A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES OF

SINGLE PARENTS WHO ARE REARING ELEMENTARY-AGED CHILDREN

ENROLLED IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL IN A RURAL COMMUNITY

by

Jenine LaVonne Cotman

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

Gail Collins, EdD, Committee Chair

Tony Ryff, PhD, Committee Member

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to examine the experiences of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development was used to guide this study. Vygotsky's theory focuses on cognitive development being fundamentally framed by social interaction. Vygotsky also believed that cognitive development is strengthened when a child is encouraged to learn within their zone of proximal development, which refers to a person's current cognitive space that can be further developed with social interaction and help from a teacher, peer, or parent. The central research question asked, "What are the experiences of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community?" A purposeful sample of a combination of 11 teachers and single parents of elementary-aged children from a small rural public school in the United States was selected as participants. Data collection included interviews, separate focus groups for teachers and parents, and participant journals. I utilized Moustakas' methods to analyze this study. The findings show that single parents in August County have high academic expectations for their children, despite the challenges of living in a rural community that includes a lack of internet, a deficit in school funding, and transportation. The single parent participants in this study all reported that their children benefitted greatly from family and teacher support.

Keywords: single parent, non-nuclear family, student, education, family structure

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Dedication

This dissertation work is dedicated to my husband, Alonzo, who has always believed in me, and pushed me to be the best that I can be. To my daughters, Jaylen and Jada, you both continue to be my motivation.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. None of this would be possible without continued grace and mercy, and the blessings bestowed upon me each day.

I am eternally grateful to the participants of this study for sharing the truth of their lived experiences in order to make education better for future generations.

Thank you to Dr. Gail Collins, my dissertation committee chair, and Dr. Tony Ryff, committee member from Liberty University. Your guidance through this process has been second to none.

Finally, I must acknowledge my support system. My husband, children, grandchildren, parents, siblings, nieces, nephews, cousins, friends, colleagues, Archbishop and First Lady, and my entire church family. You all were there for me every step of the way, and I am eternally grateful. WE DID IT!

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List of Abbreviations

August County Elementary School (ACES, pseudonym)

August County Public Schools (ACPS, pseudonym)

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model of the Parental Involvement Process (HD-S)

International Review Board (IRB)

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT)

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Many families are being led by single parents. Three hundred twenty million children in the world are being raised in a single-parent household, with most being raised by the mother (Agnafors et al., 2019). I was one of those children who were raised by a single mother. My experiences have led me to this research study. This qualitative transcendental phenomenological study examined the experiences of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and the zone of proximal development provided the theoretical framework for this study. This chapter serves as an introduction to the many issues single parents face, coupled with the challenges of raising children in a rural community. This problem is introduced, as well as the purpose and significance of this study. The central research question and its sub-questions are offered and definitions for key terms are provided.

Background

The world is made up of all types of people. Single parents are rearing their children on their own. Being a single parent can be challenging at so many levels. There is a health disparity among children from single-parent households. A lower intake of healthy foods like fruits and vegetables coupled with an overconsumption of sugary drinks and high fat foods has led to an increase in obesity (Duriancik & Goff, 2019). When there is only one income in the household, children may have to become latchkey kids, and there may be discipline issues because of the absence of a second parent. Children being raised by a single parent may experience negative impacts as a result. According to Usakli (2018), "a child belonging to a broken family has constant internal conflict" (p. 22). The historical, social, and theoretical contexts for this study

are discussed in the following sections.

Historical Context

The 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries gave rise to high parent mortality rates in the United States. Death due to childbirth complications, war, and disease were single-handedly the most typical causes of single-parent families being formed (Chapman, 2015). The rate of divorce increased from the 19th to the 20th centuries (Chapman, 2015). Single parents must learn to cope with the emotions that arise after a divorce, along with childcare strategies and reorganizing their life (Van Gasse & Mortelmans, 2020a). There was a substantial increase in children living in a single-parent family due to divorce and separation (Van Gasse & Mortelmans, 2020a). Even though being raised by a single parent is not a new phenomenon, more children grow up in single-parent households today than they did five decades ago (Elliott et al., 2015). Another cause of the single parent spike is becoming a single parent by choice (Van Gasse & Mortelmans, 2020b). Becoming a single parent by choice is done by adoption or sperm donation. These single parents desire to take the negative stereotype away from being a single parent (Van Gasse & Mortelmans, 2020b).

Social Context

According to Freeman (2017) traditionally single parents often faced social ridicule. Freeman reported that mothers often faced pressure to live up to the definition of a good mother in the eyes of society, crossing racial and class lines. With so many students being raised in single-parent households, the myriad of problems this causes is extensive. From inappropriate behavior, to lack of resources and inadequate support at home, school districts, administrators, teachers, and counselors need to be equipped to identify these students and to provide the help they need to be academically successful. Some educators have preconceived notions concerning

students from single-parent households. This could be due to previous teacher talk or from their own personal experiences with these families. Teachers may believe that children of single parents do not have much of a chance academically. Addressing this ever-growing problem not only concerns the student in the single-parent household, but it can also affect other students. Due to less emotional support from the single parent, children from single-parent households have historically been more likely to experience emotional and social difficulties than students raised in two-parent households (Baker et al., 2019; Taylor & Conger, 2017). If negativity is frequently expressed in the home and the neighborhood, children easily pick up on this. Addressing this problem will not only benefit the child, but there will be extensive benefits for educators, administrators, and school districts.

Theoretical Context

Vygotsky's (1986) sociocultural theory of cognitive development (SCT) highlighted the culture in which a child is raised, along with the importance of using a rich language and writing that has the power to elicit the highest level of cognition in children. Vygotsky's (1986) theory is vital in understanding how single parents perceive education and culturally teach how they value education to their children. The value of education may not have been expressed in the family of the current single parent; therefore, the parent does not feel the need to highlight education as a goal for their child. The single parent may be lacking the skills and knowledge to assist their child in their academics at home.

Vygotsky's (1986) SCT is useful as a framework to understand the family dynamics present in a household being headed by a single parent. A child learns from the major relationships they form in their lives. For a child being raised by a single parent, being in that person's presence is how they will develop speech, morals, values, and even social constructs.

Vygotsky (1986) believed that the mind of a child would not reach its highest potential without interpersonal instruction. A child's immediate social and cultural surroundings are where the earliest learning takes place.

Problem Statement

The problem is that single parents have many challenges facing them daily, including their relationship with their children, stress as a result of having the sole responsibility of taking care of their children, and the lack of social support when overseeing the academics of their elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community (Baker et al., 2019; Browne & Battle, 2018; Elliott et al., 2015). Unfortunately, supporting to their children's education is often lower on the single parent's list of priorities behind taking care of their child's physical needs. Underlying factors such as socioeconomic status, race, and resilience are roadblocks that can alter the academic success of students from single-parent households (Daryanani et al., 2016). Uncovering the evidence on how family structure correlates to educational achievement provides insight as to what can be done to address this problem (Nonoyama-Tarumi, 2017). Students being raised by single parents are often identified as aggressive or at risk, but it is important for educators to develop a greater understanding of the problem (Baker et al., 2019; Usakli, 2018).

Children from single-parent households often have a unique set of circumstances such as lack of transportation, low socioeconomic status, being left unsupervised because of their parent's need to work, and lack of parental support. Even one or a combination of these circumstances can have a negative outcome on academic success. With programs in place to combat these factors both at home and at school, these students can be successful and break the cycle for students who will follow them (Yue et al., 2018).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to examine the experiences of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community. A single parent was defined as a parent or guardian who is rearing children as the lone caregiver in the household (Han et al., 2020). They may be single by choice, abandonment, divorce, or the death of a spouse. Guiding this study was Vygotsky's (1986) SCT that highlights a child's culture, language, and writing correlating to their cognitive development. Children from single-parent households have many negative influences that may be the root cause behind them experiencing challenges in elementary school (Baker et al., 2019). Rural communities are considered as having a low population, lack of services, underdeveloped, and outside the city limits (MacGregor-Fors & Vázquez, 2020).

Significance of the Study

Empirical, theoretical, and practical significance are discussed in light of the importance of this study. It is imperative to create an understanding of the many obstacles single parents must face when they are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community. Single parents make up a large demographic within society, and many children from single-parent households will benefit from acquiring the tools and knowledge needed for academic success as well as success in their life goals and pursuits (Dronkers et al., 2017).

Empirical Significance

Research regarding single parents and the effect being reared by a single parent has on a child's educational achievement is readily available (Malczyk & Lawson, 2017; Song, 2016). However, understanding the specific mindset of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community necessitates a need for further research.

Single parents can be mothers, fathers, grandparents, siblings, or even guardians (Krueger et al., 2015). Single parents have stories of resilience and achievement and perceive value when they are heard (West et al., 2017). Single parents with elementary-aged children who live in a rural community often have less educational attainment (Oerther & Shattell, 2019). Single parents are a dominant demographic in society compared to 50 years ago when most households were headed by a mother and a father (Elliott et al., 2015). Of importance to administrators and educators is the home environment of students raised in single-family households and how it affects school readiness, behavior, and cognition (Fomby et al., 2016).

Theoretical Significance

This research looked to build on ways students from single-parent households can be supported in keeping with the theoretical significance of Vygotsky's (1986) SCT and the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (HD-S) model of the parental involvement process (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Vygotsky's ideas regarding thought that is internalized with culture, language that facilitates conversation, tools that are used to lead to changes in objects, and signs that are used to work on self-mastery are useful in socially situated explorations leading to educational development and transformation (Marginson & Dang, 2017). Vygotsky (1986) believed that the very development of thought is determined by language and the sociocultural experience of the child. Parents are the representatives of society to their children, and those experiences constitute a biological or physical environment. Vygotsky (1986) believed the child's intake of information can be transferred from sociological to biological, having an effect on the actual development of the child. Stressors associated with the disruption of family structure can affect the child's emotional well-being (Fomby et al., 2016). The implications of the family dynamics, and relationships are profound to the future of children from single-parent

households. The absence of a parent who makes education a priority, due to not having

experience with positive educational outcomes themselves, can be detrimental for the student

(Kalmijn, 2015). The HD-S provides an overview of why families become involved with their

children's education, what they do when they are involved, and how it positively affects the

educational outcome of the children. Parents' ideas regarding the appropriateness of their role in

their child's education is subject to social influence and teacher recommendations (Hoover-

Dempsey et al., 2005).

Practical Significance

Students from single-parent households make up a large demographic of August County

Public Schools (ACPS, pseudonym). The student population attending ACPS is predominately

African American and on the low end of the socioeconomic scale. There are only two schools:

one elementary and one high school that serve just over 600 students between them. The ACPS

district is made up of 56% African American students (Public School Review, 2021) and 53.5%

of students identified as economically disadvantaged (Virginia Department of Education, 2021).

If programs were designed at the district level to specifically assist students from single-

parent households who are academically deficient, it could help to improve the lives of the

students and parents and assist in professional development for teachers to identify and assist this

specific group of students (Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018). This information can be used to

bridge the equity gap. On a national level, creating a support system and program with specific

procedures and indicators of how to identify students at risk academically, specifically because

of the situation in their single-parent household, is paramount for future educators. There is a

positive correlation between students living with single parents and disruptive behavior, truancy,

and overall poverty (Dronkers et al., 2017). The practical significance of this study is that

teachers, counselors, and administrators alike could get a glimpse into the concerns that single parents of elementary-aged students may have, and assist in keeping the lines of communication open with the parents of these students.

<p style="text-align:center">Research Questions</p>

The research questions were derived from the problem and purpose statements of the lived experiences of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community and are guided by Vygotsky's (1986) SCT. In transcendental phenomenological research, the phenomenon is described from the perspective of the individual's experiences (Moustakas, 1994). One of the core facets of transcendental phenomenology is that study participants are asked to describe their lived experiences of the topic being studied (Moustakas, 1994).

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community?

Sub-Question One

In what ways does a single-parent household structure affect the educational achievement of an elementary-aged child who is enrolled in a public school?

Sub-Question Two

How do the experiences of single parents coupled with the culture of being raised in a rural community impact the overall development of an elementary-aged child enrolled in a public-school setting?

Sub-Question Three

How do single parents with elementary-aged children describe academic success for their child in a public school?

Definitions

1. *Hoover-Dempsey, and Sandler Model of the Parental Involvement Process* – A model that places a parent's support of their child's learning into the four categories of involvement through encouragement, involvement through modeling, involvement through reinforcement, and involvement through instruction (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

2. *Race* – Division of mankind based on physical features, ancestry, and culture (Johnston-Guerrero, 2016).

3. *Resilience* – Affective negotiating of stress and trauma (Neville et al., 2019).

4. *Rural* – Any population of under 50,000 residents, housing, or territory not in an urban area (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). A community that has a small population of residents, lack of services, is underdeveloped, and outside the city limits (MacGregor-Fors & Vázquez, 2020).

5. *Single Parent* – Not married, by choice, divorce, death, or abandonment (Dronkers et al., 2017).

6. *Single-Parent Household* – One adult is solely responsible for the rearing and wellbeing of the children who reside in that household (Kalmijn, 2015).

7. *Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development* – A theory that views human development as a process that is socially nurtured where children acquire all character,

culture, and problem-solving skills by watching members of their society (Vygotsky, 1986).

8. *Socioeconomics* – Level of income or social class within a community (Freeman, 2017).

Summary

As an educator, it is my job to advocate for the student. The problem is that single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community have many challenges that they face daily, including their relationship with their children, stress, and the lack of financial and social support. Administrators and teachers who are made aware of the concerns single parents with elementary-aged children may have can use that information to gain a better understanding of the home life situation the children may be dealing with. Forming open lines of communication can work in the child's favor as far as educational achievement is concerned. Vygotsky's SCT was instrumental in the research because of his finding that socialization with adults and peers with greater cognitive growth can facilitate a child's learning potential (Vygotsky, 1986). My personal history of being raised by a single mother connects me to this study. The findings of this study can have a positive outcome for students of single parents by providing them with a safe and inviting platform to address their needs and concerns regarding their education.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to examine the experiences of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community. The first section of this chapter expounds on the theoretical framework focusing on how Vygotsky's (1986) sociocultural theory of cognitive development (SCT), with support from the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model (HD-S) of the parental involvement process (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) is related to the phenomenon being studied. Secondly, the literature focuses on how single parents' personal choices, family structure, housing, and living in a rural community play a role in everyday life. Challenges single parents face will follow detailing socioeconomics, deficits in social groups, race, and sexism since most single-parent homes are headed by mothers. Next, I focus on academic achievement, school support, family support, and support from the absent parent. Lastly, the focus shifts to family structures, mother-only families, multi-generational families, and father-only families. The conclusion discusses a disparity regarding sufficient assistance provided by elementary schools for students who are being raised by single parents. A concentrated study is needed to create programs that aid in identifying these students and reinforcing their academics. The process of uncovering literature specific to the topic was arduous at best, thus lending to the need for future research.

Theoretical Framework

Qualitative research is used to aid the explanation of mechanisms or linkages in existing theories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The founding theorist laid the road map for the researcher to continue in the path of previous fields of study. A foundational understanding of cognitive

development plays a significant role in how single parents raise their elementary-aged children. The parent's ability to understand the importance of parental involvement at their child's school is a vital tool to academic success. This study focused on the works of Vygotsky's (1986) SCT and the HD-S (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky (1986) ascertained that the SCT is useful as a theoretical framework for the knowledge of the parent or other people in the children's circle as it relates to human development. Vygotsky's SCT guided this study along with an evaluation of single parents and their experiences, challenges, successes, support, and family structure. Vygotsky's theory describes how interaction with parents, guardians, peers, and the general culture helps to develop cognition in children, revealing an interconnection of single parents to the academics of their elementary-aged children (Vygotsky, 1986). Spending quality time with children helps to strengthen their speech and language, which in turn develops deeper levels of critical thinking.

Vygotsky began his research in the field of psychology in 1924 at the age of 28. The SCT was first developed in Russia in the 1920s and 1930s, but Vygotsky died only 10 years into his study at the age of 38. Kozulin translated Vygotsky's manuscript and then published it in the United States in 1986. Vygotsky's (1986) theory consists of the concepts of culture-specific tools, private speech, and the zone of proximal development (Newman, 2018). Vygotsky (1978) emphasized "the dominant role of social experience in human development" (p. 22). I discuss the implications of Vygotsky's SCT for the single parent in Chapters Four and Five. However, it was evident in the results that children who are reared in single-parent households have an entirely different social experience compared to children raised by two parents. Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development, often abbreviated to ZPD, is "the distance between the

actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving, and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86).

According to Vygotsky (1986), "thought development is determined by language, i.e., by the linguistic tools of thought, and by the sociocultural experience of the child" (p. 94). For a child to grow intellectually, that child must first master their language, that is the social means of thought. Thought simply put is "speech minus sound" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 2). Thought and language are two of Vygotsky's (1986) primary areas of study. Children have an active curiosity about words, as evident by their frequent questions. These questions result in an expeditious increase in the child's vocabulary. As children grow up in different cultures, they will undoubtedly pick up a different dialect and language capacity from their parents or the adults by whom they are surrounded. Children raised in a rural community may have a different dialect than those raised in urban areas. The cognitive development of elementary-aged students starts with the parents they see every day.

Vygotsky (1986) believed that thought and speech were derived from two different backgrounds. Speech is developed in the pre-intellectual stage, while thought happens long before a child has the linguistic skills of forming words and sentences. Thought and speech have the ability to be independent of one another up to a certain point in the development of a child. A child's development and the impact other people may have on them or how well they function in society are key factors of the ZPD. Everyday concepts are constantly being taught, sometimes unintentionally, between parents or other adults and the child with whom they spend time. Cultural norms and values are taught through rich social interactions that in turn foster cognitive growth long before formal education takes place (Vygotsky, 1978). Time spent with parents

especially forms a child's personality. Personality development is negatively affected by defects in a person's character (Jun-qing, 2020). Sometimes, a child may have the responsibility of being the sole source of emotional and spiritual support for their single parent, causing excessive psychological pressure on a child in this situation (Jun-qing, 2020).

