

MOTHERING WHILE BLACK: EXAMINING RESILIENCE AND GRIT IN THE
RAISING OF BLACK BOYS BY BLACK SINGLE MOTHERS

by

Suzette Fagan

Liberty University

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

Liberty University

August 2022

APPROVED BY:

Dr. Rachel L. Piferi, Committee Chair

Dr. Brittany Hernandez, Committee Member

ABSTRACT

The ongoing struggles and challenges of the Black experience and the consequences thereof have been widely studied. One of the many challenges that have faced by this population is the growing epidemic of single parenting. The fractured nature of the Black family has been researched, showing the implications of absentee fathers and the raising of children by black single mothers, especially those raising boys. Using the social constructs of resiliency and grit, this study provided insight into how Black single mothers used resilience and grit to turn their parenting into a story of hope. A qualitative phenomenological study was conducted where the lived experiences of 10 Black single mothers were examined. Sixteen themes emerged from the dataset which included: (a) single parenting as a Black mother is challenging and difficult, (b) the determination for positive outcomes, (c) the power of vulnerability: asking for help, (d) dual role of the church, (e) importance of perseverance, (f) keeping busy, (g) the use of existing systems, (h) the use of creativity, (i) overcoming adversities and moving forward, (j) tough love, (k) forgiveness and redemption, (l) independence and goal accomplishment, (m) mentorship/linkages (n) importance of education, (o) defying stereotypes and (p) changing their story for the next generation. The analysis of these two social constructs provided vital information to future single parents, educators, and community members in making what could be a dismal and bleak future of Black boys being raised by Black single mothers into a more optimistic narrative.

Copyright Page

Dedication

Dear Black Beautiful Single Mother,

This might have not been the journey you choose, but that little soul that lives in you will one day see the miracle you are. You are the chosen vessel that God is using to bring about his purpose, in the form of your son. He has given you all you need to be successful. Fear not.

To Mom,

Thank you for being brave. This dissertation is dedicated to you and mothers like you who sacrifice each and every day for your children. I am forever indebted to you, not because of what you did, but who you are and who you have created in me. You are my hero. You parented 5 children on your own, leaving your own country, giving up your dreams so that we can live ours. Thank you for being the greatest mother I have ever known.

To my sister Andrea,

I am so grateful to you because by watching you, I was able to become a better mother. You showed me the importance of community and connections. You also showed me how necessary it was to show tenderness and love. When mom had to leave us to come to this country, you became my second mother...always protecting me...and I will always be grateful.

Acknowledgments

Xavion, my son, you are the inspiration behind this topic. Thank you for your patience while I have been on this journey. You have been my purpose and I know that you are making your mark on this world. I know that our journey has been challenging but I would not change anything but to protect you from hurt. I know that you will be the father you have always wanted and that makes me proud. I am proud of you and I always will be

Nicholas, my husband, thank you for your unwavering support and patience. Your encouragement has meant so much. Your love has been healing to be and I love you! I am so grateful to your mother who sacrifice so much so that my heart can heal because of you. I cannot wait for our children to see the father that you are. They are so blessed.

To my family (Andrea Fagan, Shanel Fagan, Saskiya Fagan, Javian Martin, Cynia Lewis, Pauline Thomas, Maya Thomas, Jalena Thomas, Collin Johnson) This is for all of us. Thank you for your love and your support.

To Dr. Dwayne Wilson:

You have been one of my strongest supporters throughout this process. I am so grateful that you are in my life as you have been such a blessing. I have gleaned and leaned on you throughout this whole process. Thank you!

Dr. Faye Lewis:

You have pushed and encouraged me for years to pursue my doctorate. You planted that seed and I am so glad that you did. I am so blessed to have your friendship.

Uncle Sid and Mama Sis aka: Mr. and Mrs. Howard:

Your encouragement and your support are none. I am so grateful for your encouraging words and for listening to me go on and on about this topic.

Mrs. Barbara George and Mrs. Betty Long,

How can I explain how amazing you both have been? You have kept me encouraged and I am so grateful. Thank you for being strong mentors to me.

Mrs. Donna Scott,

From the day I met you, you have been supportive and I cannot tell you how much that has meant to me. I am so grateful and blessed because of your friendship with me!

To the Liberty University Family, Dr. Piferi, Dr. Hernandez, Dr. Courtney Loyd, Sharon (from Academic Advising), professors, and classmates, I am beyond grateful. I have had the best experience pursuing my doctorate because of all of you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY	1
Introduction.....	1
Background.....	2
Differing Aspects of Resilience and Grit on Parenting	5
Problem Statement	6
Purpose of the Study	8
Research Questions.....	8
Assumptions and Limitations of the Study.....	9
Theoretical Foundations of the Study	10
Definition of Terms.....	13
Significance of the Study	14
Summary.....	15
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	17
Description of Search Strategy	18
Review of Literature	19
Theoretical Framework: Culturally Relevant Theoretical Model.....	19
Single Parent Phenomenon: Prevalence and Causes	21
Challenges of Single Parenting.....	26
Challenges of Black Single Mothers.....	28
Single-Parent Families and the Effects on Black Males.....	33
Positive Research: Black Single Mothers and Parenting Success	39
Protective Factors: Resilience and Grit.....	41

Literature Gap	46
Biblical Foundations of the Study.....	48
Summary	51
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD	53
Overview.....	53
Research Questions.....	53
Research Design.....	54
Participants.....	55
Study Procedures	56
Instrumentation and Measurement.....	58
Data Analysis	60
Delimitations, Assumptions, and Limitations.....	61
Ethical Considerations	63
Summary	64
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS	65
Overview.....	65
Descriptive Results	66
Data Analysis	67
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	73
Study Findings	74
Summary	104
CHAPTER 5: Discussion.....	106
Introduction.....	106

Discussion of Findings.....	107
Implications.....	124
Limitations	128
Recommendations for Future Research	129
Conclusion	131
REFERENCES	133
APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL.....	148
APPENDIX B: SITE APPROVAL	149
APPENDIX C: FACEBOOK FLYER RECRUITMENT	150
APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT	151
APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....	154

List of Figures

Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) Ecological Systems Theory (Perron, 2017)..... 11

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Almost one-quarter of children in the U.S. live with a single parent, doubling numbers from other countries worldwide (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). In 2019, 4.15 million Black children lived with a single mother, compared to 3.4 million in 1990 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). These numbers have demonstrated a sharp increase in the single Black mother phenomenon. Single Black mothers raising their children face various challenges and limitations that stem from racism and sexism (Dow, 2019). Previous research has suggested that Black boys who are raised by Black women have a higher chance of involvement with the penal system, a suppressed socioeconomic status, and lowered academic achievement levels, as opposed to girls (Barkan & Rocque, 2018; Kovera, 2019; Unnever et al., 2017). Although most research tends to examine the construct of Black mothers and their parenting experiences through a deficit lens, some research studies have demonstrated that Black women can raise Black boys where these adverse outcomes do not result (McGill, 2019; Wells, 2020).

Contributing to the overall perseverance of single parents and their endeavor to avoid the predicted damaging statistical pitfalls means understanding their use of community support and how they develop a strong awareness of discrimination and coping strategies (Cheeks et al., 2020). Resiliency and grit are essential constructs to explore when focusing on the phenomenon of the raising of Black boys in a climate of combined racism and sexism, simply because it can aid in understanding how mothers approach and deal with any difficulties or challenges they experience over the course of raising their sons. Resilience has been defined as an individual's ability to recover quickly from obstacles and difficulties in life (Small, 2018). In contrast, grit has been described as one's level of courage or strength of character (Washington, 2017).

Therefore, this study explored the perceptions of Black mothers and how they utilized resilience and grit when raising their Black boys to bring about the best possible outcome.

This chapter will introduce the study by highlighting the problem being researched, the purpose of the study that is made viable through the identified gap in the literature, and the research questions that will guide this study. This chapter will then conclude with a discussion on the study's significance and theoretical framework, an overview of this study's research methodology, and the definition of commonly used terms.

Background

Past research has concluded that Black mothers face various barriers when raising their children, including economic hardships (Taylor & Conger, 2017) and residing in disadvantaged areas (Barkan & Rocque, 2018; DeLuca et al., 2019). Additionally, Black mothers are oftentimes excluded from their son's schools, making it a challenge to be involved in their children's education (Allen & White-Smith, 2018). Research has also depicted how resilience and grit have played a role in successful parenting (Howard et al., 2019; Lan et al., 2019; Sanguras, 2018); however, little to no research existed that explored how Black mothers utilized the concepts of resilience and grit when raising their Black sons into successful men. In this study, resilience was defined as an individual's ability to recover quickly from obstacles and difficulties in life (Small, 2018). In contrast, grit was defined as one's level of courage or strength of character (Washington, 2017). This study focused on Black mothers who had raised Black boys because Black boys were at a higher risk of educational problems (Thomas et al., 2016) and substance abuse disorders (Tache et al., 2020), and were more apt to receive mistreatment from law enforcement officers (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018). In relation to Black girls, Black boys appeared throughout the research as a higher at-risk population.

Danforth and Miller (2018) completed a study that examined how Black males from female-headed households used family resilience to attend college. Conducting a qualitative grounded theory study, the authors collected data via semi-structured interviews, where they interviewed the sons of Black mothers. The results of their research highlighted that the participants perceived their mothers' resilience as being the backbone of why they attended college.

Grit is a phenomenon that has mainly been studied together with other concepts such as resilience, positive parenting, and overparenting (Howard et al., 2019). Grit is defined as the strength of character or the resolve individuals experience (Jachimowicz et al., 2018). Little to no studies had existed on grit and the parenting of Black individuals; however, it had been studied in conjunction with academic success. For example, Howard et al. (2019) completed a study that examined how Black males were successful in college due to parenting. Conducting quantitative research, the authors collected data via a survey from 226 college students. They found that parental acceptance and the involvement of parents were significantly related to grit. Additionally, the authors reported that grit was found to have a positive and significant relationship to academic success. Outside of the Black population, Lan et al. (2019) completed a study that examined parental autonomy, support, grit, and psychological adjustment in Chinese adolescents from divorced families. The results of the study concluded that adolescents from divorced families tended to experience more problems than adolescents from intact families; however, a parent's level of support and the promotion of prosocial behavior provided their children with grit, which appeared to lead to more successful handling of life's problems.

Utilization of Grit and Resilience in Parenting

An increasing number of studies have shown that grit and resilience can aid parenting, especially single parenting (Joy et al., 2020; Washington, 2017). For example, Washington (2017) compared Black and Caucasian parents and their children and found that Caucasian children perceived their Caucasian mothers as more interested in their lives than their Black counterparts. Washington highlighted that the level of interest defined a portion of grit that a parent had within their children's lives; therefore, the level of grit that a child perceived their parents as having was like the level of grit they perceived within themselves. This is another crucial aspect of why grit needed further study, as literature had suggested that grit could be influenced along familial lines.

In terms of resilience, researchers have focused on how Black mothers tended to share their resiliency experiences through the activism of teaching other Black mothers what works and what does not (Jackson & Kiehl, 2017; Sakho, 2017). When teaching resiliency, Black mothers have demonstrated the success of mothering through the presence of their culture and traditions and how this can support them through a child's developmental years (Jackson & Kiehl, 2017; Sakho, 2017). For example, Black mothers have demonstrated resilient behaviors and the ability to adapt to challenging situations by ensuring that they taught their principles and morals to their children, as they reported that this aided their children in making healthy choices in their lives as they transitioned into adulthood (Jackson & Kiehl, 2017). This appeared to be specifically true if Black mothers were living in lower socioeconomic areas, as they feared that this could hinder their children from reaching their full potential, making values and principles paramount to raising their children.

