing factors that single Black mothers utilized to push the achievement of their sons. The area of inquiry used phenomenological methods to examine the phenomenon of being single, Black, and a mother of sons that have either graduated from college or pursuing a post-secondary degree. The study revealed six themes that detailed past, present, and future narratives of nine single Black mothers. The themes included supportive, challenging, achievement mindset, support community, spirituality, and keep sons active. Findings from this study should be used to create future research in the area of single Black mothers, Black male achievement, and resiliency of single Black mothers.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Form to Participate in Research

Title of Project: From Deficit to Strength: The Educational Influence of Single Black Mothers on Their Sons' Academic Achievement

Principal Investigators: Tyre' D. Jenkins, doctoral student, Xavier University of Louisiana
Tjenkin7@xula.edu, (225) 938-7914

Advisor Information: Dr. Timothy Glaude, Division of Education and Counseling,
tglaude@xula.edu

Please read the following material that explains this research study. Signing this form will indicate that you have been informed about the study and that you want to participate. We want you to understand what you are being asked to do and what risks and benefits—if any—are associated with this study. This should help you decide whether or not you want to participate in the study.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

This study will fill a gap in literature in regard to single Black mothers and their sons. There is no blueprint of evidence-based practices to support single mothers that may be struggling with raising her children, especially her Black son. This study will illuminate the stories of the academic achievement of Black males through the voice and perceptions of their mothers. The aim of this research is to shift from the problematic narratives, which emphasizes the Black males' shortcomings and deficiencies, and move towards reshaping the knowledge base on how Black males achieve positive educational experiences and how parents are able to make this work.

PROCEDURES

For this reason, I intend on learning about your personal experiences regarding this topic and am requesting your participation, which will involve an interview of about 45-60 minutes. A minimum of seven participants will be invited to be interviewed in this study. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may choose to skip questions or end the interview at any point. Your decision to participate, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any point will have no consequences to you and will not be disclosed to anyone. Interviews will take place via Zoom, a cloud-based video communications app that allows the researcher to set up virtual video and audio conferencing other collaborative capabilities.

If you agree to be a part of this study, you will be asked questions about certain experiences in raising your son. If you agree, your interview will be audio-taped so that I can keep an accurate record of our conversation for later transcription.

DISCOMFORT AND RISKS

If at any time the interview becomes difficult or straining, I can stop, and you can choose to go on to the other questions or end the interview entirely.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

There are no known significant personal benefits to being in this research study. Your participation in this study will also contribute to the body of research on single Black mothers. This is a topic that I am sincerely invested in, and it would be of great help to me if you participate.

COSTS FOR PARTICIPATION

Costs: There are no costs associated with participation in this study.

COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

You will not be paid for being in this research study.

STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

The research records are reviewed, stored and analyzed at the home of the researcher. It will be kept in a secured area and digital files will be stored on a password-protected device and destroyed a minimum of three years after the study is completed. In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

All participants will be given pseudonyms in our research. Consent forms will not include a participant's pseudonym. The list linking pseudonyms to respondents will be kept as a password-protected file on my personal computer. This file will never be placed on a shared drive. A pseudonym will be used in all interview transcripts, notes, analysis files, and presentations.

I will keep your participation in this research study confidential to the extent that I am able. However, the Xavier University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) may inspect and copy research records.

STUDY WITHDRAWAL

If you choose to participate, you are free to withdraw your permission for the use and sharing of your information at any time. You must do this in writing. Write to Tyre' D. Jenkins and let me know that you are withdrawing from the research study. My email address is tjenkin7@xula.edu.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You do not have to participate in this research. If you choose to take part, you have the right to stop at any time. If you decide not to participate or if you decide to stop taking part in the research at a later date, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS

You have the right to ask any questions you may have about this research. If you have any questions, complaints or concerns or believe you may have developed an injury related to this research, contact Tyre' Jenkins at (225) 938-7914 or by email at tjenkin7@xula.edu.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a human participating in research, you may contact Dr. Charles Gramlich, Chair of the Xavier University IRB, at cgramlic@xula.edu, or at (504) 520-7397.

SIGNATURE AND CONSENT/PERMISSION TO BE IN THE RESEARCH

Your signature below means that you have received this information, have asked the question you currently have about the research and those questions have been answered. You will receive a copy of the signed and dated form to keep for future reference.

By signing this consent form, you indicate that you are voluntarily choosing to take part in this research.

Signature of Subject

Date

Printed Name

My signature below means that I have explained the research to the subject and have answered any questions you have about the research.

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Printed Name

Appendix B: Participant Demographic Information

Name: _____ **Age:** _____

Address: _____

City, State, & Zip Code: _____

Phone #: _____ **Email address:** _____

Number of Children: _____ **Number of sons:** _____

Highest Level of Education Completed:

- High School Graduate/GED
 Associate degree Major: _____
 Bachelor's Degree Major: _____
 Graduate Degree (MA/MS/MSW) Major: _____
 Advanced Graduate Degree (PhD, EdD, JD, MD) Field: _____

Profession (Current Occupation): _____

What is your current employment status?