When considering the experiences of single parents rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community, Vygotsky's SCT is a valid theoretical framework, because it provides insight into how children learn. Understanding family structure and Vygotsky's SCT help to advance the correlation between the way single parents were raised, and how they are rearing their children, thus resulting in a better understanding of the importance of academics and educational attainment. In addition to Vygotsky's SCT, the HD-S is a crucial component of the theoretical framework. The ideas presented in the HD-S support Vygotsky's SCT because both focus on the interactions between children, their surroundings, and the level of parental involvement.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model of the Parental Involvement Process

The HD-S highlighted four factors that influence a parent's involvement in their child's education: parental role construction, parent's sense of self-efficacy, parent's perceptions of invitations, and parent's life context variables. Parental role construction is how the parents create their own job description of what they believe they are required to do at their child's school (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). The parent's sense of self-efficacy refers to whether they believe their presence will make a difference in their child's educational outcome (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Some parents tend to wait for personal invitations from administrators or teachers before attending school events. The perception that the school is welcoming and wants them there is vital to parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Lastly, the parent's

life context variables rely on the parent's own skills and knowledge base and whether they believe they have enough time and energy to be helpful to their child in an educational setting (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

The HD-S provides insight into the parent's personal motivation and experience with education along with the current family system that can help to uncover the many perceptions of single parents who have elementary-aged children (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) noted some personal motivators that include examining the parent's family experiences with academics during their childhood, the structure of their current family systems, and any recent experiences at their child's school. The level of parental involvement can be affected by marital status. Knowing the core values of how someone was raised is imperative to understanding the way they interact with school administrators, teachers, and other parents. Gugiu et al. (2019) noted that parental involvement is not just about helping children at home with homework or reading but also involves the parent's presence at school-related events. The HD-S explores avenues parents take to exercise their influence on the outcome of their child's education (Gugiu et al., 2019).

For this study, the HD-S helped establish a connection between the experiences of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community and how involved those parents tend to be in the entire elementary educational process of their children. Regardless of whether parents are involved with their child's education at home with homework or reading time or with in-person school activities such as parent–teacher conferences, there is a positive link to parental involvement and student achievement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Related Literature

Existing research uncovers the many intricacies of single parenthood concerning the education of their children, including living situations and overcrowded households (Lopoo & London, 2016). The experiences of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community can be shared to offer hope, perseverance, and educational success to future generations. A review of the literature of single parent's experiences, challenges, successes, the importance of support, and differences in family structure is necessary to achieve these objectives. The goal of this section is to provide a synthesis of the current literature that was used to frame the current study.

Experiences of Single Parents

The experiences of single parents start with personal choices. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of single-parent households, with at least 30% of all households being headed by single parents and 32% of Virginia children in single-parent families (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Some single parents choose to raise their children alone, while others deal with divorce, death, separation after cohabitation, and abandonment (Dronkers et al., 2017; Van Gasse & Mortelmans, 2020b). According to Golombok et al. (2016), heterosexual women who have made the conscious choice to parent alone through donor insemination are the newest type of single-mother family. There is an increase in an advanced maternal age of over 35 years old among first-time mothers (Nottingham-Jones et al., 2020). Women who choose to be single mothers by choice are usually between the ages of 30 and 40 years old, financially stable, and well educated (Golombok et al., 2016). The choice to become a solo mother is not made easily. Every choice that is made can eventually be helpful or harmful to the child. One such risk factor

that can be harmful to children is single mothers who use artificial insemination to have a baby. This leaves the child without any knowledge of their biological father (Golombok et al., 2016).

Kalmijn (2015) noted that children inadvertently take over the norms and values of their parents by watching their behavior. According to Nixon and Hadfield (2018), single mothers may restrict a father's involvement with the child if they believe the father lacks competence in child rearing. When a child is raised with one parent, that becomes normal to them, and the very structure of marriage may be a foreign idea. A large proportion of single mothers have never been married (Daryanani et al., 2016). In a study on single motherhood, Härkönen et al. (2017) suggested the prevalence of single mothers is influenced by their choice to re-partner. The decision to re-partner often produces stepparents or stepsiblings that Fomby et al. (2016) identified as the cause of more aggressive behaviors in children.

Family Structure

Addressing the family structure of single parents is beneficial to this study. Chapman (2015) added that the topic of family structure was fodder for politics in the 1990s. President George H. W. Bush initiated what was called the Healthy Marriage Initiative to encourage poor single parents of color to marry for the sake of their children. The initiative focused more on the fathers of these children by encouraging involvement and responsibility. The family structure involves the number of parents living with the child and is a substantial indicator of child outcomes (Huang et al., 2017). The very categorization of the head of household being married or single can influence household consumption, investment decisions, and education. Family structure can be a predictor of educational success due to children in single-parent households having a lower academic self-concept (Baier & Van Winkle, 2021). Huang et al. (2017) noted that students who are privileged to live with both of their parents have a greater opportunity to

receive attention from their parents, along with positive interaction and the presence of an influential adult mentor or role model.

Some single mothers blame themselves for the outcomes of the choices they have made regarding their children. They may wonder if they are a good mother at all. When mothers believe that their parenting skills will ultimately produce good children, and subsequently good adults, they carry around blame when their children don't reach culturally recognized levels of success such as educational attainment and upward social mobility (Elliott et al., 2015). African American single mothers believe that being a good mother consists of great sacrifice, self-reliance, and being a protector (Elliott et al., 2015). For some single mothers, just being there for their children and being present in their education constitutes being a good mother (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Experiences of Single Parents Living in Large Cities

When examining the housing situation of single parents, Jacoby et al. (2017) noted that in some U.S. cities, up to 90% of the tenants using government-assisted housing are African American single mothers. Single parents have very difficult choices to make such as choosing between food, health, and shelter when affordable housing is difficult to obtain. Urban cities with high levels of community violence contribute to a parent's stress level of the well-being and safety of their children (Jacoby et al., 2017). According to Ceballo et al. (2016), there has not been enough investigation on the impact of living in deteriorating housing, especially in large cities, on the academic performance of poor African American youth. Some children experience trauma as a direct result of living in unstable housing. The affordable housing shortage has disproportionately affected single mothers, who are at a greater risk of being late on their rent or of being evicted than two-parent families (Martin-West, 2019). Paying 30% of one's total

income is a housing cost burden while paying 50%, or more of one's total income is a severe housing burden (Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2017; Martin-West, 2019). Single mothers often have inadequate incomes to cover housing expenses that are unsubsidized by the government, due to cuts in public welfare programs (Martin-West, 2019).

According to Swick and Williams (2010), "the majority of homeless families have very young children, and are parented by a single mother" (p. 49). When living in homeless shelters in large cities, the parent must deal with making sure that their children are safe while trying to maintain a healthy relationship with them. A vast majority of single parents live in housing projects that can be cesspools for drugs, violence, high drop-out rates, and teenage pregnancy (Swick & Williams, 2010). Parents who live in situations like this must maintain a strong tenacity to keep their children motivated for educational success.

Experiences of Single Parents Living in Rural Communities

MacGregor-Fors and Vázquez (2020) noted that *rural* can have many definitions including population size, lack of services, and underdeveloped. Even with the aforementioned statistics, the existing educational policies for rural schools are geared toward helping those schools meet federal structural requirements, but they do not offer a solid set of specific policies for rural schools. Rural classifications, though important, seem to be overlooked academically (Schafft, 2016). Although students in rural communities are often exposed to poverty and substandard living conditions, there can be benefits as well. Living in a rural community has great aspects like a strong sense of community, less crime, and familiarity (Iruka et al., 2018). Smaller schools are often found in rural communities and have been shown to increase social and academic benefits for students who are from low socioeconomic households (Schafft, 2016). Rural elementary schools can be the heart of the community where parents and teachers socialize

at the end of the day while waiting on dismissal (San Antonio, 2018). Parents are more likely to attend school events and serve in volunteer roles than parents in an urban school setting (Schafft, 2016). Teachers in rural communities speak of positive experiences such as belonging to a harmonious, functional community where the parents are pleased with the learning environment (Walker-Gibbs et al., 2018). The school–community relationship is strong in rural communities due to the small size of the school, with 64% of rural schools having less than 400 students (Schafft, 2016).

Even though "research has shown that social and emotional learning (SEL) can benefit students in affective, interpersonal, communicative, and academic realms" (San Antonio, 2018, p. 26), teachers who integrate SEL in rural elementary schools face a plethora of challenges. High poverty, race, gender, and social status along with the demands of fitting SEL lessons into an already full day of curriculum and assessment can be a struggle (San Antonio, 2018). SEL lessons often have racially diverse children in the text, and depending upon the rural demographic, it can be challenging to get all students to understand the cultural norms. Vygotsky's (1986) ZPD moves toward a collective process known as the zone of collaborative development. Teachers who use SEL lessons in rural schools must take steps toward collaboration to be successful. Some teachers perceived that an isolated community affects children in negative ways, such as exposure, noting that many children had never even eaten dinner in a restaurant (Casto, 2019). Rural communities can also produce negative consequences for parents such as health disparities, low income, less education, and a low likelihood of families being insured (Oerther & Shattell, 2019).

Securing housing in a rural community can be complex and problematic at best. The lack of apartments, rental homes, and homes for sale can make housing a real challenge. Non-

custodial single parents believe that housing issues greatly affect their custody status and the ability to gain access to their children (Reupert et al., 2016). Public housing is traditionally given to families with children first, before singles (Reupert et al., 2016). According to Gleason et al. (2021), the lack of housing in rural communities can lead to homelessness. Even though the rates of homelessness in rural communities compared to other geographic areas may seem low, it is no less present. To add to the problem, fewer rural areas are equipped with shelters to combat the problem of homelessness. Reupert et al. (2016) noted some single parents suggested that their children who experienced a lack of housing were made stronger because of it. These parents believe their children can handle stress more effectively and are not shocked by most things that would adversely affect other children their age.

Challenges of Single Parents

Socioeconomics is a major challenge for single parents. Alm et al. (2020) researched the sharp rise in poverty among single parents. They determined that in a dual-earner society, mass unemployment and welfare reform increased the poverty level of single-parent households. The use of welfare programs is often frowned upon in society. The truth of the matter is that many single-parent families rely on welfare to provide sustenance to their children. Failure to meet the physical needs of children causes focus and attentiveness in school to suffer. There is a positive correlation between a single mother with a low level of education who takes advantage of the welfare benefits available to her and her child's achievement level, grade point average, and income bracket (Chu & Chyi, 2015). Minority single mothers often struggle to maintain gainful employment, leaving them susceptible to psychological challenges as well as poverty (Richard & Lee, 2019). As single parents search for work, the need for affordable childcare becomes evident.

In many cases, family and friends are utilized rather than a formal daycare due to the cost (Clark et al., 2017).

Single mothers who live in low-income households find it is almost impossible to closely monitor their children because they are the only income earner and must work to sustain the very lives of their children. Even though their income is insufficient in many ways, some welfare policies still prevent these single mothers from receiving assistance such as food stamps (Elliott et al., 2015; Yue et al., 2018). Kramer et al. (2016) noted income disparity and poverty among single mothers compared to single fathers over 20 years from 1990–2010. The results demonstrated that even though single mothers tend to have more education, they work fewer hours and earn 60% less than single fathers. This is disturbing since single mothers tend to have more education. Working single mothers tend to have a lower level of overall satisfaction with their lives and are less likely to seek out support to cope with work stressors (Kramer et al., 2016). Single working mothers who are at the lower to middle income levels noted the importance of coping with their lack of income by using budgeting strategies, working multiple jobs, and using saving strategies like purchasing substitutions that are less expensive (Napora et al., 2018; Richard & Lee, 2019).

Social Groups

In examining social groups, Marţian and Oprea (2016) pointed out that single parents are a vulnerable social group and have a high risk of marginalization. Single parents are often stressed, are not satisfied with their lives, and are not in a mood to be social. Lack of social support attributes to poor health in single mothers (Jacoby et al., 2017). Freeman (2017) suggested that children negatively impact the social mobility of low-income single mothers. Single parents sometimes feel that their social life suffers due to the financial responsibilities and

time constraints that being a single parent brings. Jacoby et al. (2017) found that the social functioning, mental health, vitality, and emotional well-being of single mothers are below the national average. The single mothers in the Jacoby et al. (2017) study also divulged that they have participated in unhealthy practices such as binge eating and social isolation because of stress.

Race

In the continuation of challenges faced by single mothers, one that stands out is race. According to Arditti et al. (2019) there has been a perpetuation of removing African American fathers from their households and communities by racist mass incarceration policies. Incarceration disproportionately alters parental poles in African American communities. According to Chapman (2015), 64% of all households are headed by a single parent, with African American children also being more likely to be raised by a single parent. In comparison, 67% of African American children lived with single parents, 42% of Latino children, and only 25% of Caucasian children. African American and Hispanic families tend to heavily lean on their extended families and social networks for support (Taylor & Conger, 2017). The race conversation continues with research from Johnston-Guerrero (2016), who pointed out racial disparities among students and that for the most part, racial stereotypes are perpetuated by cultural assumptions. African American youth maintain lower grades than Caucasian youth as a result of living with a single parent and the challenges that can result from that situation (Ceballo et al., 2016). Taylor and Conger (2017) also noted that when African American mothers experience a high family income, their self-esteem levels rise, regardless of whether they are married or single, thus income levels affect their resiliency and ability to deal with problems.

Gender

Johnson (2016) ascertained that many single mothers ingrain ideas of girl power in their daughters, giving them the self-confidence to be self-sufficient and not having to rely on a man. These single mothers stress to their daughters that females must work twice as hard as males, specifically because of their gender. There are succinct gender differences in children being raised by single parents. Nieuwenhuis and Maldonado (2018) noted that boys suffer more with no father when the mother has custody, but girls seem to adjust easily. Boys are more likely to be in a shared custody situation than girls (Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018). Gender shapes parenting, often with single mothers making choices that some fathers would not, such as forsaking their own needs in the best interest of their children. Gender inequities have often labeled single mothers as bad mothers with no responsibility or shame for the father (Elliott et al., 2015).

According to Browne and Battle (2018), single-parent African American families are more likely to be headed by African American females, not African American men. African American women have been subjects of pervasive gendered racism that challenges their parenting skills. Cultural stereotypes impact the lifestyle of single families headed by African American women (Browne & Battle, 2018). Gender impacts the ideology of mothering, shaping their parenting skills while leading them to limit their own needs in the best interest of their children (Elliott et al., 2015). Single mothers possess lower human capital than single fathers, and there is a significant gender gap in the income that is earned as a result (Kramer et al., 2016). There are different expectations for mothers and fathers created by the context of their gender roles. Fathers are expected to be the financial provider for the family, while mothers are expected to care for and nurture the children while taking care of the household.

Behavior

Single parents can often deal with behavior difficulties when rearing their children (Dronkers et al., 2017; Fomby et al., 2016). Parents who must deal with disciplining a child with a challenging diagnosis such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) can sometimes feel inadequate (Mahomed et al., 2021). These parents must fill multiple roles as caretakers and providers, which can lead to high levels of stress. Golombok et al. (2016) established that single parents who have the responsibility of rearing a child with a mental health disorder can find themselves being exposed to parental vulnerabilities. Singe parents of children with ADHD often struggle with discipline because they strive to always be sympathetic to the disorder but fair in their discipline of the offense committed (Mahomed et al., 2021). According to Usakli (2018), 28 out of 30 teachers agree that boys from single-parent households are more aggressive in their behavioral tendencies when compared to boys from two-parent households.

Health

Single mothers can face challenges of mental health at a higher rate than families with two parents. Giving birth as a single mother can cause a greater risk of postpartum depression. This increases the need for more societal and school support in this community (Agnafors et al., 2019). The mental health of parents will subsequently affect the mental health of their children and should be prioritized in the United States (Oerther & Shattell, 2019). Adequate support and internal strength are associated with a single mother's positive mental health (Taylor & Conger, 2017).

Health disparities, healthy outcome, and availability of healthcare have created a host of challenges for children of single parents (Lut et al., 2021; Oerther & Shattell, 2019). The psychological wellbeing of children living in single-mother families as the result of divorce is

overwhelmingly affected by emotional and behavioral problems when compared to children who

reside in traditional unbroken families (Golombok et al., 2016), the main cause being that

children witness the continued conflict between the divorced parents. Single parents often suffer

from physical and mental health struggles such as depression, which can increase the likelihood

of their children suffering that same fate (Jacoby et al., 2017). Lut et al. (2021) noted that several

outcomes are present in children born into or growing up in single-parent homes. These

outcomes can include low birth weight, perinatal mortality, lack of nutrition, being underweight,

mental health or developmental issues, or the lack of available healthcare. Duriancik and Goff

(2019) studied obesity in children of single-parent households and found that higher rates of

overweight and obesity risk were present. Children who reside with both parents experience

better health when compared with children from single-parent households (Cenegy et al., 2018).

Reasons for the level of obesity included communication during meals, physical activity, fruit

and vegetable consumption, and the amount of added sugar the child was allowed to eat (Lebron

et al., 2020). According to Cenegy et al. (2018), poor health in children raised by single parents

is largely a symptom of demographic and socioeconomic differences rather than exposure to a

nontraditional family system.

Social Isolation

Social isolation can result in single mothers being put at a higher risk for emotional

distress and parental disruptions. Therefore, their children become vulnerable in social settings

due to exposure to poverty, witnessing their mother battle depression, and being on the receiving

end of poor parenting skills (Taylor & Conger, 2017). Single mothers can sometimes feel very

isolated (McArthur & Winkworth, 2017). Single mothers who believe they lack social support

have a higher risk of internalizing symptoms and poorer parenting behaviors (Taylor & Conger,

2017). According to McArthur and Winkworth (2017), "social isolation, and limited social ties have been found to be associated with an increased risk of child abuse and neglect" (p. 638).