Resiliency has also been examined from a theoretical standpoint when exploring parenting styles and child behavior problems. Resiliency has been connected to positive

parenting traits. For example, parents who have reported experiencing higher levels of resiliency have tended to utilize more positive parenting traits when raising their children (Erato, 2016). Similarly, Cho (2016) has demonstrated a relationship between resiliency and other essential parenting factors such as emotional control and the perception of a positive future.

Differing Aspects of Resilience and Grit on Parenting

There are differing aspects of resilience and grit regarding parenting, as many studies have tended to focus more on resilience than grit. While resilience demonstrates a parent's ability to recover quickly from difficulties, grit can demonstrate how one continues to persist successfully through these difficult situations. Therefore, grit should be examined from a parenting standpoint, which was one of the aims of this study. For example, a child's level of grit is associated with how they are parented (Francis et al., 2020). The influence of grit and parenting has also been established in other studies. For example, a child's level of grit was strongly associated with both a mother and father's level of grit and different social determinants such as socioeconomic status, mother's education, and mother's employment status. (Joy et al., 2020). Therefore, understanding the perspectives of Black mothers is crucial in exploring how grit is related to resilience and the rearing of their children. Previous literature was paramount to this study simply because it demonstrated a gap in the literature signifying the importance of exploring grit directly from the perspective of Black mothers in conjunction with resilience.

Biblical Foundations of the Topic

Historically, religion and faith have been a central force and a place of comfort in the Black community. In examining resilience and grit in single Black mother parenting, one cannot do that effectively without incorporating the influence of her faith as it is often the centripetal force in her life. For the Black mother, the role of faith is multifaceted. For her, not only is

church a place of solace where she can gather and garner strength in response to the challenges of being a single mother, but it is also a place of safety (Brodsky, 2000; Lewis, 2010; Wilson, 2014). When raising her son, the Black mother utilizes all things helpful to assist her in ensuring success. Hence, utilization of the church and her faith becomes a primary consideration. In addition to being a place of solace and a reminder of her faith, the church is a place where she can find positive male role models (Brodsky, 2000; Ledford, 2010). Therefore, when organizing the biblical foundations for this study, one was able to see how the Black mother identified but also embraced the struggles that often accompanied parenting success by the thematical similarities between her life and biblical characters. Like her, although these biblical figures faced overwhelming hardships and challenges, they often overcame them through perseverance and grit. She, as she has been encouraged to do, understands that her momentary afflictions are producing an eternal glory that is far beyond comparison (*Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2008/2015, Colossians 3-4). Stories similar to these are becoming pivotal to the Black mother experience and thus were an essential consideration to the ecological approach to this study.

Problem Statement

Resilience has been defined as an individual's ability to recover quickly from obstacles and difficulties in life (Small, 2018). In contrast, grit has been defined as one's level of courage or strength of character (Washington, 2017). Studies have demonstrated that resilience may be enhanced by grit (Buckingham et al., 2021). For example, when faced with difficult or unfavorable events, the lack of negative emotions or the presence of a positive outlook can help one cope and adapt (Prime et al., 2020). The problem being studied was that Black mothers face a variety of barriers when raising their sons. Such barriers include economic hardships (Taylor &

Conger, 2017) and residing in disadvantaged areas (Barkan & Rocque, 2018; DeLuca et al., 2019). Additionally, Black mothers may oftentimes be excluded from their son's schools, making it a challenge to be involved in their children's education (Allen & White-Smith, 2018). As a result of being raised in a single-parent household, current research has suggested that Black boys are placed in a higher at-risk category as they experience higher rates of educational problems (Thomas et al., 2016), substance abuse disorders (Tache et al., 2020), and mistreatment from law enforcement officers (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018), all in comparison to Black girls.

Gaylord-Harden et al. (2018) reported that Black boys in the United States are more marginalized and experience higher rates of racism, economic disadvantages, oppression, segregation, and other trauma-related experiences during their development. Despite these challenges, the authors reported that young Black boys could overcome adversity if provided with a framework that follows a model of positive developmental growth that meets the needs of the challenges of pro-social development in all areas of their lives. While much research existed on the negative consequences of single parenting, there was little available data on successful outcomes and even less available social constructs that might lead to successful outcomes despite facing similar adversities.

Many success stories do exist within the Black community when it comes to single mothers' parenting efforts. Literature has concluded that Black single mothers can face many unique parenting challenges, aggravated further if the non-resident father is not involved (Barkan & Rocque, 2018; DeLuca et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2016). However, there are still successful Black adults who grew up in absent-father homes. One possible reason is that they were raised by their resilient single mothers, yet studies on these resilient mothers' experiences are scarce. Previous research (Jackson et al., 2019; Simmons et al., 2018; Washington, 2017) had concluded

that the Black family structure is quite unique; Black single mothers' experiences may have similarities to other single mothers', but they appear to face specific challenges that other single mothers, especially White single mothers, do not face. Unfortunately, not only are Black children being raised by single mothers often misunderstood and deprived of opportunities, but their mothers are also often devalued, misconceived, and even negatively portrayed. Yet, in these instances of adversities, Black single mothers continue to successfully navigate the challenges of parenthood. Further studies are required to understand how resilience and grit play a role in their parenting journeys (Wilson et al., 2016). Therefore, it was currently unknown how Black single mothers perceived resilience and grit to promote strong pro-social development throughout their sons' developmental years. By completing a phenomenological study, the researcher explored the perceptions and lived experiences of Black single mothers to understand better how resilience and grit had been used throughout the successful raising of Black boys.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of Black single mothers in the raising of their sons. Furthermore, this study explored how these mothers had experienced resilience and grit in assisting them in raising their Black sons; how they defined these constructs and made meaning of them were also explored.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do Black single mothers who have raised their Black sons describe their lived experiences in the parenting of their sons?

RQ 2: How do Black single mothers who have raised Black sons describe their experiences of grit in their parenting?

RQ 3: How do Black single mothers who have raised Black sons to describe their experiences of resilience in their parenting?

RQ 4: How do black single mothers define success as it relates to the raising of their sons?

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

In this study, assumptions were defined as things that were considered true (Brown, 2019). The first assumption of this study was that the participants answered the semi-structured interview questions in an open, honest, and candid manner. A second assumption was that the participants had the knowledge and experience to answer the semi-structured interview questions and provided answers to this study's research questions.

Some limitations needed to be addressed in this study. Limitations were experiences in research that can affect the outcome of the results (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). The first limitation that needed to be addressed was that of the population being studied. Because this study concentrated on Black single mothers raising their sons in the United States, this study's results were limited to both the population and geographical area being studied. Further studies would need to be completed to understand how Black mothers perceive resilience and grit in raising their sons in other populations and geographical regions. Therefore, the results of this study could be transferable but not generalized to other populations and geographical areas.

A second limitation of this study included that of the research design. Because the researcher utilized a qualitative phenomenological design, the study could have experienced researcher bias. Researcher bias occurs when the researcher injects her thoughts and values into the research, affecting the study results. To account for researcher bias, the researcher created

and developed an interview protocol, utilized a panel of experts to review the participant questions, and completed member checking to review the transcripts of their interviews.

Delimitations in research are boundaries that have been set by the researcher (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Because participants in this study met specific criteria, this was an instance where the researcher included delimitations. The participants of this study met the following requirements:

1. All participants identified as being Black single mothers.
2. All participants reported raising their sons in a fatherless household.
3. All participants raised a Black son. In this study, the raising of a Black son was defined as a mother who had raised a son throughout the different developmental years, and their sons were 21 years and older.
4. All participants resided in the United States.

Therefore, this study was delimited to individuals who met these criteria. In other words, individuals who did not identify as being Black single mothers had not raised a Black son, whose sons were younger than 21 years of age, whose sons had not been raised in a fatherless household, and individuals who resided outside of the United States were excluded from this study.

Theoretical Foundations of the Study

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory guided this study. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory highlighted five categories of external influences that are found throughout a child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The five different categories that guided this study included:

1. The microsystem (immediate environment)
2. The mesosystem (connections)

3. The ecosystems (indirect environment)
4. The macrosystem (social and cultural values)
5. Chronosystem (changes over time) (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 41).

Figure 1 highlights Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory.

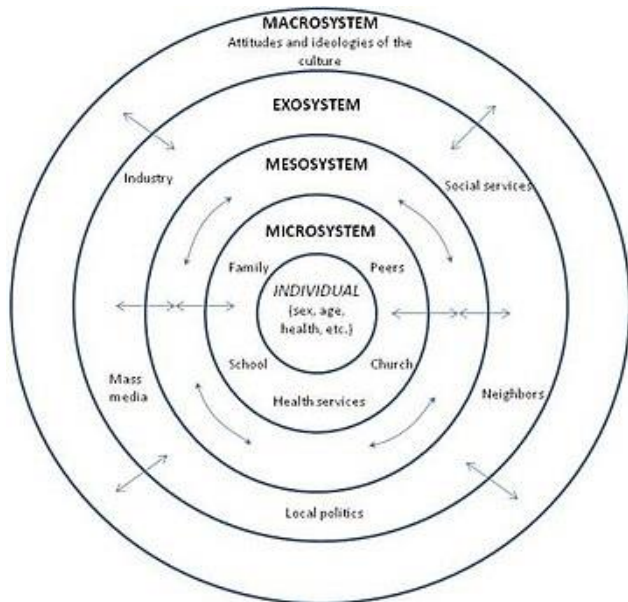


Figure 1. *Bronfenbrenner's (1994) Ecological Systems Theory (Perron, 2017)*

By using this theoretical framework, the researcher better understood how the different systems were tied to resilience and grit when Black mothers were raising their Black sons into successful men during the different developmental years.

To demonstrate how Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory had been used in similar research, it was essential to view other studies that had been completed. For example, Hill and Roberts (2019) conducted a study that focused on parent-adolescent communication and social impacts in Black families. Completing quantitative research, the authors collected data via questionnaires to bring awareness to different positive communication skills and social components that help increase academic achievement levels of Black children in both junior high and high schools. Using Bronfenbrenner's ecology systems, the results highlighted how

communication skills change throughout the children's developmental years. For example, more vital communication skills and positivity are needed at grade school levels because these communication skills set a tone for future academic years in junior high and high school environments. Additionally, the authors also determined that higher levels of resiliency are needed in single-parent households, especially when teaching children communication skills.

Jackson (2020) completed a study that followed Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory by examining how different systems can influence Black males' identities throughout the different years of their early lives. The author discussed how family, school, and communal factors influenced educational expectancy and academic achievement levels within the research. Jackson's study concluded that all three constructs of family, school, and communal influences were directly related to academic achievement levels and educational expectancy. That is, the author reported that there was a systemic multi-level influence at different stages of a Black male's early life that influenced educational expectancy and academic achievement. The studies reviewed highlighted a need and strength to utilize Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to understand better how Black mothers used resiliency and grit while raising their sons through a climate of racism and sexism.

Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, understanding the implications of faith as a protective factor for Black women can be even more understood. For the Black community, religion has always played an integral role when it comes to overcoming challenging situations; for the Black mother, it becomes even more critical (Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Coley, 2001; Davis, Rhodes, & Hamilton Leaks, 1997; Gee & Rhodes, 2003; Jarrett & Burton, 1999; Shook, Jones, Forehand, Dorsey, & Brody, 2010). The church also offers a sense of community and normalcy whereby Black mothers can be provided a sense of solace and additional resources

such as mentorship and academic support for their sons (Henderson, 2016; Sisselman-Borgia, Budescu, & Taylor, 2018). Hence, single Black mothers are more likely to be exposed to others experiencing similar struggles, normalizing their experiences, and providing them a sense of community support. Through their faith, Black mothers may be exposed to Scripture that highlights how individuals should face challenges and struggles in life, such as Psalm 46:1-2:

God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So, we will not fear when earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea (*King James Bible*, 2008, Psalm 46:1-2).

Definition of Terms

The following is a list of definitions of terms that were used in this study.

Ecological Systems Theory – The ecological systems theory was developed by Bronfenbrenner (1994) and are a theoretical framework that highlights five categories of external influences that can be found throughout a child’s development: (a) the microsystem, (b) the mesosystem, (c) the ecosystems, (d) the macrosystem, and (e) chronosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 41). These different systems highlight the immediate environment, connections made, indirect environmental influences, social and cultural values, and changes over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Fatherless homes – Fatherless homes were defined as households where mothers were raising their children in the absence of a father (Devoil, 2021).

Grit – In this study, grit was defined as one’s level of courage or strength of character (Washington, 2017).

Phenomenology – Phenomenology was defined as a form of qualitative research that concentrated on individuals' perceptions and lived experiences related to a phenomenon

(Creswell & Poth, 2016). Phenomenology allows researchers to understand better individuals' world views and how they have directly experienced a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Resilience – In this study, resilience was defined as an individual's ability to recover quickly from obstacles and difficulties in life (Small, 2018).

Significance of the Study

This study was significant in many ways, as this study examined the lived experiences of Black single mothers in the raising of their sons, how these mothers had experienced resilience and grit in assisting them in their parenting, and how these mothers defined these constructs and made meaning of them. Most previous studies had focused on Black single mothers from a deficit perspective (Jackson et al., 2019; Simmons et al., 2018; Washington, 2017). Therefore, this study was significant as it provided an understanding of the experiences of Black single mothers from a strength-based perspective, as it aided in a better understanding of how resilience and grit had assisted them when raising their sons throughout their development.

In addition to providing valid data regarding grit and resilience, this study assisted in creating more effective measures as it related to the mothering of Black boys from both a community and educational standpoint. By highlighting experiences of resilience and grit, both community leaders and educators could be able to understand better Black boys' needs and the importance of offering supportive measures of sustainability to Black single mothers, and how these supportive measures relate to the constructs of resilience and grit. This could allow both the community and educational institutions to begin looking at the single-parent phenomenon within the Black community from a strength-based perspective.

According to existing data, the academic performance among Black children is depressed and subpar when compared to their White counterparts and even other ethnic groups (Jackson et

al., 2019; Simmons et al., 2018; Washington, 2017). Using the results of this data, practical measures to assist Black single mothers in being more involved in the educational environment and having a more collaborative rather than adversarial relationship with the school system may reduce academic suppressions and increase performance. Using the premise of this research regarding resilience and grit, Black mothers could be better able to work in tandem with educators and other community members, thus creating beneficial and essential gains in their parenting.

Summary

Past research has demonstrated that Black mothers face various barriers when raising their children, such as economic hardships (Taylor & Conger, 2017) and residing in disadvantaged areas (Barkan & Rocque, 2018; DeLuca et al., 2019). Additionally, Black mothers are oftentimes excluded from their son's schools, making it a challenge to be involved in their children's education (Allen & White-Smith, 2018). The problem being studied was that Black boys are placed in a higher at-risk category as they experience higher rates of educational issues (Thomas et al., 2016), substance abuse disorders (Tache et al., 2020), and mistreatment from law enforcement officers (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018), all in comparison to Black girls. Therefore, the purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Black single mothers in the raising of their sons, how these mothers had experienced resilience and grit in assisting them in their parenting, and how these mothers defined these constructs and made meaning of them.

When conducting this study, the researcher followed a qualitative phenomenological design. The researcher interviewed 10 Black single mothers, asking them 10 open-ended questions during their private interviews. The participants were allowed to answer the open-

ended questions in any manner that they saw fit, providing the researcher with an improved understanding of their world views. Furthermore, this study was guided by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory which allowed the researcher to understand different systems and how they influenced Black single mothers throughout their son's developmental years.

This chapter introduced the study by highlighting the problem being researched, the purpose of the study that is made viable through the identified gap in the literature, and the research questions that will guide this study. Using the delineated theoretical framework and methodology, it is hopeful that the importance of this research is adequately conveyed with the purpose of being an essential and valuable finding that would be beneficial, not only to Black single mothers but also to churches and communities that are part of the ecology of the family unit. Despite the challenges in the journey, they will be able to have a biblical belief and one that is supported by science, that the path, albeit challenging, is surmountable. The next chapter is that of Chapter 2 that will present a comprehensive overview of the literature.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Social scientists are beginning to see a significant likeness and considerable heterogeneity among Black American single-mother families (Bolds, 2019; Graves, 2017; Wint et al., 2019). Until recently, researchers have committed their attention to identifying the causes and adverse effects of single parenthood instead of examining the possible ways that single mothers can overcome their unique difficulties, especially Black single mothers, whose host of challenges can be compounded by race, culture, socioeconomic status, and stereotypes (Bolds, 2019; Graves, 2017; Wint et al., 2019). There were a plethora of research studies that had been completed regarding the adverse effects of single parenthood among Black mothers (Browe & Battle, 2018; Battle & Crates, 2004, Dowd, 1997; Kim, 2005; Lowe, 2000; Page & Stevens Thomas, 2011; Page & Stevens, 2015, Wilcox et al., 2021); however, more recently, studies were also emerging that demonstrated hope in Black mothers who demonstrated both resilience and grit and who fared well in raising their children properly despite their undeniably challenging circumstances (Hills, 2019; Rodems & Shaefer, 2020; Turner, 2019). Therefore, there was a need for more research that explored how Black mothers had experienced resilience and grit in assisting them in raising Black boys into successful men without negative stereotypes becoming a reality.

The purpose of this study was to explore Black women's experiences with resilience and grit in raising their sons to positive outcomes. How Black mothers defined resilience and grit and made meaning of them were also explored. This literature review will present a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon being studied. The review will begin by highlighting the framework of the ecological systems theory and discuss why the model is essential and in alignment with the needs of the Black community. The researcher will then discuss the single

parent phenomenon by examining the factors that cause single parenting to exist, why it has increased, and more importantly, why it has affected single Black mothers and their boys. The impact of the absence of fathers on Black mothers will also be discussed as other challenges that the mothers experience when raising their sons. Finally, the researcher will discuss single mothers and parenting success while highlighting emerging research on how resilience and grit have played a role in the success of single Black mothers. The literature review will then conclude with a discussion of biblical integration and the identification of the literature gap.

Description of Search Strategy

To gather the materials for this literature review, the researcher used established electronic data sources. These included, but were not limited to, online and university libraries and Google Scholar. Journal databases included ProQuest, CINAHL and Medline, PubMed, Psych Info, EBSCOhost, Digital, and Sage Publications. Because the focus of this study consists of the population of Black mothers, the researcher used the Black Research Starter, which provided information from the Journal of Black Studies and Black Scholar. In addition to these databases and to support a biblical perspective, Strong's Dictionary was also utilized. When using Strong's Dictionary, the researcher was able to examine over 8,000 root words in the Old Testament, and over 5,000 root words in the New Testament. Both root words and keywords were used to gather the material from these databases, which included: *Black mothers, Black AND single mothers, single mothers, social supports, maternal deprivation, low income AND mothers, Black Mothers AND sons, Black Mothers AND parenting success, sources of help, Single Parenting AND Resilience, Grit AND Parenting success, Causes of Single Parenting; Black Single Parenting, Resilience AND Faith, Black Single mothers, AND Faith*. To be included

in this study, most research articles were published within the past five years. Only seminal studies and background materials were used if they were published earlier than five years.

Review of Literature

Theoretical Framework: Culturally Relevant Theoretical Model

The ecological systems theory was the theoretical framework used to guide the study (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The ecological systems theory allows researchers to evaluate human development by integrating components of ecological theory, resiliency, and gritty perspectives. This framework clarifies the relationships between risk and protective processes at all levels: individual, family, and the community (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This theoretical approach integrates developmental and contextual processes linked with maternal psychological functions, including child growth and development, thus offering a conceptual universe or framework appropriate for single-parent families (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Application of the ecological systems theory to this study can better understand why some single mothers and their children succumb to the challenges and risks they face while others do not (Murry & Brody, 1999). The theory can also be used to evaluate how and why certain children at risk continue to grow up to be successful adults while others do not (Brodsky, 1999). This framework focuses on conditions and individual characteristics that facilitate competence and healthy behaviors (Bogensneider, 2000). Most importantly, this theory allows and even stimulates researchers to redefine and widen their views about the characteristics that have led to a positive family function and the methods of achieving such (Dilworth-Anderson, Burton & Johnson, 1993).

In this review, Black single-mother families' challenges, and their strengths to resolve them are evaluated from micro and macro levels. The micro-level refers to the mother's

immediate environment, while the macro-level refers to the individual's surrounding culture and society (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Under this theory are the concepts of resiliency and grit.

Resiliency refers to the ability to recover from negative experiences and situations (Howard & Johnson, 2000). In contrast, grit is defined as one's level of courage or strength of character (Washington, 2017). Both grit and resilience have been seen as emerging themes, even in the medical field. Studies regarding epidemics and diseases show that resilience and grit are significant concepts in preventing and recovering those affected by diseases (Howard & Johnson, 2000). While these models lend themselves to the medical area, similar characteristics can be extended to parenting success as protective factors in overcoming challenges despite mitigating circumstances.

Additionally, protective processes refer to individual and environmental characteristics that can improve a person's ability to resist stressful events, encouraging more muscular adaptation and enhanced competence (Bogenschneider, 1996). Protective factors refer to the behaviors and circumstances that can lessen the chances of adverse outcomes, including personal and family resources, skills, and abilities. Protective factors may have varying direct effects on child outcomes and maternal functioning. They can insulate or safeguard children and parents from stressful circumstances or let stressful events affect their well-being. These protective factors may serve as moderators, changing but not erasing the relations between risks and outcomes.

In terms of the experiences of African Americans, the ecological systems theory framework is best suited for this population simply because single Black mothers face multiple challenges that stem from individual and community factors that other single parents may not necessarily face. For example, single Black mothers are often plagued with stereotypes that they

must define and make meaning of to demonstrate successful parenting techniques (Fields-Smith, 2020). Other factors include economic hardships (Taylor & Conger, 2017), residing in disadvantaged areas (Barkan & Rocque, 2018; DeLuca, Wood, & Rosenblatt, 2019), and being excluded from their son's schools. Additionally, this theoretical framework accounts for protective factors, which have been demonstrated throughout the Black community. For example, authoritative parenting techniques (Danforth & Miller, 2018), robust support systems, and spiritual-religious practices can aid the researcher in accounting for a complete understanding of parenting experiences of single Black mothers concerning both challenges and protective factors in alignment with resilience and grit.