- a. Employed full-time
- b. Employed part-time
- c. Seeking opportunities
- d. Retired
- e. Prefer not to say

What is your annual household income?

- a. Less than \$25,000
- b. \$25,000 - \$50,000
- c. \$50,000 - \$100,000
- d. \$100,000 or more
- e. Prefer not to say

Questions Concerning Son:

1. How old is your son?: _____
2. What is his educational attainment?: _____
3. What is/was his major in college? _____
4. What extracurricular activities were your sons involved in?

5. If he's into his career, what is his current occupation? _____

Appendix C: Interview Protocol Form

In the interviews, the following protocol will be followed, with appropriate and reasonable discretion for omitting, adding, and modifying interviewing questions:

Interview Introduction:

My name is Tyre' Jenkins. I am a doctoral candidate at Xavier University of Louisiana. The purpose of this study is to provide a platform for single Black mothers to amplify their voices in order to gain a better understanding of the mother's lived experiences in supporting their son's academic achievement. To facilitate my notetaking, I would like to audio and video record our conversation today. Before we get started, I would like for you to sign the consent form. For your information, my committee members and myself will be the only persons privy to the recordings, which will eventually be destroyed after they are transcribed. In addition, you must sign a form devised to meet our human subject requirements. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential and your identity will be protected, (2) your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) I do not intend to inflict any harm. I appreciate you for taking time from your busy schedule to participate in this study.

The interview is designed to gather information from single Black mothers that have influenced the academic achievement of their sons. You should understand that there are no particular answers that I am looking for other than those that would give me the benefit of your most accurate and candid perception and experience. If you feel that you are in no position to answer any given question (or set of questions) for any reason, I ask that you simply inform me that you lack the requisite information.

Interviewee Background

I'd like to begin by asking you a question about your background.

1. Tell me about yourself (age, occupation, educational attainment, family demographics, religious backgrounds).
2. Tell me about your son(s).
3. How does it feel being a mother?
4. How did it feel being a single Black mother?
5. How do you handle defeat or setbacks?
6. What do you do to cope with tension or pressure?
7. Can you identify what you might consider to be your biggest failure? How did you handle it?
8. Can you identify a major crisis and how you handled it?

Experience of Single Black Mothers (RQ1: How do single Black mothers perceive their experiences as influencing the academic achievement of their son(s)?)

9. How would you describe your relationship with your son(s)?
10. How do you perceive education? Does it hold any value to you?
11. What was your educational expectation for your son(s)?
12. Being a single Black mother, how did the absence of his father in the home influence the way you raised him?

Contributing Factors (RQ2: What factors contribute to the single Black mother's influence on their son's academic achievement?)

13. What role did you play in your son's academic success?
14. What factors do you believe contributed to the academic achievement of your son(s)?
15. How would you rank these factors according to importance to guide other single Black mothers?

Appendix D: Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
Background Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell me about yourself (age, occupation, educational attainment, family demographics, religious background). 2. Tell me about your son. 3. How does it feel being a mother? 4. How did it feel being a single Black mother? 5. How do you handle defeat or setbacks? 6. What do you do to cope with tension or pressure? 7. Can you identify what you might consider to be your biggest failure? How did you handle it? 8. Can you identify a major crisis and how you handled it? 9. How would you describe your relationship with your son(s)?
RQ1: How do single Black mothers perceive their experiences as influencing the academic achievement of their son(s)?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. How do you perceive education? Does it hold any value to you? 11. What was your educational expectation for your son(s)? 12. Being a single Black mother, how did the absence of his father influence the way you raised him?
RQ2: What factors contribute to the single Black mother's influence on their son's academic achievement?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. What role did you play in your son's academic success? 14. What factors do you believe contributed to the academic achievement of your son(s)? 15. How would you rank these factors according to importance to guide other single Black mothers?

Appendix E: Interview Protocol for Focus Group

Date/Time: _____ **No. of participants attending** _____

My name is Tyre' Jenkins and I will be facilitating this focus group interview. I am a doctoral candidate at Xavier University of Louisiana. The purpose of this study is to provide a platform for single Black mothers to amplify their voices in order to gain a better understanding of the mother's lived experiences in supporting their son's academic achievement.

You were selected through a voluntary response to the recruitment flyer that has been posted across social media platforms or local communality centers. There will only be one focus group session conducted with five participants. Prior to this interview, you were sent a consent form prior to the session today. The focus group interview will take approximately 90 minutes and will follow a designed interview protocol. I appreciate you for taking your time to be a part of this study. You are making a contribution to this study and literature in assisting to shift the negative narrative about single Black mothers and Black males to a more positive outlook.

Does anyone have any questions?

If there are no further questions, let's get started with the first question.