Successes of Students Being Raised by Single Parents

Ford (2017) noted that even though being raised by a single parent is not the best situation for success, it can become the fuel for success by defying the odds. In discussing the academic achievement of students from single-parent households, Ford (2017) insisted that to be successful, negative thoughts must be replaced by positive thoughts, and teachers and parents must believe in the student. Nonoyama-Tarumi (2017) noted parental involvement is an indicator for student academic achievement and consequently has a stronger effect on elementary school students. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) agreed that the academic performance of children from single parents improves when one or both parents are actively involved in the child's education. According to Nonoyama-Tarumi (2017), mothers are mostly responsible for the child's academic success. Single parents use educational attainment to escape the grip of poverty that many of them face (Assari, 2018). In a study by Jones et al. (2018), it was noted that students from single-parent households who attend rural schools had an advantage for academic success. These students experience deeper ties to the community, benefit from longstanding cross-generational ties to adults in the community, and are spared from many negative external influences of more populated areas (Jones et al., 2018).

The internal strength of a single mother, including an optimistic outlook, good self-esteem, and self-efficacy, can lead to positive outcomes in their child. The child experiences social competence, lower emotional or behavioral problems, and appropriate developmental skills as a direct result of the strength of their mother (Taylor & Conger, 2017).

Even though there is a negative stigma associated with being a single parent, it is possible for single parents to successfully raise their children (Hakovirta et al., 2021). Attitudes toward traditional families being the status quo are shifting. Single-parent families, divorces, and same-sex marriages are becoming more tolerated. Attitudes depend on the social structure of the family and how the individual was raised. Variables such as age, political affiliation, and religion also play a part in the idea that single parents can be good parents (Hakovirta et al., 2021).

There is an old adage that says it is not how you start; it is how you finish. Single mothers can be creative instructors, and they do what they must in order to assist their children academically (Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2019). Students who were raised by single parents are constantly defying the odds that are stacked against them. Single-parent households are usually located in low-income areas and have high unemployment and inadequate schools (Previ et al., 2020). It is not outside of the realm of possibility that students exposed to such negativity would have a bleak future. However, according to Previ et al. (2020), single mothers who use protective strategies of restrictive parenting, support engagement and encouragement when it comes to education, offer emotional support, and provide financial security contributed to their children getting into college. African American single mothers groom and socialize their daughters for future success in a way that they do not seem to do with their sons. The mother's experience as a single mother is used to stir up an appetite for education in their daughters so much that their daughters even postpone married in pursuit of higher education (Johnson, 2016). Single mothers encourage their daughters to disembody the stereotypes of race, gender, and class, and instead use them as fuel to power through to be successful in life (Johnson, 2016).

The Importance of Support for Students from Single Parent Households

School support is vital for all students, but even more important for students from single-parent households who may need a little extra time and attention. According to Huang et al. (2017), a positive school climate can serve as a promotive factor for students living in single-parent households, rather than just a protective factor. For some students, growing up in single-parent households does not offer them any semblance of protection or peace. Going to school may be the only time they feel a sense of safety, belonging, or validation. West et al. (2017) gathered data from single mothers regarding the importance of school support in educating their children. The results showed that when school administrators, teachers, faculty, and staff members were genuine, empathetic, and attentive toward single mothers, it gave the single mothers a sense of validation that they belong and are respected members of the school community. Partnerships with the child's teacher were viewed as an invaluable alliance of mutual respect. West et al. (2017) highlighted the importance of administrators, counselors, and teachers being patient and listening intently when dealing with single parents (Neville et al., 2019; West et al., 2017). Huang et al. (2017) pointed out that financially disadvantaged students benefit more from school support than students who live in a supportive and financially stable home environment. Huang et al. (2017) also noted positive relationships with parents and the added benefit of positive support at school can lead to strong emotional, behavioral, health, and academic outcomes. The warmth of the teacher, as opposed to an authoritative teacher, can produce higher student engagement. Teachers may be pivotal in supporting the emotional health of their students (Dronkers et al., 2017).

After-School Care

Another aspect of school support is after-school care facilities. In some instances, single parents can have access to after-school programs through welfare assistance (Freeman, 2017). Barnes and Nolan (2019) noted the daily interactions that after-school providers have with students from single-parent households can have a profoundly positive effect on their education. Along with supporting child development and academic achievement, the relationships and supports that parents receive are critical to disadvantaged families (Barnes & Nolan, 2019). After-school programs are widely used by low-income, single-parent families to provide social, emotional, and material assistance (Barnes & Nolan, 2019).

Single mothers often have to work long hours to make ends meet. The increase in single-parent families has uncovered a real need for after-school care between the hours of 3:00–6:00 p.m. (Smith & Bradshaw, 2017). Supportive interactions with adults in after-school settings are beneficial to academic achievement, fostering social skills, and civic engagement for children from single-parent households (Smith & Bradshaw, 2017). Single fathers engage in after-school childcare facilities much less than single mothers. The belief is that single fathers have more support from family members, due to them working longer hours and being responsible for providing for their children or paying child support (Lee & Hofferth, 2017).

Family Support

Family support is vital to single-parent families. Networks of supportive family groups are essential for providing protective factors to single parents and children who are experiencing adversity in their lives (East et al., 2017). Raymo (2016) showed that many single parents do not live alone. Many of them live in households with other adults in their families. In contrast, Nunes et al. (2021) reported single-parent families have significantly fewer family members in their

social group when compared to two-parent families. Regarding support from family members, single parent and immigrant families report relying on smaller support networks. When grandparents or other adult family members live in the same household with single parents and their children, the family support can add to the overall well-being of the child. Daryanani et al. (2016) established that many single mothers live in homes with their parents, which increases the support available to the mother and the children. Grandparents can be a source of support to single parents by supervising children or even contributing money to the household (Krueger et al., 2015).

Social Support

Social and community support can be critical for single parents. According to Martin-West (2019), "social support refers to close social ties with friends, family, neighbors, and social services organizations that help families to navigate the day-to-day struggle of living in poverty" (p. 33). With welfare reform reducing benefits, low-income single mothers have had to rely on informal support systems found throughout their community. Single mothers often experience food instability and difficulty paying bills, thus turning to friends or other sources of support within their community (Martin-West, 2019). Single mothers with adequate social networks perceive having more support. Social support is integral to the well-being of a single parent. Such support helps to alleviate stress, concerns regarding child behavior, and mental health worries (West et al., 2017).

The Importance of Support for Students from Absent Parents

When single parents are fortunate enough to receive support from the absent parent, it alleviates the stress that rearing a child alone can cause. Of significant importance is the fact that support is not just financial. Children living with single mothers experience a deficit when it

comes to quality time, attention, and consistent discipline from their fathers (Lerman et al., 2017). Since most single-parent households are headed by the mother, it is important to note that the absent parent is usually the father. Wilson et al. (2016) noted that a study of absent fathers unveiled that they deemed themselves unworthy of being in their child's life due to their inability to support them financially. Most children in those instances turned to mentors or other role models to fill the gap that their absent father left (Wilson et al., 2016). Jun-qing (2020) noted support from a father impacts factors such as social skills, empathy, confidence levels, and independence.

When male children are raised by a single mother, it shapes their entire life as men. East et al. (2017) discussed the research from men who described different types of men who were present in their lives with the intention of being father figures. First, there was the ambiguous father figure who offered little to no parenting advice, caring, or financial support. Next, there were the positive father figures with most being uncles, grandfathers, and stepfathers. These men were characterized as positive role models who provided support, guidance, and a strong sense of family resilience. Lastly, East et al. (2017) recounted the experiences of the men with bad father figures who were abusive and cruel, even to the extent of allowing their friends to abuse the children. Wood and Brownhill (2018) noted that schools should employ more men in order to provide male role models or replacement fathers to children being raised in single-parent homes. They go on to say that the absent fathers contribute to the social–emotional problems in students.

Köppen et al. (2018) brought up the issue of child support, visitation, and legal custody after divorce or separation. According to Köppen et al. (2018), the amount and consistency of child support payments correlate to positive relationships between the absent parent and their child. Financial consequences of being a single parent include poverty, insecurity, and living in

unsafe neighborhoods, which can be stressful for both parents and children (Lerman et al., 2017). Having joint custody is another indicator of strong relationships. The parents work together to ensure the absent parent remains a vital part of the children's lives. According to Nixon and Hadfield (2018), some nonresident fathers believe that mothers are becoming gatekeepers regarding access to their children. Most mothers discount that claim, noting that their actions are strictly meant to promote involvement and acceptable behavior where the father is concerned.

Chapman (2015) noted that fathers are now more actively involved in the lives of their children. In the last 15 years, major family policies have evolved to promote the greater involvement of fathers in the rearing of their children (Köppen et al., 2018). A parental leave policy aims to get parents to share leave responsibilities, and therefore stipulates that fathers should be involved with their children after separation from the mother (Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018). Nixon and Hadfield (2018) noted that some mothers just believe that fathers are not important in the lives of their children because they had never been present. Fathers with volatile relationships with their child's mother tends to be absent and less likely to follow through on financial support. The father has an extremely important role in the life of a child. According to Jun-qing (2020), "the father can stimulate children's interest in the external world, improve their observation and thinking ability, and attract children into a more beautiful world beyond the mother–child relationship that also affects their social, emotional, and cognitive development" (p. 1231). Fathers were once primarily thought of as the breadwinners of the family, but their role has expanded to caregivers and providers of financial and emotional support, thus leading to more fathers actively seeking custody of their children following a divorce or separation from their child's mother (Chapman, 2015).

There are a multitude of reasons for a nonresident father to be involved in the life of their child and to what extent. The sad reality is just because a man makes a baby, that does not automatically give him the skills to be a father. Some fathers never had a positive example of a father as a role model in their life, and therefore have no point of reference or blueprint to follow. This leads to single mothers turning to relatives or programs like Big Brothers/Big Sisters to find mentors for their children (Arditti et al., 2019). Nixon and Hadfield (2018) found that mothers sometimes close the gate to the child having a relationship with their father to protect the father, who was unaware that they had fathered a child. Arditti et al. (2019) noted four typologies regarding the level of involvement of nonresident fathers. Disengagement is the most common typology. Disengagement can be choosing not to interact either by phone call, text message, email, or in-person contact with the father. Some disengagement could be caused by geographic constraints, poor relationships, and the father leaving before the child was born or when they were an infant. Sporadic nonresident fathers seem to come and go, providing support sometimes, but providing negative experiences for both the single mothers and their children, who were often disappointed by them. Encouraged nonresident fathers had a more positive relationship with their children because they made an effort to form a relationship. Lastly, there are thankfully some nonresident fathers who are engaged with their children by having consistent, positive relationships, spending time, and providing support (Arditti et al., 2019).

Family Structure of Single Parent Homes

When examining the family structure of single parents, mother-only families are the most prevalent at 23%, affecting 15.3 million children, while single-father families sit at 4% (Browne & Battle, 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Mother-only families often experience emotional, social, and financial deficits. Many must rely on public assistance just to ensure their family has

their basic food needs met. Chu and Chyi (2015) revealed that a less-educated single mother's reliance on welfare impedes the long-term achievement of their children. The effect on short-term achievement, however, is positive. Children who receive the care provided by welfare feel they have stability throughout childhood, and that can transfer to academic success. Welfare provides mothers with money as well as other resources that may improve their children's development and nurture.

Mother-Only Family

Children who live in mother-only families are at a greater risk to exhibit aggressive behaviors that can lead to clinical diagnoses of behavior disorder (Fomby et al., 2016). Baker et al. (2019) reported that the absence of a parent can contribute to aggressive behaviors. Malczyk and Lawson (2017) added to the conversation, noting that in families headed by mothers, the mother–child relationship and the parent's ability to monitor their child influence their academic achievement and could be a precursor for behavior problems outside of school.

According to Harkness et al. (2020), the number of children growing up in mother-only families with little or no contact from the father is growing at an alarming rate. Fathers on the low socioeconomic spectrum are less likely to provide support or be involved in the care of their children, which often leads to attainment deficits in the children (Harkness et al., 2020). A single mother's age, education, and even the birth weight of the child may affect a child's verbal cognitive outcome (Harkness et al., 2020). A goal of welfare reform is to reduce the number of households being headed by single mothers. The Social Security Act (2012) aimed to promote marriage, encourage two-parent families, and reduce the number of pregnancies out of wedlock. Single mothers have a mother–child bond that motivates them to make positive changes, prioritize the needs of their children, mold a strong family unit, and move out of poverty

(Freeman, 2017). The work of Beckmeyer et al. (2020) indicated that establishing and maintaining family routines is a consistent challenge for single-mother families. Family management practices have become even more important for mother-only families. The closeness of the mother and children, knowing who their children's friends are, sitting down together for family meals, and monitoring their media intake are ways to overcome family management challenges (Beckmeyer et al., 2020).

Father-Only Family

Fathers are fighting for their parental rights and gaining legal access to their children. Father-only families typically have a higher average income when compared to mother-only families (Nonoyama-Tarumi, 2017). Single-father households usually come about as a result of separation or divorce. Single fathers tend to be less affluent, educated, and less likely to be Caucasian. Historically fathers were the financial support system for the household, but they are becoming caregivers. Single fathers are often met with constraints that subsequently cause a poor relationship with their children (Arditti et al., 2019).

Carone et al. (2017) found that like single mothers, single fathers are now choosing to raise children on their own. These fathers usually enlist a surrogate, use an adoption agency, or go the route of egg donation because becoming a single father by choice was the result of gay men not having a partner or heterosexual men who decided that waiting until they found a wife or a mate could result in them getting too old to be a single parent. Until recently, some single men were denied access to becoming fathers through fertility clinics (Carone et al., 2017). Fathers who chose surrogacy did so because they had worked through any concerns they may have had regarding being a single father, and they received encouragement from family and friends. Fathers by choice identified adoption as a random path to parenthood, and cited adoption

agencies for putting a stigma on single fathers who want to adopt. Layne (2019) noted that deciding to become a single father is a decision that is carefully considered and discussed with friends, family, and health care providers. In 2001, at the age of 53, Ian Mucklejohn tinkered on the brink of celebrity when he became the father of triplets through gestational surrogacy. Ian believed he could choose to have a family and become a single father whenever he wanted and that his children were his personal accomplishments (Layne, 2019).

Lerman et al. (2017) cited that the research on the economic consequences of childhood family structure indicated that when being raised by a single parent, children will have lower education levels, experience income disparity earning less than $21,000 compared to children raised by two parents. These children will also be less likely to get married when they are adults. Family structure during childhood can have a significant impact on adult economic outcomes and academic success (Lerman et al., 2017). If a parent has the responsibility for providing the income to provide for the family and takes care of all other family duties, they will have difficulty sustaining a standard of living that is the norm for two-parent families (Van Gasse & Mortelmans, 2020a).

Single Parents in Multigenerational Family Households

Many single parents live in multigenerational families that are disproportionately immigrant, Asian, and Hispanic (Lopoo & London, 2016). According to East et al. (2017), "research has found that involved inter-generational family members such as grandparents can offer support to families and promote a child's development and wellbeing" (p. 437). Grandparents can offer much needed support such as childcare that will enable the single parent to work outside the home or go to school (East et al., 2017). Single-parent families have been able to sustain their household with the support of their retired grandparents by either moving

them in the house with them or by living in close proximity to the family (Nieuwenhuis &

Maldonado, 2018).

Song (2016) revealed multigenerational family structure can have a lagged effect on the

social outcomes of children who were raised by single parents who also have grandparents who

were single parents. Three-generation mobility has an impact on educational transmission from

grandparents to parents and from parents to children. A study by Chen (2016) noted that single

fathers are more likely to live in multigenerational families, adding that U.S. studies show this is

a beneficial arrangement for children. Important to note, Whitley and Fuller-Thomson (2017)

asserted that coping skills are embedded into generation across generation, with grandparents

sometimes turning to alcohol, smoking, or overeating. Single parents learn from their parents and

grandparents and pass those skills on to their children, sometimes without knowing. Nonoyama-

Tarumi (2017) concluded that more research needs to be conducted to determine if students who

live with single parents and grandparents have poor academic performance.

Whitley and Fuller-Thomson (2017) made connections between the health of African

American grandparents and raising their grandchildren. Solo grandparents have fair or poor

health and are more likely to experience depression in their lifetime. The importance of

education can be accentuated by having grandparents present in a child's life. Five differences in

educational attainment and mobility are offered below:

1. In any given period or generation, more highly educated grandparents provide greater
   potential benefits to their grandchildren.

2. Grandparent effects on grandchildren are likely to be greater when grandparents and
   grandchildren have shared lifetimes and mutual contact.

3. Secular increases in mutual exposure of grandparents and grandchildren create greater inequalities in overall family backgrounds of grandchildren because more advantaged children experience more years of exposure to relatively highly educated grandparents, whereas less-advantaged children experience more years of exposure to poorly educated grandparents.

4. Trends in inequalities may be amplified or reduced by differences among education groups in mortality and fertility trends.

5. Secular increases in mutual exposure of grandparents and grandchildren are likely to increase the associations of the educational attainments of grandparents and grandchildren (both zero-order associations, and associations net of parental characteristics) because of the growing capacity of grandparents to affect their grandchildren, whether in a favorable or unfavorable direction. (Song & Mare, 2019, p. 894)

Edwards (2018) discussed that children living with a grandparent may experience frustration, depression, and an impact on their psychosocial functioning as a result of not being raised by a parent. According to Whitley and Fuller-Thomson (2017), grandparents fill the role of parents in some situations. Accepting the responsibility as a solo grandparent to raise their grandchild alone presents risks for the grandparent. The research shows that African American solo grandparents have a greater prevalence of depression and lower socioeconomic and educational status. The U.S. Census Bureau (2019) reported that in 2012, 2.7 million grandparents were serving as caregivers, with the majority being grandmothers.