Single Parent Phenomenon: Prevalence and Causes

The United States has the highest rate of children who live with a single parent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). This equates to almost one-quarter of children in the U.S. living with a single parent, nearly doubling the numbers from other countries around the world (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). For example, as of 2020, more than 15 million children were living with a single mother in the United States, and more than three million were living with a single father (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Research shows that the single-parent phenomenon is more common in single-mother households, highlighting the need to study the phenomenon in women (Golombok et al., 2020). Furthermore, the single-mother phenomenon is more common among Black families (Connor & Davidson, 2003). It seems to have more detrimental effects on Black males than on other racial groups (Kreider & Elliott, 2009). This section will discuss the difficulties and causes of single-parent families in general and the single-parent Black family phenomenon specifically, emphasizing its effects on Black males.

Causes of Single-Parent Families

The causes of single parenting are complex due to the change in our ever-changing society's social, political, technological, and racial climate (Berryhill & Durtschi, 2017; Kujper & Johnstone, 2018; Meyrose et al., 2018). Regardless of the reason and factors of influence, single-parent families are rapidly increasing (Bolds, 2019; Graves, 2017; Wint, Elias, Mendez, Mendez, and Gary-Webb, 2019). Single mothers are the fastest-growing student demographic in the United States (Advisory Committee, 2012; Freeman, 2015; Threlfall, 2015). One of the contributing factors to this increase in divorce (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2017; Wagener, 2019). Currently, in the United States, the divorce rate is at an all-time high (Jaskiewicz & Dyer, 2017; Jaskiewicz et al., 2017). One in two marriages is predicted to end in divorce, hence contributing to the rise of single parenting (Morse & Steger, 2019; Parker, 2017). In addition to divorce, non-marital childbearing is a significant cause of single-parent families (Schneider, 2017). According to Hatcher (2004), out-of-wedlock birth rates have soared since 1970 and may be due to the change related to marriages. In 1970, about seven in ten U.S. adults ages 18 and older were married; in 2016, only half of this population was married. Furthermore, in 1968, the average age of first marriage for men was 23, and for women, it was 21, a direct contrast to the current statistics; in 2017, this age increased to 30 for men and 27 for women (Abbott, 2017; Donald & Carter, 2020; Settler & Thomas, 2016).

Another contributing factor to the overall increase in single parenthood is the changing views on family structure and single parenting (Crawford, 2019; Mooman, 2020; Powell & Coles, 2020; Smith, Caruthers, & Fowler, 2019). Women now believe marriage is not a requirement for parenting coupled with the lessening of stigmatization associated with single parenting (Smith, Caruthers, & Fowler, 2019). Research shows that while in previous years the

public held a negative view of single parenthood, society is becoming more accepting of this phenomenon. As evidence of this, in 2016 four-in-ten births were to solo mothers (US Census), adding to the growing normalization of the phenomenon of single parenting.

Cause of the Black Single Mother Phenomenon

While the causes for single parenting vary overall, regardless of demographics, other reasons have also been proposed that are unique to the Black experience (Campbell-Grossman et al., 2016; Vreeland et al., 2019 Washington et al., 2017). Slavery, racism, as well as financial consequences of historical events, implications of Black men shortage, and the higher prevalence of incarcerations of Black males, have all been proposed as causes of single parenting in the Black community, and the single mothering phenomenon, in particular (Allen & Connor, 1997; Bellingsley, 1965; Collins, 2005; Dickerson, 1995 Giddings, 1992; Lareau, 2003; Meyrose et al., 2018; Raley et al. 2015 Suizzo, Robinson, & Pahlke, 2008; Meyrose et al., 2018; Wilson, 2014;).

Albeit not all-encompassing, many have written about the effects of slavery and racism and the irreparable damages on the concept of family in the Black community and the etiology of single parenting in the Black community (Collins, 2005; Lareau, 2003; Suizzo, Robinson, & Pahlke, 2008). According to Allen and Connor (1997), Black women, having to occupy dual roles as both laborer and mother in a system where humanity was denied, were forced to acclimate themselves to a concept of family that was far from what had been their cultural norm. “Often children were raised without fathers, and women were thrust into the child-rearing role, a phenomenon that is still being observed today. The systemic and persistent emasculations, the inability to serve as a protector and a provider, with the looming reality of being viewed as property to be sold at the whim of slave masters, stripped the Black male of their cultural identity” (Meyrose et al., 2018, p. 158). Adding to the direct attack on his masculinity, Black

fathers were deprived of a position of protecting their families, a role innately ascribed to men (Bellingsley, 1965). “The powerlessness of the negro man to protect his family for two and a half centuries under slavery has had crippling consequences for the relatedness of the Negro men and the women to this very day” (Bellingley, 1965, p. 61).

In addition to the system of slavery, historical events such as the Civil War gave rise to female-headed households (Dickerson, 1995; Giddings, 1992). The Great Depression also bore negative consequences for the Black Family. According to Allen & Conner (1997), unemployment within the Black community was twice that of whites. This might have been a contributing factor to the high degrees of suicides and homelessness observed during this time. Following the Great Depression and post-World War II, Allen & Connor (1997) noted significant decreases in marriages among Blacks. They contended that due to the systematic disenfranchisement resulting in housing shortages, financial distress, lack of educational and employment opportunities, increased occurrences of marital discord, and disruptions in the Black family, the stage was set for what could be considered a norm of the Black single parenting phenomenon (Allen & Connor, 1997).

Compounding the issues of these historical events and their impact on the Black family, one cannot thoroughly discuss single parenting without considering the shortage of Black males (Wilson, 2014). In a 1987 study, Wilson attributed the increase in out-of-wedlock births to a decline in the marriageability of Black men due to a shortage of jobs for less-educated men. But Mare and Winship (2004) have estimated that at most, 20 percent of Blacks’ decline in marriage rates between 1960 and 1980 can be explained by decreasing employment. Wood (2004) estimated that only 3-4 percent of the decrease in Black marriage rates could be explained by the shrinking of the pool of eligible Black men. As a result of this “shrinking pool,” the lack of

marriages among single Black women went from 34 percent in 1970 to 78 percent in 1990 (Raley et al., 2015). Moreover, adding to the lessening of available men, the rise of interracial coupling and marriages has also affected Black marriages. Hence, studies have shown a consistent decline in married Black women compared to other cultures such as Whites, Hispanics, and Asians (Raley et al., 2015). Raley et al. (2015) further contend that in addition to later age at first marriage and lower proportions ever marrying, Black women also have relatively high rates of marital instability. At nearly every age, divorce rates are higher for Black than for White women. Recent demographic projections suggest that these racial and ethnic gaps in marriage and marital dissolution will continue growing.

Adding to the narrative of the shortage of available Black men, another noteworthy factor to consider is the impact of incarcerations of the Black male. African American men represent a disproportionate percentage of the prison population in the United States (Pettit & Western, 2004; Roberts, 2004; Unnever, 2008). According to research, Black men face a 28.5% risk of entering prison than their White counterparts, who face a 4.4% risk (Pettit & Western, 2004). These statistics illustrate the negative impact of incarceration, given the age range at which Black men enter prison as most enter prison of marriage age. As a result of this disproportionate rate, the penal system has also contributed to a limited marriage pool for African American women as potential marriage partners. Even if these men are no longer incarcerated, due to their involvement in the penal system, Black males who were previously incarcerated now have diminished economic prospects that prevent men from forming stable marriage-focused relationships with women (Lopoo & Western, 2005).

In addition to the consequences of race and economic disenfranchisement, a possible factor in the increase of single parenting could be the change in political and social climates.

Black women's attitudes toward the necessity of marriage and procreation have shifted over the past years (American FactFinder, 2011; Banks, 2011; Hurt et al., 2014, Taylor, Tucker, Chatters, & Jayakody, 1997; Wanzo, 2011). Black women now are entering the job market, occupying administrative roles, and experiencing higher earning potential, and therefore they may no longer be focused on entering marriages as before. Hence, career aspirations may also contribute to a possible cause for single parenting.

Another daunting statistic affecting Black women and increasing their odds of single parenthood is the mortality rate of Black men. As observed in recent events, the increase of Black deaths from police officers has caused the nation to react. Black men experience higher death rates compared to their white counterparts due to heart disease, cancer, homicide, and HIV infection; In addition, Black men lag White males in life expectancy by 7.1 years and are at higher risk for preventable diseases (Gilbert et al., 2016, Corbie-Smith et al., 1999; Ellis et al., 2015). The shorter life expectancy of African American men is a factor that removes them from the marriage pool (Whitaker et al., 2014). As a result of these contributing factors leading to the decrease in marriages among Black women, shorter life expectancy has been said to be the bedrock whereby the negative narrative of the trajectory of Black males has been predicated.

Challenges of Single Parenting

Although propensity towards single parenthood is increasing and accepted by most, this life path is often challenging. Single-mother families usually face a range of difficulties, including reduced personal finances, increased work responsibilities, emotional issues, and increased family responsibilities (Keefe et al., 2018; Turner, 2019; 2020)). Family adversities, such as environmentally hazardous living conditions placing mothers and their children at risk, have been explored extensively because of the concern that they would lead to even worse

negative life consequences (Keefe et al., 2018; Turner, 2019; 2020). Previous researchers also have used changes in family norms and values to explain why the life of a single parent can be increasingly daunting. (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2017; Wagener, 2019). In a study tracking a nationally representative group of mothers of children from kindergarten to third grade, researchers Nomaguchi and House (2011) found that only Black mothers experienced heightened levels of parenting stress as their children grew older, and mothers' concerns about their safety and survival increased.

In general, mothers raising their children alone can encounter a host of economic, work, and family-related issues. Financial stress forms additional difficulties by negatively affecting family processes (Abbott, 2017; Donald & Carter, 2020; Settler & Thomas, 2016). The demands to maintain a family by oneself can compromise parenting as single mothers also have to make economic considerations such as finding the time to work and earn money while incurring debts (Abbott, 2017; Donald & Carter, 2020; Settler & Thomas, 2016). Naturally, these issues can be determinantal in relation to the time and devotion needed to parent children, so at the very least, single mothers can experience a struggle when it comes to monitoring their children's activities, supervising their homework, and forming relationships (Abbott, 2017; Donald & Carter, 2020; Settler & Thomas, 2016).

In addition to limited financial resources and time constraints, the single mother also faces the challenge of limited supportive services, especially within her community (Dlugonski et al., 2017). Many social support systems are limited or non-existent at best, reducing the ability of the single parent to have another person to assist her in parenting (Campbell-Grossman et al., 2016). Hence, for many single-parent mothers, the fragmentation of the family and limited community resources increases the likelihood of additional stress and even more susceptibility to

psychological problems (Campbell-Grossman et al., 2016). According to Tahar (2016), single parenting is prone to catastrophic, stressful, and anxiety-provoking events, affecting their psychological well-being.