[Note: the researcher will use phrases such as "Tell me more", "Could you give me an example?", "Could you explain that?", as prompts to solicit more detailed information needed]

1. To get start, let's introduce ourselves. In your introduction, please tell us who you are and a little about your son.
2. As you know, the current study being conducted focuses on the lived experiences of single Black mothers that has raised their sons and have seen them matriculated beyond a high school education. Reflect on your role as a mother throughout your son's high school journey. How would you describe your experience?
3. What challenges did you face while raising your son(s)?
 - a. Probe: What ways do you feel like those challenges affected your son(s) (i.e., behaviorally, psychologically, academically)?
 - b. Probe: What strategies did you use to motivate him to stay focus on school?
 - c. Probe: What made you resilient during this time?
4. What type of concerns did you have for your son(s) when raising him?
 - a. Within the past ten years, there has been a rise in police brutality, civil unrest, and protest demonstrations across the United States. What type of parenting strategies did you employ while raising him?

5. Did you have a support system? If so, who were they?
 - a. Probe: What role did your support system play in your son(s)'s life?
6. How active were you, as a parent, when he was in high school?
 - a. Probe: Did you build relationships with his teachers? If so, how was it?
 - b. Probe: Were you a part of any parent organizations at the school?
7. Since graduating high school and pursuing post-secondary education, how would you describe your son now?
 - a. Probe: How would you describe your relationship with him now?
8. How could schools better partner with parents and organizations? What advice would you give other mothers that are struggling with raising their sons alone?

Appendix F: Focus Group Questions

Opening Question

1. To get start, let's introduce ourselves. In your introduction, please tell us who you are and a little about your son.
2. As you know, the current study being conducted focuses on the lived experiences of single Black mothers that has raised their sons and have seen them matriculated beyond a high school education. Reflect on your role as a mother throughout your son's high school journey. How would you describe your experience?

Main Questions:

3. What challenges did you face while raising your son(s)?
 - a. What ways do you feel like those challenges affected your son(s) (i.e., behaviorally, psychologically, academically)?
 - b. What strategies did you use to motivate him to stay focus in school?
 - c. What made you resilient during this time?
4. What type of concerns did you have for your son(s) when raising him?
 - a. Within the past ten years, there has been a rise in police brutality, civil unrest, and protest demonstrations across the United States. What type of parenting strategies did you employ while raising him?
5. Did you have a support system? If so, who were they?
 - a. What role did your support system play in your son(s)'s life?
6. How active were you, as a parent, when he was in high school?
 - a. Did you build relationships with his teachers? If so, how was it?
 - b. Were you a part of any parent organizations at the school?

Closing Questions

7. Since graduating high school and have obtained or currently pursuing post-secondary, how would you describe your son now?
 - a. How would you describe your relationship with him now?
8. How could schools better partner with parents and organizations? What advice would you give other mothers that are struggling with raising their sons alone?

Appendix G: Field Notes Template

Focus Questions	Detail	Reflection
1. To get start, let's introduce ourselves. In your introduction, please tell us who you are and a little about your son.		
2. As you know, the current study being conducted focuses on the lived experiences of single Black mothers that has raised their sons and have seen them matriculated beyond a high school education. Reflect on your role as a mother throughout your son's high school journey. How would you describe your experience?		
3. What challenges did you face while raising your son(s)? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What ways do you feel like those challenges affected your son(s) (i.e., behaviorally, psychologically, academically)? b. What strategies did you use to motivate him to stay focus in school? 		
4. What type of concerns did you have for your son(s) when raising him? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Within the past ten years, there has been a rise in police brutality, civil unrest, and protest demonstrations across the United States. What type of parenting strategies did you employ while raising 		

him?		
5. Did you have a support system? If so, who were they? a. What role did your support system play in your son(s)'s life?		
6. How active were you, as a parent, when he was in high school? a. Did you build relationships with his teachers? If so, how was it? b. Were you a part of any parent organizations at the school?		
7. Since graduating high school and currently pursuing a post-secondary education, how would you describe your son now? a. How would you describe your relationship with him now?		
8. How could schools better partner with parents and organizations? What advice would you give other mothers that are struggling with raising their sons alone?		

Appendix H: Recruitment Flyer



CALL TO COMMITMENT

THE EDUCATIONAL IMPACT OF SINGLE MOTHERS ON THEIR SON'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

YOU ARE ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE IF YOU:

1**SELF IDENTIFY AS A BLACK WOMAN****2****RAISED A SON AS CUSTODIAL PARENT****3****FATHER WAS NOT ACTIVELY PRESENT**

FATHER WAS NOT ACTIVELY PRESENT (PHYSICALLY, EMOTIONALLY, OR FINANCIALLY)

4**SON COMPLETED HIGH SCHOOL**

SON MUST HAVE COMPLETED COLLEGE OR CURRENTLY PURSUING POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

FOR ANY QUESTIONS

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
TYRE' JENKINS, M.ED
TYJENK7@GMAIL.COM