Summary

Vygotsky's SCT (1986) and the HD-S (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) provided the framework for this study with the lived experiences and knowledge of single parents playing a significant role in their experiences rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community. The influence of the SCT continues to grow in research (Marginson & Dang, 2017). A child's parents or the people who raise the child represent society to them and assist in developing the behavior the child will eventually exhibit (Vygotsky, 1986). People are inseparable from their emotional attachment to their families, and household structure plays a critical role in educational attainment (Browne & Battle, 2018).

Literature related to single parent's personal choices, family structure, support systems, and housing that can all have a profound impact on the academic success of their child provided context for this study (Daryanani et al., 2016). Understanding the connection that being raised by a single parent has to education in the elementary school setting is imperative to student success (Malczyk & Lawson, 2017; Nonoyama-Tarumi, 2017). Challenges faced by single mothers include poverty, problems in social groups, race issues, and sexism (Elliott et al., 2015). Through all the disparities faced by single parents, there are success stories. Single parents who support their child's academics note better grades (Chukwuka, 2018; Nonoyama-Tarumi, 2017). Education is more attainable for single parents who have students in rural communities, who are spared from negative experiences of a big city, and who have strong community ties (Jones et al., 2018). Support from the child's school along with family support and support from the absent parent, all aid in the child's academic attainment (Watt, 2019; West et al., 2017; Wilson et al., 2016).

Family structure closes out the review of the literature by exploring families headed by mothers only, fathers only, multigenerational families, and families headed by solo grandparents. Though much research is present regarding single parents, studies specific to elementary school students in rural communities are scarce, causing a void in the literature. Many of the literature sources that were found were over 5 years old. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community. This study provides much-needed information on the current research regarding this topic.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to examine the experiences of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community. This chapter provides a detailed description of why a phenomenological research design was chosen to examine the lived experiences of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community. This is followed by discussions of the research setting, participants, procedures, data collection, analysis, trustworthiness, and the ethical considerations for this study.

Research Design

Qualitative research flows from philosophical assumptions to interpretive lenses followed by the procedures used to study human participants and problems (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The different methods used in qualitative research can be adapted to address multiple realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The appropriate research design for this study is qualitative research because it is used to study things in their natural settings and bring meaning to shared phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In qualitative research, one can gain a plethora of rich data through interviews and observations (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Using open-ended interview questions is useful in gaining insight into the shared experiences of the participants by allowing them to tell their own story. Suspending judgment from the researcher can be challenging in phenomenological research, which makes the quality of the interview questions even more important (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Using a phenomenological design allowed me to understand the social phenomenon by hearing it from the participant's perspective (Patton, 2015). The writings of Moustakas (1994),

who was a leader in the field of humanistic psychology, and Edmund Husserl (1970), a German mathematician, were instrumental in this research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). When studying a particular phenomenon, the objective is to learn from the people who have experienced the very thing the researcher is trying to learn (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Looking to the experience of others to get a better understanding of a particular subject matter is the basic foundation of phenomenological research (Hopkins et al., 2017). The design for my study was used to extract the common meanings or themes found in the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A transcendental phenomenological design was the best approach to research the lived experiences of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community because the design allowed the essence of each participant's lived experience to stand out (Moustakas, 1994). In a transcendental approach, the researcher focuses on how the participants describe their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Good qualitative researchers understand that their own lived experiences have a way of influencing the interpretation of the data collected from the participants. Bracketing allows a fresh look at the information provided by the participants while setting aside any of the researcher's preconceived experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community?

Sub-Question One

In what ways does a single-parent household structure affect the educational achievement of an elementary-aged child who is enrolled in a public school?

Sub-Question Two

How do the experiences of single parents coupled with the culture of being raised in a rural community impact the overall development of an elementary-aged child enrolled in a public-school setting?

Sub-Question Three

How do single parents with elementary-aged children describe academic success for their child in a public school?

Setting and Participants

The setting for this research study was a rural elementary school located in Virginia. The participants were single mothers with students enrolled in the elementary school. Elementary teachers were also participants in the study. The following section describes the setting and participants in greater detail.

Setting

This study was conducted in a rural county in Virginia, in the August County Public Schools district (ACPS, pseudonym). ACPS consists of one elementary school with Grades K–6 and one high school serving Grades 7–12. The elementary school (ACES, pseudonym) currently has 345 students, with 69% receiving free or reduced lunch, and 50.4% being African American (Virginia Department of Education, 2019). This setting was selected because ACES is a Title I school, because of the socioeconomic makeup of the families, and because the students do not perform well academically. Leadership at this school is ever-changing with a new administrative

staff every 3 or 4 years. Concerns regarding low standardized test scores, discipline resulting in out-of-school suspension, and the lack of supplies for students are hot-button topics of discussion.

Participants

The sample pool was taken from teachers who teach at ACES and single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children who are enrolled in ACES. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a heterogeneous group of prospective participants can vary in size from three to four to as many as 10–15. The study aimed to gain 12 participants, including six teachers and six parents (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Purposive sampling was used to identify participants. Purposive sampling was useful to select a small number of participants to yield extensive information about a particular phenomenon (Bickman & Rog, 2009). A maximum variation sampling strategy was attempted, but in the end, I was only able to obtain the minimum number of participants required for the research study.

The criterion for participants was that they must be an elementary teacher at ACES or a single parent or guardian with an elementary-aged child who attends ACES. A single parent can mean a mother, father, or grandparent. For this study, a guardian was defined as one person who is solely responsible for the health or wellbeing of that student. Participants in the study were selected voluntarily and could exit the study even after agreeing to participate if they so desired. A screening survey was used to select participants who met the criterion noted above. This survey included questions regarding gender and race to strive for diversity.

<center>**Researcher Positionality**</center>

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the positionality of the researcher relates to the context and setting of the research. The school district where the research took place is the same

district where I attended school. I still live in my hometown of August County. I was raised by a single mother, and because of it, I experienced many struggles both socially and academically. No one gets to choose the life they are born into, or the choice of parents who are the pathway by which they enter that life. Some seem to be born with the perfect family already intact: two loving middle-class parents, a big house, a picket fence, and enough love and support to evenly distribute to everyone. Even though that life is a reality for some, it is far from reality for many others. Being the child of a single parent can pose many challenges in life and education. Growing up the fourth child out of five being raised by my single mother in a rural community, we faced many difficult days. Trying to provide basic necessities of shelter, food, and clothing were my mother's first priorities, and that meant that education took a back seat. I never remember my mother attending a parent–teacher conference. I never even remember her asking me if I had homework or asking to see my report card. I probably could have signed all my report cards myself, and she would not have even noticed. When parents face struggles of providing for their family, school somehow seems less important.

It is very difficult to grow up wondering why my friends lived in a house with a mother, and a father, but for me, it was just my mother who was raising me. I lived through struggles that some of my friends would not believe and that, thankfully, my children never had to experience. Always being stereotyped because of having one parent is tough on the mental state of a child. My mother often had to rely on public assistance to feed her five children. There were times when I was hungry, cold, and downright depressed as a child and teenager. Even though I lived in the same house my entire childhood, there was always the threat of losing the house due to delinquency on the payments.

Flash forward to high school where the peer pressure of wearing certain clothes,

participating in extra-curricular activities, and hanging out with friends was sometimes overwhelming. I did the best I could to fake it, but truthfully, my mother was not in a position financially to afford me those luxuries. As a junior and senior, I felt that I was overlooked by my school counselor. The students in honors classes were always in meetings with the counselor talking about college. Not one time did any adult at my high school ever talk to me about college. I had good grades, but I guess the absence of a parental presence at the school, coupled with the stereotype of being on public assistance, excluded me from their focus. It would have been cathartic to have someone to share my struggles with back then, and my hope is that this research will assist students who felt the way I did in my growing-up years.

Interpretive Framework

Social constructivism was used as the research paradigm to guide this study on the experiences of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community. "In social constructivism individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 24). Social constructivism is built on the assumption that no worldview is determined specifically by empirical or sense data about the world, but by understanding the world through forming meanings that correlate to their own personal experience (Patton, 2015).

Philosophical Assumptions

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), philosophical assumptions are certain beliefs that are added to our research, sometimes unknowingly. Life experiences, education, and advice can be deeply imbedded in the researcher, thus forming what questions will be asked or how data will be collected. The three philosophical assumptions that were addressed in this study are ontological, epistemological, and axiological.

Ontological Assumption

In ontological studies, reality is examined through different views and perspectives of people who are experiencing the same phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The intent of qualitative researchers is to uncover the multiple realities that individuals experience. My ontological assumption is that children being reared by single parents have the same odds for academic success as anyone else. Single parents do have an enormous responsibility to raise children independently, but they are dedicated to the overall success of their children. It would have been therapeutic to have someone to share my struggles with back then, and my hope is that this research will assist students who feel the way I did.

Epistemological Assumption

An epistemological assumption ensures that the researcher gets as close as possible to the study participants so that knowledge can come forth through subjective experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Studies conducted in the field where the participants live and work become extremely important in understanding the responses of the participants. It is vital for the researcher to get to know the participants, which can lead to firsthand information being conveyed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As I conducted this study, I divulged that I was a member of the community where the study was taking place and did my best to make the participants feel comfortable while sharing their experiences.

Axiological Assumption

An axiological assumption characterized this qualitative study. In axiological assumptions, the researcher is transparent with the participants in their biases, personal experiences, and belief systems (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative researchers make their values known to the participants at the beginning of the research study. The researcher's social

position along with beliefs regarding politics, personal experiences, and professional beliefs are also revealed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Based on my personal experiences of being raised by a single parent, I was purposeful in setting aside my biases.

Researcher's Role

My role as the researcher was to be honest, forthcoming, and neutral throughout the entire process. I was once a student at ACES, and my daughters attended that school as well. Having experienced the phenomenon being studied, my role was one of empathy. The goal was to put the participants at ease to feel comfortable and confident during the interview process. In phenomenological research, it is up to the researcher to decide if and when personal experiences will be divulged to the participants (Hopkins et al., 2017). Having lived as a student being raised by a single mother, I had shared experiences with the participants, and I was forthcoming with my experiences once the field of participants was chosen. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), researchers must engage in self-understanding regarding any experiences, beliefs, or preconceptions of the topic being studied. The biases that I brought to this study of being raised by a single mother were divulged along with any other biases that arose throughout the study and were recorded in the researcher's reflexive journal (Appendix I).

In a qualitative phenomenological research design, the researcher is the main instrument being utilized (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is up to the researcher to have adequate recording equipment, thorough research questions, and a plan to analyze and interpret the data. Following the rigor of phenomenological research so that the data collection and analysis are above board is vital.

Procedures

In a qualitative research study, the procedures section includes details and technical information regarding the mechanics and administration of data collection (Creswell, 2015). Procedures began with acquiring permissions from the school district and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. After this I obtained study participants, collected data, and used adequate recording procedures.

Permissions

I first contacted the ACPS district and was able to acquire written permission to conduct this research in that district. That approval letter was originally placed in Appendix A, but was replaced with the IRB approval letter in this dissertation to preserve the confidentiality of this school district. Liberty University's IRB approval was obtained before any data were collected (Joyner et al., 2018).

Recruitment Plan

After acquiring IRB approval, the first step was to conduct a pilot study. Creswell (2015) noted that a pilot study is beneficial to provide feedback on the research study by determining if the data collection methods are adequate to answer the research questions. The pilot study was conducted using two single parents and two teachers from ACES who were not included as participants in this study. During the pilot study, these individuals completed an interview, participated in a focus group, and kept a participant journal. None of the data collected from the pilot study were used in the actual study. The pilot study participants did not make any recommendations for modifications to the procedures or the questions used in the data collection methods.

After completing the pilot study, I sent an email to the ACES principal that included the approval letter from the superintendent for the purpose of gaining site approval. Once site approval was received, the principal sent an email to all teachers on my behalf that included the recruitment letter (see Appendix B). The recruitment letter shared information about the study, explained associated risks, and recruited possible participants. A link to the screening survey (see Appendix C) was included in the recruitment letter. The screening survey was included to aid in selecting a minimum of six teacher participants. Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that a minimum of 10 participants is needed to ensure that a study will be successful; however, I was able to gain 11 participants after one dropped out during the data collection phase of this research. Chosen participants received an acceptance email (Appendix D) with a link to the Consent Form (Appendix E). Once participants were selected, the data collection portion of this research study began via individual interviews, separate online focus groups for the teachers and parents, and participant journals that were returned to me electronically. The interviews and focus groups were recorded using the recording option in Microsoft Teams.

Data Collection Plan

The first form of data collection was individual interviews conducted virtually using the Microsoft Teams platform. Next, I conducted two focus groups as a tool to gather small subgroups of the participants in the same room together, to discuss their like experiences and discover what they have done differently to achieve favorable academic results for children enrolled in ACES. Teachers and parents were grouped in separate focus groups to ensure an environment that was comfortable for all to express themselves candidly (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Lastly, participant journals were useful in my study because they helped develop the study by uncovering themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Individual Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with each participant to understand their lived experiences of the phenomenon (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) of being a single parent who is rearing an elementary-aged child who is enrolled in ACES, or of being a teacher who has children in his/her classroom being reared by a single parent. The individual interviews were utilized to answer the central research question (CRQ) and Sub-Questions (SQ) 1, 2, and 3. I started with the individual interviews so the participant felt comfortable in a one-on-one setting while forming an element of trust towards the researcher. Interviews can cover several topics while conveying emotion, building trust, and allowing understanding of the participant's personal experiences (Bickman & Rog, 2009). The interviews took place with one participant at a time using virtual meeting software, Microsoft Teams, and in conjunction with the participant's best time availability. Microsoft Teams was used at the request of the teachers who cited a lack of time to meet in person as well as health concerns during the pandemic. The parent interviews were conducted virtually to alleviate the stress of the having to find transportation, childcare, or just carving out the time it would take to drive to a meeting location. I took notes and used audio recording equipment during each interview. The collected data were transcribed after each interview. Member checking was used to reinforce the credibility of the study. When the individual interviews were concluded, participants were asked to review their transcripts for accuracy. Teacher interview questions for this phenomenological study are listed below and in Appendix F.

Individual Teacher Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself. CRQ

2. How long have you worked at ACES? SQ1

3. What grade level do you teach? SQ3

4. What other school systems have you worked in? Were they rural or urban communities? SQ3

5. What experiences have you had with single parents at ACES? SQ1

6. Explain any additional support you have given to students from single-parent households. SQ1

7. What challenges, if any, do your students who are being raised by single parents face? CRQ

8. How would you describe the parental support you receive from single parents? SQ1

9. What procedures are used to encourage single parents to attend parent–teacher conferences at your school? SQ3

10. Describe any alternative methods used to communicate with single parents who have not attended conferences in the past. SQ3

11. How would you describe the benefits students receive from having parental support in school? SQ3

12. What challenges regarding transportation, internet, and supplies do you notice regarding your students while working in a public school in a rural community? SQ2

13. What are your beliefs regarding what academic success looks like for your students? Are they the same for students from single-parent households as they are for those students from two-parent households? SQ3

The interview and focus group questions were formed in direct correlation to Vygotsky's (1986) SCT, with support from the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (HD-S) model of the parental involvement process (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). A total of 13 questions were asked of the

teacher participants, which brought to light their experiences of teaching children from single-parent households who attend ACES in the rural community of August County. Interview Questions 1–4 were intended to reveal any history in teaching and background knowledge the participants may have had regarding teaching in multiple school systems.

Question 5 revealed the interactions between the teacher and single parents, and if those interactions have skewed the way the teacher feels about teaching students of single parents. According to Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) teachers can offer recommendations about parental help based on interactions with parents. Questions 6 allowed the teacher to share what additional supports they have given the students on their own. West et al. (2017) noted that teachers changed their schedules and purposely had class events on the weekends so that working single mothers could attend. Question 7 served as a way for teachers to explain student challenges from their perspective. Children raised by single parents are characterized by having less emotional and parental support, which can contribute to greater aggressive behaviors (Baker et al., 2019).

Questions 8–11 were created to gauge the level of support the teacher feels they receive from single parents. The HD-S model of the parental involvement process found that parental involvement is a great predictor of student outcomes (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Question 12 sought to allow the teachers the opportunity to share any disadvantages experienced by their students while teaching in a rural community. Walker-Gibbs et al. (2018) noted rural areas are prone to have restricted access to goods and services as well as social interactions. Question 13 attempted to acquire the teacher's meaning of academic success, and whether there are biases present concerning their students from single-parent households. Some teachers tend to depend on their beliefs when developing expectations, rather than using data. This means that students' expectations vary from student to student depending upon the student–teacher relationship

(Timmermans & Rubie-Davies, 2018). Parent interview questions for this phenomenological study are listed below and in Appendix F.

Individual Parent Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself. CRQ

2. How many miles do you live from ACES? SQ2

3. Please describe your own educational experiences as a student. CRQ

4. Where else have you lived other than August County? Was that area rural, urban, city, etc.? CRQ

5. Please specify what other types of school systems (urban, city, large) your child has attended, if any? CRQ

6. What does your child enjoy about school? SQ3

7. What challenges, if any, does your child face in school? SQ1

8. How would you describe the academic support you receive from ACES? SQ3

9. How has your family structure affected your level of self-esteem? CRQ

10. In what ways, if any, do you feel that your child's academic experience at ACES is affected by you being a single parent? SQ1

11. In what ways was education valued in the home where you were raised? CRQ

12. What challenges do you experience by living in a rural community? SQ2

Interview Questions 1 and 2 inquired about the participant's demographic information, provided important background knowledge and were directly about the respondent or their environment (Bickman & Rog, 2009). Question 3 pointed to the parent's experiences regarding their education. Nonoyama-Tarumi (2017) noted there is a negative association between the education level of single parents and their children's educational outcomes. Question 4 helped

determine if the participant was a lifelong resident of the county in question or whether they lived in other areas that were not rural, such as urban or suburban areas. An area is considered remote when it is far away from an urban area (Walker-Gibbs et al., 2018). Question 5 sought to uncover the various schools that the elementary-aged children had attended. Many children who are raised by a single parent switch schools during their elementary school years (Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018).