Challenges of Black Single Mothers

Parenting Stress and Poverty

Although it is challenging to be a single parent, being a Black single mother is particularly daunting. Black mothers raising their sons encounter the implication of poverty and parenting stress when compared to non-Blacks counterparts (Jackson et al.; Ray et al., 2021; Cooper et al., 2009; Bernard & Maguire-Jack, 2016; Vreeland et al., 2019). When focusing on the families being raised by Black single mothers, some researchers have found that the higher levels of exposure to neighborhood poverty are familiar to these families (Cassells & Evans, 2017). Studies have concluded that neighborhoods and family stressors due to neighborhood violence and poverty can lead to family stress and conflict, poor parenting, and maternal depression (Campbell-Grossman et al., 2016; Vreeland et al., 2019; Washington et al., 2017). Cassells and Evans (2017) designed one of the more recent studies that showed poverty or the lack of economic resources as a critical issue facing most families in the U.S., particularly those belonging to racial and ethnic minority groups. Cassells and Evans evaluated and explored the impact of poverty on parenting stress to clarify and demonstrate the nature of the relationship across Black families and other ethnic minority families. The researchers utilized the Family Stress Model of economic disadvantage as the primary theoretical lens in understanding the link between poverty and basic parenting strategies and behaviors. This model has been beneficial for researchers of various topics in emphasizing dimensions of poverty that can supersede mere accounts of income levels. Poverty, in other words, is so much more than just material hardship

or financial strain, as these can be felt by even those not currently exposed to poverty situations. The researchers determined three primary mediators in the link between poverty and parenting stress for Black and other ethnic minority families. Three mediators included depression, family structure, and neighborhood environment. According to the researchers, neighborhood environment or neighborhood poverty was often overlooked even though it had a massive impact on the family stressors felt by Black parents who belonged to a low-income or poverty background.

Challenges to single parenting may also exist in poverty and increasing parenting stress (Dlugonski et al., 2017), resulting in other consequences, which may be somatic. Research findings suggest that Black single mothers experience physical challenges due to limited support and limited access to healthy activities. Although Black single mothers see physical exercise as a form of stress relief, barriers exist, resulting in little physical activity, lack of social support, chronic stress, and stressors from single motherhood (Dlugonski et al., 2017).

Black Single Mothers and the Challenge of Stereotypes

In addition to poverty, increased stress, and limited ability for physical activities, Black mothers also face the challenges of unmasking the negative stereotypes associated with being a Black male. Powell and Coles (2019) also focused on the challenges of Black single mothers, who were raising their children ages 10 and 18 years, to understand how the mothers saw themselves and their situations as they navigated and negotiated their daily lives while raising their children alone. The researchers used the methodology of *motherwork* to understand the oppressive factors that mothers deemed they had been facing as they reared their sons. Apart from understanding how Black single mothers viewed the meaning of motherhood, the researchers strived to understand how being a single parent affected other aspects of Black single

mothers' lives. Powell and Coles (2019) also evaluated how this group of mothers faced challenges when raising their Black male children in contemporary urban America. Researchers also designed the study to understand precisely how Black single mothers responded to the challenges they had raised during their interviews and how they coped with their parenting stressors and issues. Their study provided the Black single mother participants a chance to share their stories about raising their male children, a platform usually not offered to them. This study allowed the participants to share all barriers, personal challenges and perceived societal and cultural factors that affected them daily. Their research findings revealed that the Black family structure was unique. Black single mothers' experiences may have similarities to other single mothers', but they appear to face specific challenges that other single mothers, especially White single mothers, do not face. These challenges included Black single mothers being often misunderstood and deprived of opportunities and being devalued, misconceived, and even negatively portrayed through stereotypes.

For example, when it came to the challenge of being negatively portrayed through stereotypes, researchers have purported that a popular discourse usually characterizes Black single women as desperate and dysfunctional, leading to negative stereotypes and assumptions (Crawford, 2019; Mooman, 2020; Powell & Coles, 2020; Smith, Caruthers, & Fowler, 2019). When they become single mothers due to unforeseen events, these negative perceptions worsen. Research studies completed as early as the 1960s have highlighted that negative perceptions of Black single mothers are overwhelming. Moynihan (1965) indicated that the number of single-parent households in the Black community headed by women could be blamed for the many societal ills and woes. Black women are blamed for raising men who account for higher crime rates, drug use, incarceration, and low academic performance. Many present researchers already

know that these assertions are wrong; however, these views were dominant for quite some time. Moynihan calling Black individuals negroes is enough of a sign of how low he thought of the population.

Another early study completed by Dickerson (1995) highlighted how Black boys raised by single mothers could be described as inferior, nonproductive, pathological, and dysfunctional. Despite the changing of the times, these early studies, particularly Moynihan's report, created a stereotype that today continues to shape and affect how single Black mothers are still being studied. Most researchers striving to understand the experiences of Black children raised by single mothers often do so from a negative stance; that is, Black single mothers are irresponsible. Many of the studies today examining Black students raised by single Black mothers often start with the assertion that these students were being raised in an unhealthy environment wherein not only they could not take care of their children, but they could also not possibly know how to value themselves as women too (Moynihan, 1965). Often, such research could lead to a particular type of findings, which would also be harmful. The basic assumption of these early studies is that the only stable family structure is the patriarchal family, wherein both parents are present, which is simply no longer the case in more recent times.

Black Single Mothers and the Challenge of Racial Socialization of Children

Because Black single mothers report experiencing the effects of stereotypes when raising their boys (Crawford, 2019), studies have also reported that they tend to engage in the racial socialization of their children, which can be a significant challenge when parenting. Racial socialization is defined as a developmental process where Black mothers assist their children in navigating the world through the lens through which they are seen (Wang et al., 2020). Frequently, these lenses are built on stereotypes and practices of discrimination (Umaña-Taylor

& Hill, 2020). For example, Turner (2020) conducted a study investigating the racial socialization practices of Black single mothers who identified as low-income. The author followed a qualitative method where they collected data via interviews. The study results concluded that Black single mothers appeared to fear their boys' safety due to discriminatory practices and different stereotypes found within the community. The authors reported that the Black single mothers reported that raising their sons was a challenge. They had to encourage them not to dress or behave in ways that solidified the community stereotypes. In another study, Blanchard et al. (2019) also discussed the racial socialization of African American males. They concentrated on how parents went about this practice to keep their young boys safe. The study results highlighted that mothers tended to practice racial socialization to prepare them for experiences of bias and egalitarianism and other instances of mistrust in society's stereotypes. The importance of discussing challenges of racial socialization is seen through different areas of research, especially a study conducted by Davis et al. (2017). Davis et al. reported that racial socialization messages could be seen as impacting youth in negative ways, as the authors noted that children could experience a decrease in self-esteem and both internalizing and externalizing negative behaviors.

In essence, along with raising their sons alone, with limited support, and more vulnerability to economic and financial constraints, Black mothers are challenged with even more compounding variables increasing their sons' negative stereotypes and the consequences of such (Ferguson, 2000). The negative images associated with being Black and male, seen potentially as a criminal even without reason, along with the unmerited mistrust related to just being his color, often becomes overwhelming for Black mothers. Black mothers are constantly attempting to protect their children from the dangers of institutionalized racism as their sons are

routinely framed as aggressive and threatening (Collins, 2004; Ferguson, 2000; Russell-Brown, 1998). Ferguson (2000) and Collins (2004) also show that in addition to the everyday work of parenting, unlike other cultures and ethnic groups, Black mothers are reminded daily that these stereotypes are not just ways of thinking; they are undeniably linked to the potential threat to their sons' lives.

Single-Parent Families and the Effects on Black Males

As a result of the increase in single-parenting households and the documented challenges of raising Black males, research shows that this type of family constitution has detrimental implications for Black males (Jones et al., 2007). Moynihan (1965) indicated that the number of single-parent households in the Black community headed by women could be blamed for the many societal ills and woes. Black women are blamed for raising boys who account for higher crime rates, drug use, incarceration, and low academic performance (Williams et al., 2017, Wang et al., 2020). Many researchers already know that these assertions are wrong due to perceptions of race and stereotypes of the Black community (Donald & Carter, 2020; Settler & Thomas, 2016); however, these views have been dominant for quite some time (Tache et al., 2020).

While only accounting for 13% of the overall population, Black males constitute 35% of arrests for drug possession, 55% of convictions, and 74% of prison sentences (Harvey 2004; Hinton et al., 2018). Educationally, the Black male lags significantly behind in all significant ethnicities in all academic content areas. This has been correlated with the inability of single Black mothers to be heavily involved in their son's educational journeys (Williams et al., 2017). For example, Williams et al. (2017) conducted a study that focused on the perceptions of Black mothers on the role that race played in their children's education. Completing qualitative research

and interviewing 76 Black mothers, the authors concluded that they could be limited in their child's education due to their racial composition and teachers.

What has also been seen because of being raised by a Black woman is lowered level of success. Black males raised in single-parent families are more apt to experience a higher chance of dropping out of high school, reduced opportunities to attend college, higher incidences of remaining at a lower socioeconomic status, and an increased experience of committing crimes and using drugs (William et al., 2017). These effects need to continue to be researched; however, it is also essential to view these challenges concerning the absence of fathers.

Impact of Absent Fathers on Black Boys

Adding to the challenge of raising boys in a single-parent female-headed household, new research shows the vital importance of a father's relationship with his sons, even outside the home. Research evidence links the fatherly relationship to children's language development, leading to future academic success. In addition to language development, having an active father in a boy's life positively correlates with high self-esteem, increased academic success, and reduction in drug and gang involvement, in addition to a plethora of other benefits. (Robinson & Werblow, 2012)

While it is clear how beneficial having a functional fatherly relationship is to children, it is also equally apparent that his absence has detriments. Studies have linked the lack of fathers to an increased risk of carrying guns, dealing drugs, poverty, and abuse (Schneider 2017, Allen & Daly 2007). Similarly, research linked most prisoners, juvenile detention inmates, high school dropouts, pregnant teenagers, adolescent murderers, and rapists to fatherless homes (Baskerville, 2004). With over 50 percent of Black males under the age of 17 living in single-parent households, these statistics for this population are even more compounded. Among the

previously discussed maladaptive behaviors related to father-absence, different authors have also addressed that Black children can be affected by reduced financial opportunities, negatively affecting their upbringing (McLeod & Tirmazi, 2017). Additionally, while researchers have highlighted that the effects on children are mainly due to fathers being incarcerated and not involved in their children's lives, the economic constraints cannot be overlooked (Keefe et al., 2017). Due to being the sole breadwinner, Black mothers cannot provide adequately for their children. These economic consequences may force mothers to live in more poverty-stricken areas where a higher incidence of crimes may be experienced.

In addition to slowed economic growth, the absence of fathers also had detrimental effects on academic success for Black males. There are also direct educational implications related to truancy and academic performance (Ellis, 2015). Over 71% of high school dropouts are fatherless. Fatherless children have more trouble academically, scoring poorly on tests of reading, mathematics, and thinking skills; children from father-absent homes are more likely to play truant from school, more likely to be excluded from school, and more likely to leave school at age 16, and less likely to attain academic and professional qualifications in adulthood. In addition to this, researchers have discovered that the most detrimental time for a child not to have his father is during the developing years of birth and five. Still, these negative changes are often seen when the child becomes much older (Warde, 2008).

Absent fathers also have had a bearing on how a child sees himself and the world (Harris & Taylor, 2012). Hence, a Black male's self-concept and his way of seeing the world are often negatively impacted by having an absent father. According to Magqamfana and Bazana (2020), the negative impact of absence from fathers can have long-lasting effects. This study showed that the participants battled with self-esteem, seeing their worth, romantic relationships, and even

career success. Similarly, according to Princeton University, a study conducted by McLanahan (2013) substantiated the damaging effects of absenteeism by Black fathers. Per her study, a father's absence increased anti-social behavior and drug use and lowered the ability for future employment. Likewise, Cory Ellis (2015), author of *Growing up without Father: The effects on African American Boys*, found that the father's absence was also the strongest indicator of delinquency (Belgrave, 2018). In addition, this study also showed father's absence contributed to mental illness, suicide, and increased risk of depression. This study also indicates that the impact of absent fathers is different from fathers who are just outside the home but still maintain a connection with their children. In her research, Faye Belgrave (2018) found that a father's involvement is more important than his presence in his home. Per her findings, family structure is not as important if the boy has quality time and positive involvement with his father.