Question 6 was formatted to allow the participants the opportunity to express their likes when it comes to academics, activities, and social structures at school. Academics are positively affected when parents believe that education is significant (Hakovirta et al., 2021). Question 7 allowed the participants to express their challenges and downfalls regarding academics at ACES. Students identified as at risk for early academic decline because of truancy may warrant more assistance from teachers, and the entire class reaps the benefits (Dronkers et al., 2017). Question 8 was an opinion question regarding ACES. Administrators, counselors, and teachers should be patient with single parents and provide support when needed (Neville et al., 2019; West et al., 2017). Question 8 also explored the opinion of the single parent regarding the availability of academic support they have at their school. Some students from single-parent households may need help with mental health counseling or meeting basic needs (Lewallen et al., 2015). Questions 9 and 10 explored the lived experiences, either positive or negative, of the participants. Self-esteem, race, and socioeconomics are major contributing factors in the academics of students from single-parent households (Browne & Battle, 2018). Question 11 delved into the level of importance that was placed on education in the household (Johnson, 2016). Question 12 offered insight into challenges faced in rural communities concerning inadequate educational resources (Schafft, 2016).

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

During the first step of data analysis, I practiced *epoché* by setting aside, or refraining from judgment, any preconceived notions (Moustakas, 1994). The experiences of the participants are what is important in this phenomenological study. The phenomenological reduction phase of the research is where the experience of each participant is considered. Meanings and essences of how the data are constructed will follow (Moustakas, 1994; Neubauer et al., 2019). The researcher's lived experiences can taint the findings in a way that guides the reader to believe what the author wants them to believe (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The *epoché* is necessary to describe a new way of looking at things (Moustakas, 1994). The concept of bracketing (Husserl, 1970) is a way for the investigator to set aside their experiences. This was done using a researcher's reflexive journal (Appendix I).

Prior to the start of each interview, I divulged my personal experiences with being raised by a single parent to ensure the focus was on the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The recordings and notes of the individual interviews were transcribed, followed by member checking from the participants to ensure accuracy of the transcripts (Creswell, 2015). I followed Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen approach to data analysis. Developing a coding scheme or classification is one of the first steps of data analysis (Patton, 2015).

Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted following the initial interviews. The focus groups were conducted using Microsoft Teams and were determined by the availability of the participants. Focus groups are beneficial, because they usually identify themes by using narrowly focused topics, seeking reactions from participants, and responses are kept on target (Patton, 2015).

Parents and teachers were invited to participate in separate focus groups after the interviews were completed. In a focus group, the interviewer is more of a facilitator to move the conversation along. Interviewees are encouraged to react and respond to other group members' statements and feelings (Patton, 2003). Focus groups are useful in identifying cultural norms and issues of concerns within a group where everyone has experienced the same phenomenon and are appropriate when the interactions between participants will likely yield the best results (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These groups allowed the participants to become familiar with each other during guided discussions and hopefully formed a network of support for the future. Teacher focus group questions for this phenomenological study are listed below and in Appendix G.

Teacher Focus Group Questions

1. What specific programs or resources have been implemented at ACES for children who are being raised by single parents? SQ3

2. How have you provided additional support to single parents? CRQ

3. What do you believe is the most prevalent academic disparity among students from single-parent households? SQ1

4. When assigning homework or special projects, in what ways do you consider the resources single parents may have? What alternatives have you suggested when children from single-parent households have not been able to complete special projects in the past? SQ1

5. How has the administration at ACES been available to hear concerns from single parents? SQ1

6. Describe your experience with dealing with single parents when they have complaints regarding grading procedures. SQ1

7. How does parental involvement accentuate academic success? SQ3

8. What effect does the rural community have on children at ACES who are from single-parent households? SQ2

9. What was the main reason you chose to take a job in the rural community of August County? SQ2

10. What are your beliefs regarding the available supplies and resources afforded to you by ACES, and do you think being a school in a rural community plays a part in that availability? SQ2

Focus groups are qualitative tools widely considered as a combination of interviewing and observation, containing open-ended questions that yield mixed data (Bickman & Rog, 2009) Question 1 allowed teachers to give suggestions to administrators involving what works for their students. According to Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) teachers have a direct influence on student cognition, motivation, and behavior. This information is of vital importance to find positive change. Question 2 was guided toward teacher motivation for student success by providing additional support (West et al., 2017).

Questions 3 and 4 were created to highlight disparities and the lack of resources some single families encounter. Single parents have major socioeconomic struggles. Alm et al. (2020) noted the sharp rise in poverty among single parents and determined that in a dual-earner society, mass unemployment and welfare reform have increased the poverty level of single-parent households. Question 5 allowed the teachers to share their understanding of the support the administration has for the concerns of single parents. Questions 6 and 7 shed light on parental involvement and grading. Positive relationships and feelings of support have a positive impact on parents and students (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Timmermans & Rubie-Davies, 2018; West

et al., 2017). Questions 8, 9, and 10 covered questions regarding schools in a rural community. Rural communities can change a teacher's pedagogy (Walker-Gibbs et al., 2018).

Parent focus group questions for this phenomenological study are listed below and in Appendix G.

Parent Focus Group Questions

1. What does your family structure look like? CRQ

2. How many people live in your household, and what are their relationships to you and your child? CRQ

3. What role does your family play in assisting you while educating your child? SQ1

4. What were your academic experiences as an elementary student? CRQ

5. What are your expectations for your child's grades? SQ3

6. What types of academic support did you receive from your parents while you were in elementary school? CRQ

7. Describe any recommendations you would make to ACES to offer support to single parents who have students in their school? SQ3

8. In what ways does living in a rural community present challenges to you as a single parent? SQ2

9. How has the lack of a dependable internet connection in August County been a hindrance to your child's learning? SQ2

10. Discuss the ramifications of the employment opportunities in a rural community. SQ2

Parents in the focus groups were asked questions relating to their family's structure, support systems, and their children's education. According to Bickman and Rog (2009), focus group questions are not a script and can be modified according to the responses and discussion of

the participants. Questions 1, 2, and 3 addressed the importance of family structure, living

arrangements, and support, which can all be determining factors in student success (Fomby et al.,

2016; Huang et al., 2017). Questions 4, 5, and 6 created the opportunity for the single parent to

give background on their education and how that has affected their goals for their child. The

parent's development and academic level influence that of their children (Vygotsky, 1986).

Question 7 dived into the tangible changes that single parents would make to their school

about support. School support gives single parents a sense of validation (West et al., 2017).

Questions 8, 9, and 10 highlighted the challenges of rearing children in a rural community.

Living in a rural community can lead to health and income disparities along with depression

among the parents (Oerther & Shattell, 2019). Rural counties have limited community resources;

therefore, parents are ill-equipped to provide stimulating experiences for their children. This is

exacerbated by low-paying jobs, forcing parents to travel long distances to work, creating less

time to spend with their children (Iruka et al., 2018).

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis for the focus groups including the teachers and single parents from ACES

was imaginative variation that relies on intuition, and the use of multiple variations of one

phenomenon to arrive at the desired essence (Neubauer et al., 2019). Using the Stevick-Colaizzi-

Keen method, a structural description was created from the recordings of the focus groups to

reflect on the setting and context of the phenomenon being studied. Finding the essence of the

responses is the objective. Moustakas (1994) noted that imaginative variation must be conducted

using multiple lenses, different perspectives, and varying frames of reference. Imaginative

variation follows the steps of structural meanings underlying textural meanings, the recognition

of underlying themes, considering space, time, and relationships about the phenomenon, and

searching for exemplifications that develop the sub-themes (Moustakas, 1994).

Journal Prompts

All participants in this study were asked to keep a participant journal (Appendix H). After the interviews, I gave each participant their choice of either an electronic journal or a journal in the form of a booklet with the questions printed on the pages. The journal was returned to me electronically after 1 week. The journals were used to answer the CRQ and SQ1. Understanding how family dynamics are present in everyday life is an invaluable tool in dissecting the experiences, challenges, and successes of single parents. Participants should also note events that affect how they are supporting their child's education as a single parent. According to Creswell (2015) having participants keep a participant journal or diary during a study is an acceptable approach for data collection in qualitative research. Each participant was asked to complete the three questions listed below in their journals over the course of the week (see Appendix H).

Parent Participant Journal Instructions

1. What were your job requirements during the week? Please include the number of hours you worked, if you had adequate transportation, and your thoughts about your job being empathetic to you being a single parent, and how this may impact your availability to take care of your child's needs.

2. Did your elementary-aged child go to daycare, stay with grandparents, older siblings, or attend an after-school program during the week? Describe your comfort level with your babysitting arrangements.

3. Describe how you and your child engaged in each of the following activities: homework, attending social events, or spending quality time together during the week?

Teacher Participant Journal Instructions

1. Please describe any differences you noticed while interacting with students being raised by single parents as opposed to other students over the course of the week.

2. How does the attention level of students from single-parent households differ from those students being raised by both parents? If there is no difference, what do you credit with the student's level of focus all around?

3. How would you describe your interactions with single parents during the school year?

Journal Prompts Data Analysis Plan

Once the journals were collected from the participants, data analysis for the journal began with developing a list of significant statements from the journal entries to begin horizonalization. Each statement was considered to have equal worth (Moustakas, 1994). The objective was to not repeat or overlap statements. The information was then used to cluster the meaning units to create themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Reducing data to find themes depends on the researcher's ability to have clarity and clear reflectiveness (Moustakas, 1994). The significant statements are displayed verbatim as examples in the findings of the study.

Data Synthesis

Synthesis was used as the last phase in the data analysis process and was meant to integrate fundamental textural and structural descriptions from all data sources to form a unified statement that defined the essence of the lived experiences of the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl (1970) described essence as the condition without which something would not be what it is. Synthesis realizes that the essences of any situation or experience are never depleted, but the essence describes that particular researcher's study of a particular time and place (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological data analysis builds on the data from research questions and highlights themes found in the transcription of the interviews; analysis began after participants had completed the member checking phase (Moustakas, 1994). The core processes include *epoché*, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis. Phenomenological reduction, specifically horizonalization, was used to analyze the data by finding statements of significance that tied together similarities in how the participants experienced the phenomenon. Meaning and essences of the phenomenon were constructed through the integration of textural and structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). The result of this phenomenological reduction is displayed in Chapter Four under Themes Development in the form of a table that provides the key words/phrases, major themes, and subthemes. Irrelevant statements were deleted (Moustakas, 1994) or became outlier data.

<div align="center">

Trustworthiness

</div>

Ensuring accuracy is paramount when collected data and performing data analysis in any research study. Other terms more adept to qualitative research are credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In qualitative research studies, the human being is the main instrument, and the results are meaningless if the human being is not trustworthy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness, therefore, strengthens the value of a research study.

Credibility

According to Amankwaa (2016), "credibility is confidence in the truth of the finding" (p. 121). Credibility was established by using member checking and triangulation. According to Patton (2015) both triangulation and analytical perspectives will increase the credibility of research findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted member checking can be done by providing

transcripts to the participants to check for accuracy. All participants reviewed their responses to both the interview and focus group questions and addressed any corrections that needed to be made. Triangulation was also used to establish credibility by using multiple sources of data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Different sources including interviews, focus groups, and participant journals were used to locate evidence of themes, thus triangulating information and providing validity to the results of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Operational techniques such as prolonged engagement and persistent observation are also ways to establish credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Prolonged engagement was used by spending ample time with each participant. They were allowed to elaborate on each question, so they did not feel rushed. Persistent observation was accomplished by using the same participants in the one-on-one interviews and focus groups. The participants were also allowed to choose the time that worked best for them, therefore allowing observation during different days, settings, and under different circumstances.

Transferability

Transferability determines that a researcher's findings are applicable in other areas and contexts (Amankwaa, 2016). Transferability also refers to the similarity between two contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ensuring that the research can be duplicated lends itself to transferability. The procedures were detailed step by step for future researchers. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) thick description is used to facilitate transferability, along with keeping an audit trail (Appendix J) to record events throughout the doctoral journey so that the study can be easily replicated. Providing explicit details in writing about the themes and descriptions of the findings will also aid future researchers (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Dependability

Dependability was established by keeping a researcher's reflexive journal that included the *epoché* method (Appendix I). Using this journal allowed me, as the researcher, to set aside my own biases that may have stemmed from being raised by a single mother and from being a very Type A personality that likes to do everything in a timely manner. According to Moustakas (1994) "in the *epoché,* the everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings are set aside, and phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide-open sense, from the vantage point of a pure transcendental ego" (p. 33).

Confirmability

"Confirmability can be reached by completing a peer review and ensuring that the findings are grounded in the data" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 323). The peer review was completed by two former colleagues who possess an understanding of qualitative research and have a history with the life of single parents. Both colleagues have served as principals in low socioeconomic areas and have experience with single parents. Their feedback was encouraging, with only a few changes being made. Corroborating evidence using triangulation of multiple forms of data can be used to reveal themes or codes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

Ethics in qualitative research can be challenging. Creswell (2015) identified three principles that tend to guide ethical research: respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice. The first step in considering the ethics of this research study was to acquire IRB approval from Liberty University to conduct this research study. Next, I secured the written consent of all the participants and informed them of their right to withdraw from the study at any time (Joyner et al., 2018). Participants may feel that their personal information, upbringing, and lived

experiences could cause them to feel shame in their communities. To combat this problem, geographical information was not provided in the details of the study, and both participants and setting were given pseudonyms. To protect data, all notes and recordings were kept in a locked desk drawer in the researcher's office. Digital records are stored on a password protected computer in a locked desk in my home office. The files will all be destroyed 3 years after the completion of this research study. According to Moustakas (1994), "human science researchers are guided by the ethical principles on research within human participants" (p. 109). Being transparent with the participants is key. Divulging any risks associated with the study, protecting the confidentiality of the participants, and clearing up misconceptions are extremely important in phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994).

Summary

This chapter described the methods that were used in the phenomenological research of the perceptions of single-parent families while rearing their elementary-aged school children. The research design, setting, participants, and procedures were discussed. The role of the researcher, data collection, and analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations round out the chapter.

The plight of students from single-parent households needs more attention. These students and their families often live with sexism, face issues of poverty, classism, and racism far too often (Freeman, 2017). Single-parent households are disproportionately headed by African American women. This could be due to the low rate of marriage, correlated to the unemployment rate of African American men (Browne & Battle, 2018). Students from single-parent families often must deal with their parents being absent due to having to work more than one job to make

ends meet. These economic disadvantages could result in parental aggression (Baker et al., 2019). All these issues impact academics.

This qualitative phenomenological study sought to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of being raised by a single parent and what influence it has on the education of an elementary-aged child in a rural community. Vygotsky's (1986) SCT guided this research, where Vygotsky believed that a child learns from more knowledgeable people around them.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community. Getting the teacher's perspective added depth to the challenges single parents face when it comes to their child's elementary education. Six teachers from August County Elementary School (ACES, pseudonym) were selected, along with six single parents with children currently enrolled in ACES. Participant confidentiality was ensured by giving all participant pseudonyms. Chapter Four presents the findings of this study's data analysis. A brief overview of each participant is provided, followed by results gathered from the study.

Participants

Twelve participants who met the criteria for the study were selected, including six teachers from ACES and six parents with children currently enrolled in ACES. One teacher withdrew from the study for personal reasons, so I completed the study with five teacher participants. The teachers taught different grade levels and different content areas to ensure a wealth of information. All teachers and parents completed one-on-one interviews, participated in focus groups, and completed a participant journal for one week.

The participants were more than willing to be very frank and honest in their responses. Some of the single parents were very vulnerable and showed a lot of emotion during the interviews and focus group. The teachers expressed their appreciation for the research study as a whole, due to their experiences with students and single parents. Table 1 displays the demographic information of all participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Parent or Teacher	Children at ACES	Years teaching at ACES	Ethnicity	Gender
Ava	Parent	1		African American	Female
Brenda	Parent	2		African American	Female
Carmen	Parent	2		African American	Female
Charles	Teacher		11	Native American	Male
Holly	Parent	2		African American	Female
Jennifer	Parent	1		African American	Female
Kallie	Teacher		3	Caucasian	Female
Linda	Teacher		1	Caucasian	Female
Monique	Teacher		19	Caucasian	Female
Tiffany	Teacher		6	Caucasian	Female
Wendy	Parent	1		African American	Female

Ava

Ava was the last parent to agree to be a part of this research study. She is an African American female with one son who just began his first year at ACES. Ava is a business owner who shares custody with her son's father. Ava wrote in her journal, "My job does not have a negative impact on my parenting at all, I'm able to bring him to work with me if need be." Ava comes from a family where bad grades were unacceptable.

Brenda

Brenda is an African American single mother who has two children currently enrolled in ACES. She lives approximately 10 miles from the school and is the president of the Parent

Teacher Association. Her youngest daughter who is in fourth grade is a little behind her peers and needs extra help in school. Brenda revealed that this daughter loves the electives like music and art and "she doesn't really care about the educational part of it right now."

Carmen

Carmen is an African American female with two children who both attend ACES. She has a daughter and a son. Carmen explained during her interview, "My daughter enjoys reading and social engagement, and my son enjoys science, especially dinosaurs." Her daughter is an excellent student, while her son was recently diagnosed with a developmental delay. He did not speak until he was 3 years old. They found out that it was because his hearing was muffled, resulting in surgery to insert tubes in his ears.