Along with the higher incidence of behavioral dysfunction, the emotional impact of absent fathers is also striking. Kunjufu (2007), the author of *Raising Black boys*, refers to the emotional maladjustment of boys and their missing fathers as "post-traumatic missing daddy disorder." The behavioral dysfunction, emotional withdrawal, or depression stems from the boy's inability to express his emotional hurt regarding his father's absence. Research suggests that children growing up without their fathers have a perceived sense of abandonment, a heightened sense of anger, and a growing sense of mistrust (Kunjufu, 2007, Jones et al., 2007). As a result of these conditions, the attachment process to form healthy relationships may be compromised, creating a possible rippling effect of generational cycling of similar behaviors.

Impact of Absent Fathers on Black Mothers

The harsh reality of absent fathers does not limit itself to the psychological impact on the children but also has a lasting effect on the mother, making effective parenting even more

challenging (Kunjufu, 2007). Non-resident fathers' involvement with the parenting and rearing processes can lead to lower levels of depression and better functioning in Black mothers, demonstrating that there are many impacts of absent fathers on both mothers and their boys (Cross, 2018). The rates of Black single families are increasing, with fathers becoming completely absent. The latest statistics would show that in the United States, there were around 4.15 million Black households with a single mother in 2019 (Statistica, 2021). This is up from 1990 when roughly 3.4 million Black families were headed by single women (Statistica, 2021). Additionally, 70% of Black children are born into a single-mother family dynamic (Cross, 2018). While most Black children are born to single mothers, the father's involvement can shape the child's parenting and quality of life.

Studies have demonstrated that a father's involvement is crucial to a Black mother, regardless of whether he lives in the home or not (Finzi-Dottan & Cohen, 2017). Alternatively, depression was also linked to lower paternal involvement levels (Beckmeyer et al., 2020; Elam et al., 2016; Finzi-Dottan & Cohen, 2017). The same can also be said of mothers' dissatisfaction with the father-child relationship and the amount of financial support that the father provides, as single Black mothers tend to experience a decrease in financial stability when an absent Black father is absent (Beckmeyer et al., 2020; Elam et al., 2016; Finzi-Dottan & Cohen, 2017). Research has demonstrated that paternal involvement in the child's life, the amount of financial support, and Black mothers' level of satisfaction with the quality of father-child relationship their children had, are linked to decreased maternal parenting stress and depression (Beckmeyer et al., 2020; Elam et al., 2016; Finzi-Dottan & Cohen, 2017). Further research also shows a correlation between single mothers who displayed depressive symptoms and their relationship with the child's father, which, in turn, had an indirect effect on the amount of time that fathers spent with

their children (Jackson & Scheines, 2005). Hence, the absence of fathers harms their children and the single mothers who must nurture the children alone (Jackson & Scheines 2005).

The emotional and psychological stress associated with single parenthood creates susceptibility to psychopathology such as depression and other maladaptive coping skills (Atkins et al., 2018). Atkins et al. (2018) investigated the experience of depression from the perception of Black single mothers. The researchers claimed that in the realm of depression and parenting outcomes, the Black single mother population formed part of an understudied diverse sub-group and yet, was the one that consistently reported higher levels of depressive symptoms. As a result, most of these symptoms typically go formally undiagnosed and untreated. Findings concluded that Black single mothers were consistent with the depressed affect domain of the instrument used, followed by a somatic activity, interpersonal symptoms, and the lack of positive affect. Responses also demonstrated that Black single mothers experienced higher levels of sadness, anger, depression, crying episodes, and aversion to people (Atkins et al., 2018)

In addition to psychopathology, research again shows evidence that absent fathers affect not only the emotionality of the mother but also how she parents (Jackson et al., 2019). The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study demonstrated that a father's involvement was directly linked with the mothers' reduced economic hardship and reduced parenting stress when children were between three to five years of age and decreasing levels of harsh parenting once the children reached middle childhood or nine years of age (Jackson et al., 2019). Harsh parenting during middle childhood was linked directly and positively with the single mothers' boys' problematic behavior once they reached middle childhood (Jackson et al., 2019). The study's findings compelled the researchers to conclude that if Black fathers were only involved in the parenting, even if they were not living with the mothers, the adverse consequences of

stressful conditions on single mothers' parenting could be barred or buffered. But while these challenges exist, Black single mothers' unrelenting presence shows that parenting success can still be realized.

Positive Research: Black Single Mothers and Parenting Success

While the challenges of Black Single mothers raising their sons have been researched and well-documented, there is positive research evidence of their success. Single mothers have experienced parenting success as it relates to the prevention of their sons being involved in the penal system, academic mastery as evidenced by sons' matriculation into post-secondary institutions, as well as emotional and social positivity (Wilson et al., 2014). Studies over the decades have revealed the profound influence Black mothers have over their families and the development of their Black sons (Allen & White-Smith, 2018; Jacobs & Daniels, 2020; Kaplan-Levy, 2017). Researchers have concluded that Black mothers have a dominant influence in the lives of their Black sons because the mothers would naturally be one of the primary sources of strength for the entire family, if not the only source (Allen & White-Smith, 2018; Jacobs & Daniels, 2020; Kaplan-Levy, 2017).

One of the prevailing themes that have resulted from the research conducted highlighting parental success experienced by Black mothers is the ability to maintain connectedness (Allen & White-Smith, 2018; Wilson et al., 2014). Although experiencing fragmentation of the family, having limited support systems, and a possible economic constraint, the common thread in the success stories of the Black mother is her ability to maintain a positive presence in her son's life. Aligned with this philosophy is Wilson et al.'s (2014) study. Black boys grow into successful Black men because of several mother-related factors. First, successful Black men have fostered a strong relationship with their mothers growing up. All the participants in their study claimed they

had strong relationships with their mothers and served as their main inspiration and driving force. They dreamed of making the lives of their mothers better because they saw the hard work and efforts exerted by their mothers to raise them during their childhood and adolescent years. Most successful Black men strived to repay the care and love they received from their struggling mothers.

Black mothers' use of available resources within their communities has also been linked as a contributing factor to parenting success. Even if the Black children grew up without their fathers, they faced no shortage of mentors and role models. Research shows that Black students who had access to role models were better off in academics and beyond (Wilson et al., 2014). Community support via extracurricular activities, after-school programs, sports, and other positive community supports have aided in assisting single parents in supervision and decreasing opportunities for their sons to be involved with negative behaviors. Findings of research suggest that even boys who were raised in absent-father families have reduced at-risk behaviors due to the involvement of mentors and role models in the Black community (Carson, 2004; Cartwright & Henriksen, 2012; Frieman & Berkeley, 2002; Warde, 2008; Zimmerman et al., 2002). According to Harris (2006) and Warde (2008), being surrounded by positive role models and mentors encourages Black youth to become successful members of society. Research has indicated that children, especially Black males, need and will look for someone to identify with to develop their self-image (Harris & Taylor, 2012).

Another form of positive support for Black single mothers that aids in their ability to help ensure their sons' success is that of extended family support. According to Green et al. (2007), the relationship between mother and child is affected by the level of support and other healthy relationships accessible to the parent. Moreover, support from extended family members was

essential to the women in this study. Extended family support provided additional familial support, mentorship, and reprieve. (Brodsky, 2000; Green et al., 2007; Holland, 2009; Johnson-Garner & Meyers, 2003; Kotchick et al., 2005; Woody & Woody, 2007).

Research has also found that single parenting success is higher among single parents who have higher education. According to Haleman (2004), higher education has been the primary key to reducing poverty and creating more successful outcomes for single mothers and their children. In addition, research indicates that single mothers view education as a mechanism for moving away from poverty to middle-class status (Haleman, 2004). For this reason, The US Department of Education (2014) projects a 15% increase in female enrollment into higher education institutions by 2024, much of which the National Center for Education Statistics claims will be comprised of single-parent student mothers (National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 2015).

Protective Factors: Resilience and Grit

Considering the insurmountable odds, any success should not be taken lightly, especially for single parents. Any parent raising children will share the challenges of parenthood unequivocally, especially in today's time. However, this task becomes especially challenging for Black single mothers raising boys who are keenly aware of the potential consequences should they not succeed. Despite these challenges, there is research evidence of parenting success among Black mothers raising males. When examining parenting success, both resilience and grit play a role (Conger, 2014). While limited research exists on the role that resilience and grit play in the success of Black single mothers, there is research on the role of resilience and grit in parenting success from different populations. Resiliency has been defined as an individual's ability to recover quickly from obstacles and difficulties in life (Small, 2018). Relatedly, grit has been described as one's level of courage or strength of character (Washington, 2017). It has been

noted that the single-parent family can provide independence and coping mechanisms that strengthen the family unit (Greeff & Ritman, 2005; Herrman et al., 2011; Taylor & Conger, 2014).

Resilience as a Protective Factor in the Success of Mothers

The ability to persevere despite challenging situations has been a consistent pattern when examining success among single Black mothers (Wilson, 2014). Research that provides knowledge and insight into the lived experiences of resilient single mothers, according to Wilson (2014), can assist in enhancing services for single mothers parenting young males. A protective factor that is often utilized by Black single mothers to increase their resilience against parenting stress and the unique problems associated with single parenting is religion (Henderson, 2016; Sisselman-Borgia et al., 2018). According to researchers, faith helped Black single mothers cope with their challenges because it served as a foundation for their personal growth, parenting values, and ultimately happiness (Henderson, 2016). Happier single Black mothers are likelier to demonstrate improved parenting skills since they feel fulfilled within themselves even though their external circumstances are difficult (Henderson, 2016; Sisselman-Borgia et al. 2018). Churches and other organizations that Black single mothers belong to can help provide them with the support they may not otherwise find from their husbands, relatives, or the wider community. Some churches can offer more than just spiritual guidance. Research has demonstrated that single Black mothers access services they otherwise would not have access to because of their church affiliations (Henderson, 2016; Sisselman-Borgia et al., 2018). These services include healthcare, transportation, and financial support for their children. Churches are often associated with the providers of community concerts and recitals; however, some churches

go beyond this by offering food, clothing, and positive friendships and relationships to single mothers.

For Black single mothers, the church is considered more than a place where they find solace, concrete support, and spirituality; for them, this environment becomes a community whereby the members are like their extended family (Barbarin et al., 2020; Clark et al., 2017; McNeil & Landor, 2018; Widan, 2017). Researchers have also found that single mothers in Black communities who found comfort and assistance from their churches claimed that these churches positively shaped their personal and parenting values (Barbarin et al., 2020; Clark et al., 2017; McNeil & Landor, 2018; Widan, 2017). Religion also serves as one way for single Black mothers to cope with the everyday stressors of racial discrimination; it plays a crucial role in the lives of single mothers because it can make them experience increased resiliency and improved parenting.

An emerging body of research has concluded that single Black mothers also cope with the challenge of single parenting by striving to obtain support that they could not get from their partners or the father of their child (Harden, & Murry, 2020; Clark et al., 2017; McNeil & Landor, 2018). Usually, single Black mothers would receive support from close friends and neighbors, apart from relatives or kin. Usually, Black grandmothers are very helpful for single Black mothers. It is well established that supporting an extended family and loved ones is crucial to a single Black mother's success. Black single mothers with large families can cope better with their parenting issues (Widan, 2017).

Pursuing higher education to ensure her family's economic success has also been where the Black mother has shown her resilience. (Danforth & Miller 2018). For males who have attended college, their mothers' resilience has been highlighted as the backbone of why they

attended college. For example, the participants reported that resilience within their single-mother family system was underscored by specific parenting styles such as authoritative parenting. In authoritative parenting, the participants reported that their single mothers promoted the necessity of going to college and ensured that they received the correct information to do so (Danforth & Miller 2018).

The strength and endurance of Black mothers have also aided in raising their children (Jackson & Kiehl 2017). Jackson and Keihl's study on adaptation and resilience explored how mothers utilized resilience in their journey through motherhood. The study results highlighted how Black mothers demonstrated resilient behaviors. They adapted to challenging situations by ensuring that they taught their principles and morals to their children, which aided in their children making healthy choices in their lives as they transitioned into adulthood. In Jackson and Keihl's study, the participants also reported that since they were living in lower socioeconomic areas, they feared that this could hinder their children from reaching their full potential, making values and principles paramount to raising their children.

Therefore, because resilience is defined as an individual's ability to recover quickly from obstacles and difficulties in life (Small, 2018), research has demonstrated that social support, spirituality, and religion promote resilience that allows for success when raising Black boys. Although research has indicated multiple challenges that Black single mothers experience when raising their boys, they frequently must practice racial socialization to protect their boys. However, it appears that resilience through different supports and groups can help them to be successful. It is important to note that there seems to be minimal research that exists on exploring how single mothers utilize the concept of resilience when raising their sons into successful men, and even less research that focuses on Black single mothers, hence the aim of this current study.

Grit as a Protective Factor on the Success of Mothers

Minimal studies have focused on the connection to grit and its relationship to Black mothers' success in raising their children; however, the studies that have been completed have demonstrated the importance of grit in terms of successful parenting (Duckworth, 2014). Grit has been defined as one's level of courage or strength of character and having passion and perseverance for long-term goals (Washington, 2017). Many long-term goals and activities are difficult to succeed in, which means that the risk of failure is high. While explaining why one person succeeds in challenging long-term pursuit while another fails, factors like talent, opportunity, social context, and luck must be given. But even with these considerations, a potential difference remains in how those people responded to the obstacles and other experiences that are characteristic of trying to do something hard. While some persevere in the face of these obstacles, others are disposed to give up hence highlighting grit (Morton & Paul, 2019). For Black single mothers, the development of grit is crucial not only to their son's ability to circumvent negative odds, but it also can be life-sustaining.

Although studies aligning grit with parenting success, in general, are limited, it is even more limited when applied to the examination of Black parents. However, attributes of these findings can be applicable and linked to the characteristics of parenting success (Park et al., 2016). What has made Black parents successful epitomizes what grit is. Grit has been successfully tied to increases in executive functioning, academic success, performance advantages in sports, and achievements when applied to different fields of study (Duckworth et al., 2016; Ivcevic & Brackett, 2014; Lucas et al., 2015). Considering the damning statistics concerning the fate of Black single parents, these studies are testaments to the recurring themes of perseverance over a long period. Hence, these studies exemplify a need to study this

population and its ability to achieve success despite the tremendous odds over a long period (Coccia & Darling, 2017; Miller & Speirs Neumeister, 2017).

Grit is not based on talent but on utilizing resources for long-term success (Coccia & Darling, 2017). Moreover, grit refers to the perseverance and passion for long-term goals and the persevering characteristics in the face of difficulties and challenges (Miller & Speirs Neumeister, 2017). This is often attributed to academic performance and job attainment. Duckworth et al. (2014) argue that grit can help explain why some individuals perform better than their scores on ability tests might predict, and that grit was a core contributor to the success of highly accomplished individuals. For the Black mother who has had a limited support system due to absent fathers, marginalization, and stereotyping of her sons due to their race assumed lowered academic achievement, and other negative associations, grit makes the difference in ensuring life-sustaining measures. The findings of Gantt and Grief (2009) reveal that inherent in their day-to-day experiences. Black single mothers may use several parenting strategies to assist them in raising their sons. These strategies are often utilized to meet one of two primary goals. The first goal is to protect. Several strategies are implemented to protect their sons and including shielding them from negative influences, avoiding harm, praying, educating, and interpreting (Gantt & Grief, 2009). The second goal is to promote growth in their sons. The following strategies are used to facilitate this goal: providing social support and connection to fathers, providing resources, setting expectations, instilling a positive African American identity, and promoting responsibility (Gantt & Grief, 2009).

Literature Gap

Most of the research reviewed in this literature review demonstrated that Black mothers faced various barriers when raising their children, such as economic hardships (Taylor &

Conger, 2017) and residing in disadvantaged areas (Barkan & Rocque, 2018; DeLuca et al., 2019). Moreover, Black mothers are undermined and excluded from their son's schools, making it a challenge to be involved in their children's education (Allen & White-Smith, 2018). The problem being studied was that Black boys are placed in a higher at-risk category as they tend to experience higher rates of educational issues (Thomas et al., 2016), substance abuse disorders (Tache et al., 2020), and mistreatment from law enforcement officers (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018), all in comparison to Black girls. For example, Gaylord-Harden et al. (2018) reported that Black boys in the United States are marginalized. They experience higher rates of racism, economic disadvantage, oppression, segregation, and other trauma-related experiences during their development.

Researchers revealed that young Black boys could overcome adversity if they are provided with a framework that follows a model of positive developmental growth that meets the challenges of prosocial development in all areas of their lives (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018). Gaylord-Harden et al.'s (2018) study were necessary for this current study. It highlighted the need for single Black mothers to ensure that their sons are being raised and follow developmental growth to overcome their many adversities. This study allowed the researcher to understand better how single Black mothers utilized the constructs of resiliency and grit to promote solid prosocial development throughout their sons' developmental years to become successful Black men.

In addition to research conducted on the barriers that single Black mothers face when raising their sons, the literature discussed factors related to success in child-rearing. Both resilience and grit have been studied as constructs and factors important for Black mothers when raising their Black boys into successful men (Howard et al., 2019; Lan et al., 2019; Sanguras,

2018). While previous research on resiliency and grit in parenting had been more associated with academic achievement levels in Black individuals (Howard et al., 2019), it was unclear what these two constructs looked like within parenting. Specifically, it was unknown how Black mothers experienced grit and resiliency when raising their children through the different developmental stages to raise their Black sons into successful men. Therefore, more research was needed to understand how mothers specifically experienced the constructs of resiliency and grit and how these constructs contributed to a more positive outlook on their sons' parenting experiences. Furthermore, this research bridged the literature gap by focusing on how single Black mothers could drive achievement and success towards their sons within Black culture while enduring racism and sexism.

Biblical Foundations of the Study

Historically, religion and faith have been a central force and a place of comfort in the Black community. For the Black mother, the role of faith is multifaceted. For her, not only is church a place of solace where she can gather strength in response to the challenges of being a single mother, but it is also a place of safety (Brodsky, 2000; Lewis, 2010; Wilson, 2014). For her son, the church is a place where he can find positive male role models (Brodsky, 2000; Ledford, 2010). While these men will never replace the role of their fathers, Black single mothers are more entrusting men in their churches to play a vital role in their sons' lives (Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Coley, 2001; Davis et al., 1997; Gee & Rhodes, 2003; Jarrett & Burton, 1999; Shook et al., 2010). The church also offers a sense of community and normalcy. Statistics show that 60% of church members are women (Nguyen et al., 2019). Additionally, among most literature that has studied Black culture, the theme of faith and religion has always been at the forefront (Henderson, 2016; Sisselman-Borgia et al., 2018). Hence, single Black mothers are

more likely to be exposed to others experiencing similar struggles, normalizing their experiences, and providing them a sense of community support. Aligning significantly with her own life, the Black mother can gather her strength and bolster her resilience and grit related to raising her son. The Black mother has become more empowered to show her son how best to respond to the difficulties they might be experiencing and connect these difficulties to biblical themes of how struggles and challenges can be fruitful in creating a better life. Scriptures such as Philippians 4:13 and James 1:2-4 (*Holy Bible, King James Version, 1996/2015*), which invoke the belief that difficult times are surmountable with the presence of the Lord or considering it joy when faced with testing of faith, may become a source of strength for the Black single mother.

While the Bible does not explicitly address single parenting, there are many scriptural references regarding widows and fatherless children, almost making single parents and their children a protected class. After the formal formation of the church, widows and children were part of the initial initiatives to be provided for (*Holy Bible, King James Version, 2011*). However, over 100 scriptural references are dedicated to the fatherless and the widows, both in old and new testaments. Psalms 68:5 refers to God as a father of the fatherless and the protector of the widows. Such sentiments can be shared in Zechariah 7:10, Ezekiel 16:49, Exodus 22:22, and Jeremiah 49:11, calling forth 1 Peter 3:7 for the church community to protect and care towards the church endeared the vulnerable population. In addition to protecting women and the fatherless, there is also biblical significance on the importance of sons in the Bible. The strength of a community is often seen in the presence of men. During the time of Moses, Pharaoh shared this knowledge in his decree to kill Jewish boys. “If it’s a boy, kill it, if it’s a girl, let it live” (*Holy Bible, New International, 2008/2015*) Ex 1:12 NIV). Like this is the story of King Herod and his decree to kill boys under the age of two to ensure his need to maintain power. Both

situations epitomize official mandates from governmental entities and their impact on the community. To save her son, Moses' mother had to become gritty and resilient, utilizing her resources. This is like how Black mothers must use resources that they perceive as beneficial to their sons' lives. Mary and Joseph had to leave their familiar place to ensure their son's safety, which also aligns with how some Black mothers must leave places of familiarity to ensure their son's life (*Holy Bible, King James Version, 1996/2015, Genesis, 12-50*).

While there is no English translation within the Bible for the word 'grit,' both resiliency and grit are major themes found throughout Scripture. Like Black women, Moses' mother had to ensure the survivability of her son despite the inhospitable environment not made for his survival. Moses' mother had to utilize everything available to create a basket for her son to live in and place him on the river Nile, a place where she no longer had control. Similarly, the Black mother has faced similar circumstances. She also must utilize whatever she has available to ensure her son can navigate his environment. While there are no existing overt mandates to destroy Black boys, the Black mother is keenly aware of covert systemic racism evidenced by policies and staggering statistics. Therefore, covert racism can result in the overrepresentation of Black boys in special education, at-risk populations, penal systems, and depressed academic achievement, highlighting the pitfalls and consequences that have resulted in these possible trajectories.

The story of Hagar also tells the story of a single mother raising her son (*Holy Bible, King James Version, 1996/2015, Gen 21:9-16*). After being given to her master by his wife, she was put out of the house with her son. In essence, she became a single parent; she was lost and overwhelmed, and because of her plight, she wanted to kill herself. However, God came and said to her, "Do not fear, your son will be great." This story is relevant because it showed that God

still had a plan for her and her son even though she was not in the correct position (e.g., not being married, not having a husband).