Charles

Charles is the lone male who agreed to be a part of this research study. He is a Native American teacher, a member of the Chickahominy Tribe in August County. Charles has been teaching for 15 years total, with 11 being at ACES. He has taught students in second through fifth grade at ACES. Charles has had many experiences with single parents over his teaching career. He has had parents who did not want to highlight the fact that they were a single parent, as well as those who made it known at the first meeting. When asked about providing additional support to single parents during the focus group, Charles noted, "I have tutored students for free during the summer."

Holly

Holly is an African American single mother of five children. Three of her children attend ACES. Holly stated that she feels grateful because she works at ACES and can monitor her children in person. She also credited her presence at the school with being able to form good

relationships with her children's teachers. Holly stated during her interview, "I feel like my children's academic experience is enhanced by me being a single parent in the way that I can only work jobs that my children can go with me to, and the school is one of them."

Jennifer

Jennifer is a single mother of African American descent who is the mother of three sons, one who attends ACES. Jennifer stated when talking about her parents during the interview, "I think they should have been stricter when it came to education." Jennifer admitted that she has high expectations for her children's academics. She tries to turn homework into a fun game that her children will enjoy. She also works on healthy communication.

Kallie

Kallie is a Caucasian female teacher who currently teaches early childhood special education. Kallie has been a teacher for over 20 years. She has a broad range of experience as a teacher. She has taught first grade, third grade, and fifth grade at the elementary level. According to Kallie because she teaches children with intellectual disabilities, "I feel like sometimes I have more single parents in that field." Kallie believes that parents and teachers working together is a recipe for a successful student.

Linda

Linda is a Caucasian female who currently teaches third grade at ACES. Linda was hired in January of 2021, so she has been at ACES for only one year. She moved to August County from South Carolina, where she was an aid at a Title I school. Linda believes that "single parents open themselves up to communication a little bit more frequently, because there is no one else to rely on." She makes it a priority to be flexible in her time to speak with single parents.

Monique

Monique has been teaching at ACES for 19 years. She is a female Caucasian physical education teacher, who also served as interim assistant principal at one point in her career. Monique has a very unique perspective, because she teaches all students at ACES from pre-kindergarten to sixth grade. When asked about extra assistance she provides to single parents, Monique noted during her interview, "I try to communicate and just make sure that they felt comfortable with everything going on with their child."

Tiffany

Tiffany is a Caucasian female who teaches kindergarten. Tiffany has been teaching at ACES for 6 years. She has also taught second grade. Tiffany has experienced both ends of the spectrum when it comes to working with single parents. Tiffany explained during her interview,

> It was one of two ways, they were very invested in their kid and wanted them to succeed and would come to all conferences, or they were hard to get a hold of, and the child was housed often by the grandparents.

Tiffany believes in being extra flexible with single parents. She always has empathy for their time struggles, and she would use the method of communication that was best for the parent, whether it was a phone call, email, or text message.

Wendy

Wendy is a single African American mother, with one daughter who attends ACES. Wendy became very emotional during the interview process when speaking about her current circumstances. Wendy pointed out during her interview, "I'm absent from everything else that's important." She understands that she must work, but not being present for her daughter takes a

huge toll on her. Wendy worries about how her absence will affect her daughter as she gets older.

Results

After all data were collected, I carefully read through the transcripts from the interviews, focus groups, and parent and teacher journals. All quotations from participants in this results section are presented verbatim, including verbal ticks and grammatical errors in speech and writing to accurately depict the participants' voices. A list of significant statements was compiled and was subsequently used to develop codes and themes. During the horizonalization phase, each statement was given equal value as the disclosure of the nature and essence was sought (Moustakas, 1994). After careful evaluation of the transcripts, overarching themes began to develop. The following section expands on each theme and subtheme that was evident in the data.

Theme Development

Table 2

Theme Development

Key Words/Phrases	Subthemes
Major Theme 1: Rural Community	
Access to neighborhoods, having friends in your neighborhood that attend your school as well, camaraderie, social skills, Title I, diverse cultures, history, invested in taking care of community, many relatives, community needs the school system, multigenerational families	Benefits of Community
Residents sending their kids to other school districts, low enrollment, misappropriation of funds, no grant funding, very little community resources, single parents can't afford supplies, no school budget for supplies, depending on parents, supplies differ according to parents' job, supplies leftover from other teachers, budget cuts, working with bare minimum, borrowing, church, and community partnerships	Funding
Only certain parts of the county had access to reliable internet, glitching, getting kicked off during virtual school, paying astronomical amounts to have internet, using mobile hot spots, school issue hot spots were undependable, awful, kajeet, hot spots, short connectivity time, affected student learning, glitchy, hard to follow during synchronous learning, entire county has challenging internet, pandemic exposed internet problems, inequity in county	Internet Challenges

Key Words/Phrases	Subthemes
Major Theme 1: Rural Community (continued)	
Horrible, late arrival, buses have multiple routes, teachers taking students home, missed transportation changes, travel time, no options, frustrating, activity bus, key factor in inclement weather closing because of rural backroads, lack of transportation for disabled students	Transportation
Major Theme 2: Parental Involvement	
Key to success, better grades, students want to make their parents happy, exponential benefits, students blossom, academic and behavioral growth, listen and respect the teacher, level of trust, positive connections, makes a huge all-around difference	Benefits
Share their single-parent status, long list of contacts, class dojo, email, text messages, phone blast, different methods, daily and weekly folders, open themselves up because they are the only one, upfront about situation, whatever is more convenient	Communication
Flexibility, major push to get single parents to conferences, multiple choices on how to conference, publicize conferences through school website, flyers sent home by students, social media, kid friendly events during conferences, babysitting services	Parent–Teacher Conferences
Major Theme 3: Academics	
Bad grades unacceptable, highly valued, honor roll required, always told I was capable, encouragement, school was fun, parents wanted better for us, parents didn't push the importance of education, no high school graduates in the family, not strict on academics, generational curse	Education is Paramount
Rise to meet high expectations, teacher expectations higher than the parents, home life doesn't change academic expectations, challenge themselves, set goals, highest potential, depends on the student	Expectations
Lack of homework support, no time, comprehension, parent level of education, latchkey kids, not on list of priorities, unable to contribute due to work schedule	Reinforcement
Major Theme 4: Parent/Teacher Interaction	
No support offered, no remediation, I must make them aware if I need support for my child, better when relationships are fostered, available when requested, no advanced notice of big assignments, need after-school homework assistance, create a support group, supplying materials, offering printing services, extra time to complete assignments, free tutoring during the summer, flexibility, purchasing clothes and shoes, going above and beyond, making grandparents feel comfortable, zero judgement, no specific programs for single parents, awesome administration, open door policy, food pantry, available to speak with teachers and parents, building community relationships is important	School Support
No family support unless really needed, grandparents, extended family, broad village, multigenerational household, latchkey kids, positive experiences with parents, trying really hard, open lines of communication, parental support is imperative, rely heavily on grandparents, older siblings, babysitters, neighbors, friends	Parent & Family Support
Empathetically driven, options, understanding, positive interactions, positive attention, hugs, managing stressors, keep food in classroom, basic needs come first, students coming to school dirty	Emotional & Physical Needs

Theme 1: Rural Community

ACES is located in a rural county in Virginia. The population is less than 7,000 residents. There are no stoplights, and just about everyone knows each other or is related. Rural communities are filled with both pros and cons, depending upon the perspective of whomever you may be talking to at the time. When asked about her experiences of living in a rural community, Holly, who is a single mother, responded during her interview, "The challenges of living in a rural community are lack of public transportation, unreliable internet, no affordable housing and extracurricular activities for our children." There are dense familial ties in a rural community. During the focus group kindergarten teacher Tiffany shared, "Many families are multi-generational, so if it is a single-parent situation, typically grandparents, siblings, and others were helping with the student." Even though most of the participants have lived in August County most of their lives and have matriculated through school in August County, they all agree that living in a rural community can be very challenging at times. Five of the six parent participants have lived in other localities that were more urban than rural, but they all returned and are current residents of August County. The four subthemes of benefits of community, funding, internet, and transportation were revealed during data analysis and are discussed below.

Benefits of Community. Not everyone gets the advantage of living in a tight knit community. Participants agree that August County has a strong sense of community. Kindergarten teacher Tiffany offered during the focus group, "Many in August County are related to one another, so it is a tightly knitted community, and sense of family." The belief that August County residents take care of one another was consistent. Linda, who was a teacher participant, noted during the focus group, "The access to neighborhoods is enormous. Having friends around to just go play, and be active, is really critical." For some students, school could

be the only time they get to be social with peers. During the teacher focus group, Kallie added, "Their only social interaction is when they come to school, and it's really important to push the social–emotional aspect, especially in the lower grades." The school plays a big part in assisting the community in times of crisis. They have given out water during long power outages, as well as hot lunches during the pandemic. During focus group Kallie also shared, "There is just a different sense of community, it feels closer."

Funding. The participants agreed that there is a significant lack of funding in the county school district. In the teacher focus group Tiffany offered, "I paid for many things out of my own pocket. Teachers had many roles stacked on because of budget cuts." They discussed reasons for this could be residents living in the district, but sending their children to other schools. Another area of concern was misappropriation of funds. The district's inability to retain teachers or offer pay raises, yet always fund repairs to sports fields and parking lots, was mentioned. According to single mom Jennifer in her interview, "They don't put the money exactly where it needs to go." Going to a school that experiences financial struggles coupled with single parents being on the low socioeconomic level is troubling. Physical education teacher Monique remarked in her interview, "I think that sometimes financially they can face some challenges. Parents want their kids to have opportunities, but depending on their situation, they are limited in terms of what they can do." Trying to make ends meet all alone can add extra stress on a single parent. During her interview, teacher Kallie noted, "Single parents struggle because they are alone trying to do it all. There's always going to be financial stress."

When it comes to supplies, some years they are in abundance, whereas other years they are scarce. The teachers all agreed that supplies are a struggle at ACES. During the focus group kindergarten teacher Tiffany noted, "ACES does not have the means of many resources

currently. Over the last 6 years I have watched the annual budget get cut drastically. Positions have been erased or removed. Last year we were working with the bare minimum." After the pandemic and virtual teaching, some participants had more than enough supplies. Linda, another teacher, laughed in the focus group: "I think this year was the exception. The parents are so excited to bring the kids back, that they gave me buckets of stuff. I think I have 10 million glue sticks to be honest." A difference in the availability to send supplies to school was different according to the type of job the single parent had. In his interview teacher participant Charles noted, "Every year I've had at least one student whose mother was an RN." He didn't have any problem with supplies in those cases.

      Internet. The internet was a hot button issue during this research study. August County has long been known to have internet inequities throughout the county. For over 15 years, half the county had access to high-speed internet, while the other half was forced to pay extra for satellite internet services, hot spots, or had no internet at all. During the pandemic, learning suffered because of the internet. In the parent focus group, single mother Brenda noted, "It was really bad with school and trying to get assignments done, and me working from home." ACES distributed kajeets (mobile hot spots), but they only worked for a short time, were glitchy, or did not work at all. Not only is August County a very small town, but it is also extremely rural. Internet is an ongoing problem for residents. Frustrations mounted during virtual teaching. According to Charles during his interview:

> Oh my God, it was awful. They gave the kids kajeets. I mean, they only lasted like 2 hours, and they were done. They were the ones that were losing kids left to right and couldn't figure out why. I think they finally used the Cares Act money, and they were able to purchase where the kids had unlimited kajeet.

Tiffany, who is also a teacher, added during her interview, "ACES has always had internet issues. The entire county itself has had it very rough when it comes to internet." After the pandemic, internet was at the forefront of the minds of single parents and teachers alike. Tiffany also noted in her interview, "The pandemic really opened up a lot of people's eyes to the lack of equality in the way children can access their education in rural communities."

Transportation. There has been a shortage of bus drivers in many school districts lately, and ACES is no exception. Since the elementary and high school are right beside each other and dismiss at different times, many bus drivers have dual routes. This can cause a transportation nightmare. Many students rely on school provided transportation to get to and from school. Missing the bus is not an option when the single parent must go to work. In her interview, single parent Wendy exclaimed, "I am the only transportation, there is no additional bus that is going to come through here." During his interview teacher participant Charles noted, "We have several buses that are double backs. I had afternoon duty, and it was 5:30 when the last bus came back." In this small community, many times parents call the school to make transportation changes, which are not always conveyed to the teachers. Third grade teacher Linda admitted during her interview, "I made an error, and it just affected their afternoon in a negative way, and I understand how frustrating it can be." In other localities, there are activity buses for students to get to after-school activities and sporting events. Wendy, who is a single mother, noted during her interview, "An activity bus would be good for the kids that don't have a ride."

Theme 2: Parental Involvement

Any educator would say that parental involvement is irreplaceable in the grand scheme of student achievement. Parents who are present and in the know regarding the happenings at their child's school are invested in their education. All participants agreed that parent participation is

important and makes a significant difference. In her journal teacher Kallie offered, "I try to teach, and interact with parents so that they can feel more involved, and always feel empowered that they are doing the best that they can in their situation." Three subthemes were evident within parental involvement including benefits, communication, and parent–teacher conferences.

Benefits. Both the parents and the teachers were anxious to talk about the benefits the student receives from parental involvement. Teacher Tiffany exclaimed in the focus group, "I noticed that in my 6 years with ACES, the more involved the parent is with the student's academics, the more successful the child is." The consensus was that it put the student in the mindset to succeed because someone believes in them. According to teacher Monique during her interview, "It doesn't matter who the person is that believes in them. That just encourages them about their education." Charles, who is also a teacher, noticed during his interview, "With the lower grades, if they knew their parents cared, they would do everything they can because they want their parents to be happy." In her interview teacher participant Tiffany also added, "I always saw more academic and behavioral growth when parents were more involved." Some parents think they are at the school too frequently. During her interview parent participant Carmen noted, "They hate me up there, but that's cool. I think I'm so invested because my mom was not able to be so invested."

Communication. Having an open line of communication between teachers and parents only assists in the academic success of the student. During her interview, Jennifer, a single mom of one student enrolled in ACES, noted when asked about the communication between teachers and parents, "It is amazing, they are always checking to see if we have questions about anything." All participants overwhelmingly agreed that forming positive working relationships only aids in developing all around good students. Teacher Charles noted in his interview, "I

don't want the first call they get from me is that the child is in trouble." Teachers reaching out to parents at the beginning of the school year opens the door for good communication. In the focus group third grade teacher Linda offered, "I like to take the initiative in the beginning of the year to always introduce myself, and that usually opens the gate to allow them to as well."

Parent–Teacher Conferences. In today's school systems, parent–teacher conferences can look a lot different than they did in years past. During the pandemic when students in ACES were learning virtually, Zoom, phone calls, or class DOJO were some of the platforms that were used for conferences. Now that students are in person, there is still flexibility concerning conferences. Kindergarten teacher Tiffany noted in the interview, "I always provided phone conferences if coming in person was too hard to do. I would send home any important paperwork for them to look over so that we could discuss it on the phone." In her interview teacher participant Monique added, "We try to use a variety of communication so that you know single Moms or Dads don't miss it." During her interview, Wendy, who is a single mother, expressed, "I'm not always able to have a parent teacher conference because I am at work all day. That's why I'm thankful for flexibility."

Theme 3: Academics

Statistically, students who are being reared in single-parent households have lower grade point averages than students who have both parents present in the household (Nonoyama-Tarumi, 2017). This does not mean that students from single-parent households cannot be academically successful. It will take the effort of parents, teachers, students, and even extended family to make it possible. Teacher Kallie offered in her journal,

Many single parents don't have academia as their number one priority for their child. This doesn't diminish the importance of school for their children, but I think that school

involvement does not take priority over working for food on the table, clothing, and

housing.

From the academics theme, three themes emerged including education is paramount, expectations, and reinforcement.

Education Is Paramount. Many of the parent participants in the research study were raised to believe that getting a good education was a definite priority. According to single parent Ava in her interview, "Education was very highly valued, bad grades were unacceptable." In August County, there is a local newspaper that prints all the honor roll students from the school division. Parent participant Carmen mentioned during her interview, "I just told them the other day, you better get on that honor roll to get your name in the paper." They are passing the importance of education on to the children. Charles, who is a teacher at ACES, added during his interview, "We don't do Ds and Fs." Charles used this statement to encourage his students. He was referring to his track record as an elementary school teacher, where his classes had been very successful.

Some students will never understand the value of a good education, because their parents may not have the tools to impress it upon them. Single parents often do the best they can with their child's education. Holly, who is the single mother of five children, stressed during her interview, "Education was not really valued or stressed when I was growing up. We were just told to behave ourselves at school and do homework; there was not really a push to achieve." With everyday struggles, education just was not a priority. While talking in her interview, single mother Jennifer stated, "They should have kept on us more. I think it should have been stricter when it came to education." Being a single mother of a new elementary-aged student can be somewhat overwhelming. Gratefulness was expressed for family members who already had

children in ACES and were willing to show them the ropes. Wendy, who has one daughter, added during her interview, "I'm so thankful for people like Farah, who has kids, and is here to help guide me." The parents talked about passing grades on their child's report card but knowing that their child still did not understand the content. Single mom Jennifer offered in her interview, "It is like they just push them through, and I think that's the wrong place to be." Having the students comprehend the content they were being taught was a recurring sentiment.

Expectations. The teacher participants had high expectations for students from single-parent households. Charles, who has taught many different elementary grade levels, boasted in his interview, "If you have high expectations for them, they are going to rise to it, and give you what you expect from them." The students' circumstances were not dismissed, but they also believed in their capabilities. According to physical education teacher Monique during her interview, "Well, my academic goals are the same." Success may be affected by culture but not by a parent's marital status. During her interview Tiffany, a teacher of 6 years, remarked:

> Many students from a single-parent household may succeed beyond another student that has a two-parent household just because they were read to daily, or exposed to higher vocabulary and experiences. It's all within the culture of the child's surroundings that help form the academic scholar they will become.

During the focus group, parent participant Brenda added, "I expect my oldest to have nothing below a C, and the same for my youngest."

Reinforcement. Reinforcing academics at home was mentioned by the teachers in all forms of data collection including one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and journals. One of the challenges of reinforcement at home seemed to be the educational prowess of the single parent. Charles noted in the teacher focus group, "The ability to read and comprehend is huge. Some

single parents have been great at reading to and questioning their child, but that has not been the norm." Recognizing the students that were being read to at home seemed to come easily. Special education teacher Kallie offered in her interview that "parental support at home, I'm telling you as a teacher is an absolute direct correlation to the children's academic success. It's absolutely immeasurable!" During her interview, single parent Carmen shared, "I've had challenges in college, that's why I do a lot of teaching at home, and a lot of reiterating."

Theme 4: Parent/Teacher Interactions

Parents and teachers working together is a recipe for a successful student. Being present for field trips, assemblies, field days, parent–teacher conferences, etc., is vital to a child's educational success. Not only does the parent's presence advise the teacher of commitment, but being visible in the school lets the student know that there is a level of communication happening between parent and teacher. This can help to assist with an elementary student's work ethic and behavior. Single mother Brenda offered during her interview, "I have been with my Nora's teacher forever, because she was Joy's teacher for 3 years." Three subthemes that emerged from the Parent/Teacher Interaction theme are school support, parental and family support, and emotional and physical needs.

School Support. All participants agreed that support at school is important. Oddly, some parent participants experienced high levels of support, while others complained of support not being available. When asked what support she would like to see, Brenda, single mother of two, responded in the focus group, "After school homework assistance." The trend was that single parent participants with students in the lower grades felt very supported. Holly, who is a single parent, offered in her interview, "The academic support at the school is good." All teacher

participants agree that the administration at ACES is extremely supportive. They pointed to the principal in particular. During the focus group, teacher Linda noted,

> It's an open door of we are not against each other, we are together, and our principal being a dad has a lot to do with that. I'm not just here for the teacher, I'm here for the kids, and I'm here for the parents as well.

During the teacher focus group Charles added, "Dr. Jones is amazing. He has had an open-door policy the entire time I have worked for ACES." Relationships were mentioned as well. According to teacher participant Tiffany, "Building relationships with the community is very important to them."

Some believe that education is their life's work and that they were called to this profession. Monique, who is a veteran teacher, offered in her interview, "The grandparents weren't quite as comfortable with all the things that the school system offered, they just needed a little assistance. I would make sure they felt comfortable with everything going on with their grandchild." Going in their own pockets to make sure students did not go lacking is a norm for most teachers. Teacher participant Charles added in the interview, "I have purchased earbuds because I have so many kids that don't have earbuds, and we use those for Lexia."

Parental and Family Support. Unfortunately, it was understood that some students from single-parent homes did not receive a lot of parental support when it comes to education. During the teacher focus group Linda stated, "They just don't get the support at home like sometimes they are latchkey kids, or sometimes they go home alone for a few hours." It is not that the parents were not willing to support their child's education, but many of them were not able. According to Tiffany, who is also a teacher, "They were mostly too busy, worked crazy hours, and just juggling so many things at one time."

Family support was pivotal to both the parent and teacher participants. Charles mentioned in his interview, "The majority of the single parents relied heavily, and I mean heavily, on their parents to help support them and their children." The availability of support from immediate or extended families in assisting single parents can make or break a family. Many of the single parent participants doted on the fact that they have large families that help them take care of their children. Some of the parent participants said they do not really ask their family for much help, unless it is necessary. They were grateful that could count on their families in a time of need. According to Wendy, a single mom of one daughter, "When I say my grandma is doing everything that I want to be able to do, and she's doing it so much better with her than she ever did it with me." Most participants agreed that is absolutely takes a village to help raise a child of a single parent. Single mother Brenda lamented during her interview, "It's definitely draining, because it's just me." Multigenerational families are very present in the August County community.

Emotional and Physical Needs. It goes without saying that no student can learn without their physical needs being met first. Now more than ever, social–emotional learning is just as important. Kallie, who is a special education teacher, offered during her interview, "I feel like sometimes I have more single parents in teaching students with disabilities, and it can be a big stressor." It is never a waste of time to stop during the instructional day to address emotional needs. According to teacher Linda during her interview, "Sometimes children have, you know, emotional needs that aren't always met in that moment, and it catches up with them later emotionally." The life of a single parent is hard, but they make the best of it. Monique, who is also a teacher, added in her interview, "I would say they are a little more tired just because they are trying to do everything themselves." Many single parents worry that they or their children are

being judged by others. According to teacher Kallie during her interview, "I know those moms are thinking, I hope my kids don't get judged, you know."

Sadly, some single parents are unable to provide for all their children's physical needs. It can sometimes be an ongoing struggle just to keep a roof over their heads. Needs like food, clothing, and even personal hygiene sometimes take a back seat. While interviewing, veteran teacher Charles remembered, "There's been a student a few years ago that I ended up buying him some shoes." Teacher participant Kallie wrote in her journal, "Parents will provide the basic needs, and sometimes those provisions take everything out of them."

Outlier Data and Findings

In working with the participants and interviewing single mothers for this study examining the experiences of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community, there was one unexpected finding that did not align with specific research questions or themes. During the horizonalization phase and coding of the data, there was only one outlier, which is discussed below.

Child Care

Being from a rural community like August County, there are not many choices when it comes to childcare. As a matter of fact, there is only one daycare facility in the county, and it has a long waiting list. One would expect childcare to be very challenging for single parents, but the opposite happened in this study. Single mom Ava expressed in her journal, "My son has a pretty wide village, so if he is not in school, he is with immediate family. I trust my family." Single mother of five, Holly recorded in her journal, "My kids went to school with me, and went home with me. I also transported them myself to my home healthcare job. They went with me to run errands for my client also."

Research Question Responses

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community. The central research question along with three sub-questions evoked a wealth of information and developed this study further. Single parents with students enrolled in ACES and teachers from ACES gave descriptive accounts during one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and by keeping participant journals. The participants' responses are described below.

Central Research Question

The central research question asked, What are the lived experiences of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community? Even though rearing children alone can be challenging, it is also the most important job in a parent's life. Many of the single parents in this study are taking the good experiences they had growing up, and accentuating those character traits upon their children, while not subjecting their children to any past traumas they may have experienced. When asked about her upbringing, Wendy, who is a single mother, offered, "Well, I grew up in a good house. I will say my grandma and my grandpa gave me my self-esteem. Because of them, I am who I am today." A sense of mutual respect and empathy for the enormous task of being a single parent was also expressed. Experiences with single parents were overly positive, including effective and open lines of communication. Single parents were upfront with their children's teachers regarding their home circumstances, which gave the teachers insight in to how to better serve their children in the classroom setting.

Sub-Question One

In what ways does a single-parent household structure affect the educational achievement of an elementary-aged child who is enrolled in a public school? The participants in this study were a group of very determined and dedicated mothers and teachers. Even though they were not all raised to respect the value of a good education, they were going above and beyond to ensure these students would have academic success. The student's educational achievement did not seem to be negatively affected by being raised in a single-parent household. These students are treated no differently than students who have both parents in the household. Teacher participant Linda noted in her interview, "I don't even think it enters my brain." They were blessed with very supportive extended families, or villages as they called them, to support the children when they were unable to. Carmen, a single mother of two, shared during her interview, "I am stickler for academics. I do a lot of teaching at home, and a lot of reiterating."

Sub-Question Two

How do the experiences of single parents coupled with the culture of being raised in a rural community impact the overall development of an elementary-aged child enrolled in a public-school setting? Participants in August County discussed many issues and challenges but also benefits of living in a rural community. The parent and teacher participants were concerned regarding the lack of quality internet, a deficit in school funding, and transportation. Jennifer, who is a single parent, noted in her interview, "People are living in this county, and their money is basically being counted as part of this county, but their children don't go to ACPS." All participants frequently mentioned what a terrible experience they had during virtual teaching because of the pandemic, and how that affected social–emotional development. During the teacher focus group, Kallie expressed, "I think these kids are isolated. School is their only time

to be social." During her interview, single mom Carmen noted, "My daughter enjoys the social engagement at school." Monique, a teacher, expressed during her interview, "Well, the internet problems were a challenge." The strong sense of community in August County was a highlight of the data collection. Being in a small town gave the students an advantage because of their familiarity with people at school who they may have already known from church or their neighborhood.

Sub-Question Three

How do single parents with elementary-aged children describe academic success for their child in a public school? Both the parent and teacher participants were very direct regarding academic success. The expectations are that the children will perform even better than the single parents did when they were in elementary school. During her interview, teacher participant Monique shared, "My academic goals are the same no matter where they come from or what kind of situation they have at home." They are motivated to use whatever resources are at their disposal to ensure the academic success of their children. In the parent focus group, Jennifer, a mother of three sons, exclaimed, "Straight A's, I mean that though, depending upon the child." When asked about academic expectations, Wendy, who is also a single mother, noted in her interview, "We don't play that game. My child gets reinforcement as soon as she gets home from school with sight words on the back of the bathroom door."

<div align="center">Summary</div>

Chapter Four provided a brief overview of each of the study participants, followed by the results established by the data analysis methods. Data collection from one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and participant journals were thoroughly deduced and organized into individual categories for all participants, which resulted in themes and subthemes being formed. Themes

included rural community, parental involvement, academics, and parent/teacher interaction. This chapter included participant quotations to give substance to the lived experiences of the participants.

The collected data were essential in answering the central research question and three sub-questions. Single-parent participants shared their lived experiences with their elementary-aged children who attended an elementary school in a rural community. They elaborated on the triumphs and challenges the life of single parents can bring but also expressed how important education is in the lives of their children. The teachers' experiences with single parents at ACES were overwhelmingly positive when the parents were invested in the children's academic success. Teachers admitted that they give their all to children being reared by single parents because they have so much compassion and empathy for their plight.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological research study was to describe the experiences of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged students enrolled in a public school in a rural community. Chapter Five includes an interpretation of findings resulting from the study, implications for future policy and practice, as well as theoretical and methodological implications, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research. A conclusion paragraph summarizes the study.

Discussion

The discussion section elaborates on the findings of this phenomenological study, while taking note of the themes that developed during data analysis. Empirical and theoretical sources support the research findings as well as hard evidence from the study. This section will address the interpretation of findings, implications for policy or practice, theoretical and empirical implications, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research.

Interpretation of Findings

Moustakas' (1994) research method of transcendental phenomenology was used to acquire data from single parents with children enrolled in ACES and teachers from ACES. Vygotsky's social cognitive theory (SCT, 1986) with support from the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (HD-S; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) model of the parental involvement process was used as the guiding framework for this phenomenological research study. The chosen design allowed participants to describe their lived experiences using one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and journals as data collection methods. Purposive sampling was used to select 11 participants, including six parents and five teachers, to yield extensive information about this

phenomenon (Bickman & Rog, 2009). Data analysis revealed keywords and phrases that formed codes and subsequent major themes.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The four major themes that emerged in this study of the lived experiences of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community include the following: rural community, parental involvement, academics, and parent/teacher interactions. The first theme of rural community includes subthemes of benefits of community, funding, internet, and transportation. The parental involvement theme includes subthemes of benefits, communication, and parent–teacher conferences. The third major theme of academics birthed subthemes including education is paramount, expectations, and reinforcement. Lastly, the theme of parent/teacher interactions had subthemes of school support, parental and family support, and emotional and physical needs.

Breaking Generational Curses. The six single mothers who agreed to be participants in this study were some of the strongest, most focused, and most resilient young women that I have ever met. They ranged in age from 22 to 40 years old. One of the most prevalent, reoccurring sentiments was that the parents wanted a better life for their children by breaking generational curses. Even though the literature pointed to single parents struggling financially, surprisingly none of the single parent participants even mentioned finances (Alm et al., 2020; Napora et al., 2018; Richard & Lee, 2019). They were mainly focused on ensuring their children received the best education possible. Many of the participants felt that they were average students throughout their formative educational years. Some shared that their parents did not push them at all academically. Jennifer often spoke of her experiences pushing her to break generational curses. Vygotsky's SCT (1986) informs us that children learn from social situations and from watching

the adults around them. When parents do not view education as a top priority, that attitude is sometimes passed on to their children. The single mothers in this study realized that without education, their children would be set up for a future that would be filled with unnecessary struggles. They had a mindset of ensuring they did everything possible to aid in the academic success of their children. Carmen recalled how she felt so unprepared when she got to college and how she was working hard on her children's behalf so they would be spared that feeling of academic inadequacy.

It Takes a Village. The participants in this study shared the phenomenon of being single mothers, living in a rural community, and having a child enrolled in the local elementary school. Another phenomenon that was shared is the overwhelming feeling of support each of them felt from their immediate and extended families. On several occasions, the participants mentioned receiving help with their children from grandparents, parents, siblings, and cousins. When the parent was unavailable due to work obligations, there was always a member of their village who was willing and able to step in for them.

The teachers became a part of that village as well. Their expectations for the children from single-parent households were no different from their expectations for students from two-parent households. Charles and Linda talked about not thinking about their students' status of being from a single-parent household, but knowing that these students could rise to the high expectations that the teachers placed on them. Together, the parents and teachers formed a partnership that was beneficial to the children. Many of the teacher participants raved regarding how upfront the single parents were upon their first meeting at the beginning of the school year. They would inform the teacher that they were a single parent and give them their hours of availability for phone calls, parent–teacher conferences, etc. The teachers in turn were very

flexible with the different ways to communicate the progress of the students to the single parents. Linda felt that the parents opened themselves up to communication because they were the main point of contact for their child.

      Country Living. August County Elementary School (ACES), located in August County (pseudonym), is considered rural because the county population is fewer than 7,000 residents (MacGregor-Fors & Vázquez, 2020). Five of the six single mothers in this study had moved out of August County at least once in their lives, but they had all eventually returned. Some of them moved before they had children, but I thought it was interesting that now that they were parents, their children were now attending the same elementary school that they had attended. There were many complaints from the parents regarding living in a rural community. They talked about the lack of employment opportunities, internet inequality, funding disparity, lack of experiences for their children, and the transportation challenges. Most residents of the county understand that if they live in August County, work and social functions are at least a 30-minute drive away. They were concerned that their children had a lack of exposure because of very few programs at ACES.

      Conversely, the closeness of community and familial ties were strong indicators of why they chose to return to August County to live. Many of the parent participants lived in multi-generational households with their parents and even with their grandparents who offered support for the single parents and their children (East et al., 2017). The teachers at ACES could not stop applauding the strong sense of community in August County. Kallie and Linda often mentioned how the community came together when the school was forced to shut down during the pandemic. They mentioned how the school was handing out meals, water, computers, tablets and hotspots so the students could do virtual learning. The teachers said they realized then that ACES

became a hub and a resource for the community, which showed just how invested they were in the families. Kallie noted that she has not seen that type of dedication anywhere else she has worked.

Implications for Policy or Practice

This phenomenological study generated findings that can have significant implications for policy and practice. The children of single parents who are enrolled in rural elementary schools, the teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders can benefit from the practical implications. The data extracted from this research study can improve instruction and communication between single parents and teachers. Being made aware of the challenges of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community can inform new policy and practice that can lead to academic success. The implications for policy and practice where elementary students from single-parent households are concerned are discussed in this section.

Implications for Policy

August County Public Schools (ACPS) is a small district that contains an elementary school and a high school. The middle school was merged between the two schools over 4 years ago, due to the decrease in enrollment in the district. ACES currently serve students from pre-kindergarten to sixth grade with an enrollment of approximately 400. Educational policy is often created by the needs of the population that is being served. Many of the parent participants in this research study noted that extra school support is something they think could greatly benefit their children while enrolled at ACES. Additional after-school homework support and after-school programs for working single parents would greatly benefit both parents and students. ACPS does not record marital status in their data collection methods. A change in this policy could highlight

single parents and the need for greater communication efforts, remediation, and more staff development that focuses on the social–emotional health of students being reared by single parents. This identification of single parents could impact the way teachers interact with students from single-parent households and forge supportive relationships between students, single parents, and teachers.

Implications for Practice

This research study has implications for practice that school administrators and teachers might consider when educating students from single-parent households. According to (Alm et al., 2020) a supportive social policy at school can close the gap between students from single-parent households and academic achievement. The parents' provision of social and emotional support, encouragement, and even homework help is vital in the lives of their children. Schools could practice parental training opportunities offered by the school counselors to increase parental knowledge on how to best support their children.

Moreover, when teachers are made aware of a parent's situation at home, it can have immeasurable benefits for all stakeholders involved. Methods and approaches to communication between parent and teacher, support programs, and student-centered social–emotional practices could emerge. Removing the negative connotation that can sometimes surround single parents has the potential to be life changing for school readiness of students being raised by single parents. Open and honest conversations at the beginning of the school year can change the trajectory of a student's academic experience at ACES.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

The results obtained from this phenomenological research study have theoretical implications for elementary school administrators, teachers and single parents, along with

debunking the negative stereotype surrounding students from single-parent households.

Vygotsky's (1986) SCT with support from the HD-S (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) was used as a lens to view the experiences of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community. Participants in this study were asked questions during one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and participant journals regarding living in a rural community, academics, support, and educational values. Questions were intentional and formatted to elicit responses specific to the impressionable years of elementary students from single-parent households.

Vygotsky's (1986) SCT described how a child's cognitive development is dependent upon social interaction, and how society is represented through the family surrounded the child. The participants in this study had very different upbringings. Some of the single parents had great role models when it comes to attaining a good education. Others, however, felt they were not given the proper motivation or push to be academically successful. Regardless of their upbringing, all participants were very matter of fact regarding their children's education. They believed in affirming their child's skills, supporting them through whatever they needed, and setting high academic expectations.

The HD-S model of parental involvement highlights a parent's personal motivation for becoming involved in their child's academic and school experience (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Both the teachers and single parents in this study agreed that the benefits of parental involvement are irreplaceable and could be the key to success for some students from single-parent households. Single parents divulged that when the school strives to create a nurturing and welcoming environment, it reassures parents that the school administrators and teachers are

actively working towards a partnership with the parents. Positive interactions between single parents, administrators, and teachers encourage parents to remain present at school events.

The landscape of what a traditional family looks like is rapidly changing. The idea that a family is made up of a mother, father, and two children is in the minority now. In 2020, almost a quarter of all children under the age of 18 live with a single parent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Data collection in this research study confirmed that there is a large population of students from single parents in August County. Even though some teacher participants felt they went out of their way to support students from single-parent households, some parents still felt a need for additional support. Dialogue between all stakeholders could be beneficial in addressing the needs of the single parents pertaining to their children who are enrolled in ACES.

Limitations and Delimitations

According to Joyner et al. (2018) the limitations and delimitations of a research study are important to the reader. They define specific parameters of how the research was conducted and why a certain methodology was used. Delimitations in this research study included restricting the setting to ACES. The participant selection was delimited to teachers at ACES and single mothers over the age of 18 with students enrolled in ACES. By setting this boundary, I was able to select participants with experiences from both the teacher and parent perspectives.

A limitation of this study was the number of participants who responded to the survey and agreed to become a part of this study. Initially, there were 12 participants, but one withdrew before the data collection began. This study is also limited in transferability as well as application because it was set in a particular rural community in a specific location. The findings may not be transferable to different rural communities with a larger student enrollment and more single parents.

Recommendations for Future Research

This transcendental phenomenological research study focused on the lived experiences of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community. When considering future research, a different rural community in a state other than Virginia could be utilized. The parent participants in this study were all female and of African American descent. A different location could produce a more diverse pool of participants, which may bring new or different results. Another recommendation would be to conduct the research with 12 or more single mothers without including the teachers. Even though the parent and teacher participants agreed on many of the significant areas of the study, the objective was to examine the lived experiences of the single parents. Increasing the number of single-parent participants could strengthen the scope of their lived experiences regarding the elementary education of their children. Conducting a study of only single fathers or both single fathers and single mothers would be another suggestion for future research. Choosing to do a case study in a rural community with high academic achievement from students being reared by single mothers would also be a beneficial study for future research.

Recommendations for Stakeholders

One of the main findings of this research study is the need for programs to close the gap between students from single-parent households and academic achievement. Some contributing factors for elementary-aged students being academically deficient is truancy, the home environment, and disruptive behaviors. There is a great need for more professional development opportunities for teachers. Understanding the home situation while gaining more knowledge of how to approach the single parent could be extremely beneficial to the parent and teacher relationship. These opportunities to better communicate at the beginning of the school year and

work together as a cohesive unit could make the difference regarding academic achievement for students being reared by single parents.

Conclusion

The intent of this research study was to examine the lived experiences of single parents who have children enrolled in an elementary school located in a very rural community in Virginia. The study included six single parents and five teachers. A transcendental phenomenological research approach provided the single parents with a safe space to share their experiences and give them a voice when many of them have felt unheard. Data collection included one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and participant journals. Moustakas' (1994) method of data analysis was conducted using horizonalization and coding to identify themes in the data. Four major themes including rural community, parental involvement, academics, and parent/teacher interaction emerged from the data analysis. The experiences of the single parents coupled with the input from the elementary teachers provided insight into how students from single-parent households can be supported to increase academic success at the elementary level. This research adds to the current literature regarding parental involvement and school support and how much of an impact they can make on student success. Participants were determined to make every sacrifice of their time and effort to promote education and the impacts education can have as early as elementary school. School leaders have an opportunity to create more supportive policies and practices regarding elementary students who are being raised by single parents in rural communities.

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Appendices

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 8, 2021

Jenine Cotman
Gail Collins

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY21-22-68 A Phenomenological Study Examining the Experiences of Single Parents who are Rearing Elementary-Aged Children Enrolled in a Public School in a Rural Community

Dear Jenine Cotman, Gail Collins,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the

consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

xx, 2021

Dear Prospective Participant:

As a student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree. The purpose of my research is to examine the experiences of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be at least 18 years of age, elementary teachers at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ Elementary School, or a single parent or guardian with an elementary-aged child enrolled in ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ Elementary School. A single parent can mean a mother, father, or grandparent. For this study, a guardian is defined as one person who is solely responsible for the health, or wellbeing of that student. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in an interview (one hour), focus group (one hour), and keep a participant journal (one week). Parent/guardian-participant interviews will be conducted online, and the parent/guardian-participant focus group will be conducted in-person. Teacher-participant interviews and the teacher-participant focus group will be conducted in person. All the interviews and focus groups will be audio and video-recorded. All participants will receive a copy of the interview transcript to review for accuracy. The participant journal can be in the form of an electronic document that will be emailed to me after one week, or a hard copy of a handwritten journal, depending on the participant's preference. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

In order to participate, please click here to complete the screening survey. Feel free to contact me at jlcotman@liberty.edu for more information.

A consent document link will be emailed to you after I have reviewed your responses to the screening survey and determined that you meet the study criteria. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent form within two days of receiving the link.

Sincerely,

Jenine L. Cotman
Candidate, Doctor of Education, Liberty University
███████████████.

Appendix C: Screening Survey

Name:

Age:

Gender:
      Male
      Female
      Prefer not to say

Are you a teacher at [August] County Elementary School?
      Yes
      No

Do you have a child who is currently enrolled in [August] County Elementary School?
      Yes
      No

Are you a single parent, or guardian with an elementary-aged child who attends [August] County Elementary School?
      Yes
      No

Please provide your preferred contact information for this study:

If you are selected as a participant, please indicate by checking the time of your availability to participate in individual, and focus group interviews:

Monday	☐5:00-6:00pm	☐6:00-7:00pm	☐7:00-8:00pm
Tuesday	☐5:00-6:00pm	☐6:00-7:00pm	☐7:00-8:00pm
Wednesday	☐5:00-6:00pm	☐6:00-7:00pm	☐7:00-8:00pm
Thursday	☐5:00-6:00pm	☐6:00-7:00pm	☐7:00-8:00pm
Friday	☐5:00-6:00pm	☐6:00-7:00pm	☐7:00-8:00pm

Appendix D: Acceptance and Notification Emails

Acceptance Email

      Congratulations, you have been selected to participate in the study entitled A Phenomenological Study Examining the Experiences of Single Parents Who Are Rearing Elementary-Aged Children Enrolled in a Public School in a Rural Community. Please take a few moments to review, and sign the consent form by clicking on the following link. After signing using DocuSign on the Google Doc and returning the consent form to me, I will be in contact with you to set up an interview.

Thank You

Jenine L. Cotman

Candidate, Doctor of Education, Liberty University

███████████████████████████

Notification Email

Thank you so much for completing the screening survey to participate in the study entitled A Phenomenological Study Examining the Experiences of Single Parents Who Are Rearing Elementary-Aged Children Enrolled in a Public School in a Rural Community. After reviewing the survey, it was determined that you did not meet the criteria for this study. Thank you so much for your time.

Thank You

Jenine L. Cotman, Candidate, Doctor of Education, Liberty University

Appendix E: Consent

Title of the Project: A Phenomenological Study Examining the Experiences of Single Parents Who Are Rearing Elementary-Aged Children Enrolled in a Public School in a Rural Community
Principal Investigator: Jenine L. Cotman, Candidate, Doctor of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be a teacher at ███████████████████████████), or a single parent, or guardian with an elementary-aged child who is enrolled at ███████████████████████████. A single parent can mean a mother, father, or grandparent. For this study, a guardian is defined as one person who is solely responsible for the health, or wellbeing of that student. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form, and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community. This study is being done so that teachers, counselors, and administrators alike can get a glimpse into the concerns that single parents of elementary-aged students may have, and to assist in keeping the lines of communication open with the parents of these students.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
1. Participate in an individual interview of approximately one hour. Parent/guardian interviews will be done using an online meeting platform, while teacher interviews will be conducted in person. All interviews will be audio- and video-recorded.
2. Participate in a focus group, lasting no longer than one hour. Focus groups will be conducted in person with other participants, and will be audio- and video-recorded. There will be separate teacher, and parent/guardian focus groups.
3. Complete a participant journal for one week by answering three questions. The participant journal can be in the form of an electronic document that will be emailed to me after one week, or a hard copy of a handwritten journal, depending on the participant's preference. The journal will be provided at the conclusion of the interview, and anyone who completes a hard copy must return it to me in person at CCES one week from the day they receive it.
4. Review a transcript of your individual interview to ensure its accuracy.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

There are no direct benefits from participating in this study. However, you may benefit from participating in a collaborative conversation with other single parents, guardians, or with

other teachers who will discuss the ideas surrounding single parents who are rearing elementary-aged children enrolled in a public school in a rural community.

Benefits to society: The results of this study might include information that could be used to design programs at the district level to specifically assist students from single parent households, that could help to improve the lives of the students, and parents. The results of this study could also assist in professional development for teachers to identify, and assist this specific group of students.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies, or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential using pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Electronic data will be stored on a password-locked computer at the home of the researcher, and hardcopies of data will be stored in the researcher's locked desk. Data may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all physical data will be destroyed.
- Interviews, and focus groups will be recorded, and transcribed by the researcher. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years, and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current, or future relations with Liberty University or ████████ ████████████. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question, or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately, and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Jenine L. Cotman. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Gail Collins, at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions, or concerns regarding this study, and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined, and required by federal regulations. The topics covered, and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student, and faculty researchers are those of the researchers, and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

I have read, and understood the above information. I have asked questions, and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐The researcher has my permission to audio-record, and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix F: Interview Questions

Teacher Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself. CRQ

2. How long have you worked at ACES? SQ1

3. What grade level do you teach? SQ3

4. What other school systems have you worked in? Were they rural, or urban communities? SQ3

5. What experiences have you had with single parents at ACES? SQ1

6. Explain any additional support you have given to students from single-parent households? SQ1

7. What challenges, if any, do your students who are being raised by single parents face? CRQ

8. How would you describe the parental support you receive from single parents? SQ1

9. What procedures are used to encourage single parents to attend parent–teacher conferences at your school? SQ3

10. Describe any alternative methods used to communicate with single parents who have not attended conferences in the past. SQ3

11. How would you describe the benefits students receive from having parental support in school? SQ3

12. What challenges regarding transportation, internet, and supplies do you notice regarding your students while working in a public school in a rural community? SQ2

13. What are your beliefs regarding what academic success looks like for your students? Are they the same for students from single-parent households as those beliefs the same for those students from two-parent households? SQ3

Parent Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself. CRQ

2. How many miles do you live from ACES? SQ2

3. Please describe your own educational experiences as a student. CRQ

4. Where else have you lived other than August County? Was that area rural, urban, city, etc.? CRQ

5. Please specify what other types of school systems (urban, city, large) your child has attended, if any? CRQ

6. What does your child enjoy about school? SQ3

7. What challenges, if any, does your child face in school? SQ1

8. How would you describe the academic support you receive from ACES? SQ3

9. How has your family structure affected your level of self-esteem? CRQ

10. In what ways, if any, do you feel that your child's academic experience at ACES is affected by you being a single parent? SQ1

11. In what ways was education valued in the home where you were raised? CRQ

12. What challenges do you experience by living in a rural community? SQ2

Appendix G: Focus Group Interview Questions

Teacher Focus Group Questions

1. What specific programs, or resources have been implemented at ACES for children who are being raised by single parents? SQ3

2. How have you provided additional support to single parents? CRQ

3. What do you believe is the most prevalent academic disparity among students from single parent households? SQ1

4. When assigning homework, or special projects, in what ways do you consider the resources single parents may have? What alternatives have you suggested when children from single parent households have not been able to complete special projects in the past? SQ1

5. How has the administration at ACES been available to hear concerns from single parents? SQ1

6. Describe your experience with dealing with single parents when they have complaints regarding grading procedures. SQ1

7. How does parental involvement accentuate academic success? SQ3

8. What effect does the rural community have on children at ACES who are from single parent households? SQ2

9. What was the main reason you chose to take a job in the rural community of August County? SQ2

10. What are your beliefs regarding the available supplies, and resources afforded to you by ACES, and do you think being a school in a rural community plays a part in that availability? SQ2

Parent Focus Group Questions

1. What does your family structure look like? CRQ

2. How many people live in your household, and what are their relationships to you, and your child? CRQ

3. What role does your family play in assisting you while educating your child? SQ1

4. What were your academic experiences as an elementary student? CRQ

5. What are your expectations for your child's grades? SQ3

6. What types of academic support did you receive from your parents while you were in elementary school? CRQ

7. Describe any recommendations you would make to ACES to offer support to single parents who have students in their school? SQ3

8. In what ways does living in a rural community present challenges to you as a single parent? SQ2

9. How has the lack of a dependable internet connection in August County been a hindrance to your child's learning? SQ2

10. Discuss the ramifications of the employment opportunities in a rural community. SQ2

Appendix H: Participant Journal Instructions

You will be given a personal journal at the conclusion of the interview. Complete a

participant journal, and return it to me after one -week by answering the questions listed below.

Parent Participant Journal Instructions

1. What were your job requirements during the week? Please include the number of

    hours you worked, if you had adequate transportation, and your thoughts about your

    job being empathetic to you being a single parent, and what they may entail regarding

    availability.

2. Did your elementary-aged child go to daycare, stay with grandparents, or older

    siblings, or attend an after-school program during the week? Describe your comfort

    level with your babysitting arrangements.

3. Describe how you, and your child engaged in each of the following activities:

    homework, attending social events, or spending quality time together during the

    week?

Teacher Participant Journal Instructions

1. Please describe your interactions with students being raised by single parents over the

    course of the week.

2. What attention level did the students exhibit in class during the week?

3. How would you describe your interactions with single parents this week?

Appendix I: Researcher's Reflexive Journal

DATE	JOURNAL ENTRY
February 27, 2021	I was raised by a single mother and had a tumultuous childhood as a result of it. I always felt like I was invisible or counted out academically because of my household situation.
September 19, 2021	Began pilot study with two ACES teachers and two single parents of students who attend ACES.
September 21, 2021	Completed the first two teacher interviews. First one was really lengthy, I had to redirect teacher to stay on topic. The second teacher was very matter of fact while answering.
September 26, 2021	Completed first parent interview. Parent was a little nervous but gave great responses to the questions.
October 15, 2021	Completed the third teacher interview. It took a little under an hour, which I was pleased with, because that is the amount of time I anticipated. The teacher gave a wealth of information on each question.
October 18, 2021	Completed the second parent interview. Parent was very knowledgeable regarding school policy and functions.
October 21, 2021	Completed the fourth teacher interview. Participant was pleasant after having taught a full day of school.
October 23, 2021	Completed the third parent interview. This interview had to be rescheduled several times. The parent was so apologetic. I am happy we finally found the time because she provided so much insight into this research topic.
October 23, 2021	*Epoché-* I feel that this parent did not give in-depth responses. My bias exists because I was raised by a single parent, and I always have strong feelings and emotions regarding my upbringing.
October 25, 2021	Completed the fifth teacher interview. I feel I am getting better in pacing the virtual interview format.
October 27, 2021	The sixth teacher who agreed to participate in the study officially withdrew.
November 7, 2021	Completed the fourth parent interview. This parent had been working so many hours, we were struggling to find a time to do the virtual interview.
November 8, 2021	Completed the fifth parent interview. Technical difficulties caused us to change the time of the interview multiple times.
November 13, 2021	Completed the sixth and last parent interview. I was unprepared for how much time it would take to schedule interviews with six different parents. They had very hectic schedules.
November 15, 2021	*Epoché-* Participants are not returning the journals in a timely manner. This bias stems from me being a woman of my word, and from striving to meet all deadlines. I must realize that single parents and teachers have very busy schedules.
December 16, 2021	Collected the last parent journal.
December 16, 2021	*Epoché-*This last parent kept saying she would send the journal and never did. I had to ask for it a total of four times. I felt like I was bothering her, even though she insisted I was not, and that she was just very busy.

Appendix J: Audit Trail

DATE	JOURNAL ENTRY
March 1, 2021	Contacted ACES Superintendent to gain permission to conduct the research study.
March 11, 2021	Sent follow up email to ACES Superintendent.
April 14, 2021	Called, and left message for ACES Superintendent. Received reply email. Submitted ACES Request to Conduct Research Form.
April 22, 2021	Sent follow up email to ACES Superintendent.
April 22, 2021	Spoke with ACES Superintendent regarding procedures for collecting data.
April 23, 2021	Received permission to conduct research at ACES.
July 20, 2021	Successfully defended proposal with dissertation committee with minor changes.
August 23, 2021	Received initial submission returned from IRB to make changes. Edited and resubmitted.
August 31, 2021	Received second submission returned from IRB to make changes. Edited and resubmitted.
September 8, 2021	Received IRB approval
September 18, 2021	Completed pilot studies and reviewed results. Feedback from participants determined that no research questions needed to be changed.
September 19, 2021 – November 15, 2021	Conducted teacher and parent interviews.
September 26, 2021-December 16, 2021	Collected participant journals.
November 15,2021-November 22, 2021	Completed interview and focus group transcriptions and sent to all participants for member checking. Received back from participants with no changes.
December 27, 2021-January 3, 2022	Began coding and identifying themes.
January 24, 2022	Completed Chapter Four and submitted to Chair for review.
February 6, 2022	Completed Chapter Five and submitted to Chair for review.