While this study's Biblical alignment and significance are clear, this study could also serve as a protective factor in fostering resilience and grit in Black women facing single parenthood. This study illustrated that the Ecological systems approach could harness the church's proper position in the lives of its parishioners and that of the community. The Bible calls the church to be the "light of the world" (*Holy Bible, King James Version* 1996/2015, Matt 5:14) and to be the "salt of the earth" (*Holy Bible, King James Version*, 1996/2015, Matt 5:13). Hence, the church can be a focal point, demonstrating to the world how resilience and grit bolster the religious faith and offers a balm to the societal ills of social injustice and racism.

Summary

Many academic and peer-reviewed materials such as journal articles, books, and reports have investigated and explored Black mothers and their children's well-being, more so when they are single parents. Although there was robust literature on this topic, this view on that relevant theme for this study would not be exhaustive. Children born between the 1980s and 1990s have a more than 50% probability of living in single-parent families for some time before they reach adulthood. Single mothers head over 25% of American families. Most single-parent families have undergone divorce. The second-largest group of single parents is made up of adolescents who got pregnant and never married. The third-largest group of single mothers is those unmarried women who are, at the same time, economically unstable.

Provided that there is a lack of studies focusing on Black mothers' positive experiences in raising their children through resilience and grit, this study was significant as it aimed to understand better any commonalities shared among mothering attitudes that affect their success

rate over the entire course of their sons' development, from childhood to adulthood. Better understanding the limitations or barriers and the benefits of resilience and grit could help single Black mothers find more effective methods to raise their Black sons throughout their development.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of Black single mothers in the raising of their sons. Furthermore, this study explored how these mothers had experienced resilience and grit in assisting them in raising their Black sons; how they defined these constructs and made meaning of them will also be explored. This chapter will present the study's methodology. The chapter will begin by highlighting the research questions that will guide the study and the study's methodology and research design. The chapter will then discuss the population and sample, the data collection methods, the study's procedures, and the data analysis plan. The chapter will then conclude with a discussion on the study's assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and the ethical considerations that the researcher will follow.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Black single mothers who have raised their Black sons describe their lived experiences in the parenting of their sons?

RQ 2: How do Black single mothers who have raised Black sons describe their experiences of grit in their parenting?

RQ 3: How do Black single mothers who have raised Black sons describe their experiences of resilience in their parenting?

RQ 4: How do black single mothers define success as it relates to the raising of their sons?

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative methodology and followed a phenomenological design. A qualitative methodology allowed the researcher to approach the study in an interpretive and naturalistic manner, as participants were able to openly discuss a subject in their own words, to improve the understanding of an individual's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviors, and interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This study also aligned with and gave honor to the Black experience of storytelling. A quantitative methodology was considered but ultimately rejected, as quantitative research aims to investigate phenomena via statistical, mathematical, and computational techniques, making it difficult for participants to openly express their thoughts and opinions in their own words (Fryer et al., 2018).

Additionally, the researcher selected a phenomenological design for this study simply because following a phenomenological design allowed the researcher to understand an individual's worldview better; that is, real-life situations that could aid in interpreting information and generating new ideas and concepts while illustrating theories that could highlight how different aspects of a participant's life were related to each other (Gammelgaard, 2017). Other research designs were considered but ultimately rejected, such as that of ethnography and grounded theory. Ethnography is a qualitative research design that aims to collect data mainly through the act of observations, with the hopes that a researcher can better understand the culture within their real-life environment (Fetterman, 2019). Since this current study's purpose was to examine the lived experiences of Black single mothers in the raising of their sons and how these mothers had experienced resilience and grit, ethnography was not appropriate and was therefore rejected. Similarly, grounded theory was considered but rejected for this study, as the aim of grounded theory is to generate a theory through the analysis of the

collected data (Chun Tie et al., 2019). Because this study was guided by Bronfenbrenner's ecology Systems Theory, grounded theory was rejected, and phenomenology was selected.

Participants

The researcher recruited 10 participants to answer the research questions, which is considered an appropriate sample size in qualitative research (Yin, 2017). The final number of participants was determined by data saturation. Data saturation occurred when the researcher experienced redundancy in data collected; that is, participants appeared to be answering the questions in similar manners, and no new information was gleaned (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). When recruiting participants, the researcher utilized a convenience sampling method. A convenience sampling method was defined as a form of non-probability sampling, where the researcher recruited participants based on the population that was close to hand (Etikan et al., 2016). Therefore, since this research was being completed in the United States, a convenience sampling method allowed the researcher to recruit individuals within this geographical area using Zoom video conferencing. Zoom enabled the researcher to conduct semi-structured interviews via video conferencing, ensuring that she aligned with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) social distancing guidelines in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

When recruiting individuals for the study, the researcher placed a flyer on Facebook groups that supported Black single mothers (See Appendix C). For example, Facebook groups that the researcher recruited from included Moms of Black Sons, Black Mothers, and Mom's Raising Black Boys. Each of these three Facebook groups reported having at least 2,000 members each. The researcher sent a message via Facebook Messenger to the group's administrators requesting permission to post information regarding her study on the group's page (see Appendix B). After receiving approval, the researcher then posted flyers to the groups'

pages that discussed the purpose of the study, what was required from the participants, and the criteria that potential participants must meet to participate in the study. The flyer also included the researcher's contact information, including her phone number and email address, where interested individuals could contact her to participate.

When recruiting individuals for the study, the following eligibility criteria were met:

1. All participants identified as being Black mothers.
2. All participants had raised a Black son. In this study, the raising of a Black son was defined as a mother who had raised a son throughout the different developmental years, and their sons were now 21 years or older.
3. All participants perceived themselves as being successful in raising their Black sons.
4. All participants resided in the United States.

Study Procedures

When completing this study, the researcher ensured that she followed specific procedures. Before beginning the study, the researcher ensured that she received approval from her university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A). Only after receiving IRB approval did the researcher begin recruiting the participants and collecting the data. After receiving IRB approval, the researcher began participant recruitment. The researcher placed a flyer on Facebook groups that provided support to single Black mothers to find participants. For example, Facebook groups that the researcher recruited from included Moms of Black Sons, Black Mothers, and Mom's Raising Black Boys. Each of these three Facebook groups reported having at least 2,000 members each. The researcher sent a message via Facebook Messenger to the group's administrators requesting permission to post information regarding her study on the group's page (See Appendix B). After receiving approval, the researcher then posted flyers (See Appendix C) on the groups' pages that discussed the purpose of the study, what was required

from the participants, and the criteria that potential participants must meet to participate in the study. The flyer also included the researcher's contact information, including her phone number and email address, where interested individuals could contact her to participate.

When individuals responded to the recruitment postings, they were screened for eligibility. When screening for eligibility via email or phone, the researcher asked each individual if they met all four criteria. If the individuals answered in the affirmative to each criterion, they were accepted into the study; if they answered no to one or more criteria, they were thanked for their time and were not allowed to participate in the study. Individuals who met the eligibility requirements were accepted to the study on a first-come-first-served basis. Once participants were accepted into the study, the researcher sent them a consent form via electronic mail (email) and set up a time to complete their semi-structured interviews. The participants reviewed the consent forms and returned them signed to the researcher at the time of their interviews. When signing the informed consent, the participants were required to sign the form in ink, scan the document, and return it to the researcher; it was also permissible to capture the signature via smartphone and then email the picture back to the researcher. The consent form provided an overview of the study, the purpose of the study, what was required of the participants, how confidentiality and data were maintained, and the level of risk associated with participating in the study (see Appendix D). It is important to note that there was little to no risk in participating in this study, as the participants were only required to provide their perceptions and lived experiences of the raising of their Black sons. The consent form also highlighted that each participant did not have to answer any question that they felt uncomfortable with and that they could remove themselves from the study at any time without any repercussions.

The researcher completed the semi-structured interviews via Zoom to follow the CDC's social distancing guidelines regarding COVID-19. The Zoom interviews supported confidentiality and privacy as the researcher ensured that there was only one participant in the meeting room at a time. Additionally, the researcher encouraged each participant to complete their Zoom interview alone and with headphones to promote confidentiality and privacy. During the semi-structured interviews, the researcher followed the interview protocol that she had previously developed and ensured that she asked each participant the same questions as depicted in the interview protocol (see Appendix E). Additionally, the researcher asked the participants any additional questions if they needed to clarify a participant's answer or receive further information. The researcher electronically recorded each of the interviews and transcribed the recordings in preparation for data analysis.

After each participant had completed their semi-structured interviews and the interviews had been transcribed, the researcher completed member checking. Member checking was a process where the participants reviewed the transcripts to ensure that they transcripts were accurate. In this study, the researcher emailed the interview transcript to each participant to check the information for accuracy. If the participants found any area of their transcripts that demonstrated any inaccuracies, they could recommend the researcher make any changes to reflect exactly what was said. Member checking aided in ensuring that the data was reliable (Varpio et al., 2017). It is important to note that in this study, the participants did not report any inconsistencies within their interview transcripts.

Instrumentation and Measurement

The researcher's form of data collection method was a semi-structured interview (see Appendix D). The researcher developed an initial list of open-ended questions that she asked the

participants; however, the researcher also employed the assistance of a panel of experts to review the data collection method since she designed it herself and did not base it on prior instruments. The panel of experts included three individuals who had advanced professional and educational experiences, such as a terminal degree. The individuals were recruited from known colleagues of the researcher in the field. The panel of experts reviewed the semi-structured interview questions to ensure that they were in alignment with the study. If any panel members recommended any changes to be made to bring the questions into stronger alignment, they emailed the researcher with their recommended changes and the researcher made any changes as requested.

The researcher completed the semi-structured interviews via Zoom video conferencing, supporting the CDC's recommended social distancing guidelines in response to COVID-19. During the semi-structured interviews, the researcher followed the interview protocol that she had previously developed and ensured that she asked each participant the same questions as depicted. Additional questions were asked if participants' answers needed clarification or if further information was needed. The researcher electronically recorded each of the interviews and transcribed the recordings in preparation for data analysis.

The researcher also accounted for trustworthiness in this study. Trustworthiness was defined as the level of accuracy of the research findings (Connelly, 2016). Trustworthiness was ensured by the researcher by accounting for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Confirmability was defined as the level of neutrality of the findings (Connelly, 2016). Therefore, the researcher accounted for confirmability by completing member checking. Member checking was a process where the participants reviewed the transcripts to ensure that they transcripts were accurate. In this instance, the researcher emailed the interview transcript to each participant to review the information for accuracy. If the participants found any area of their

transcripts to demonstrate any inaccuracies, they recommended the researcher make any changes to reflect exactly what was said. Member checking aided in ensuring that the data was reliable (Varpio et al., 2017).

Credibility was defined by the researcher's understanding of how the study's findings were true and accurate, which was also undertaken by the process of member checking (Connelly, 2016). Additionally, credibility was ensured by the researcher employing the assistance of a panel of experts. Finally, transferability and dependability included the researcher ensuring that the study's findings could be repeatable and applicable to other contexts (Connelly, 2016). Because the researcher was following a qualitative approach, the findings may not be generalized to other populations and geographical regions. Therefore, future research is required to understand this phenomenon in other settings. To account for future research, this researcher developed strong interview protocols and study procedures that followed.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began with the transcription of the interviews. After transcribing the interviews, the researcher followed a qualitative content analysis. A qualitative content analysis allowed the researcher to complete a subjective interpretation of the content by coding and identifying themes and patterns (Assarroudi et al., 2018). When conducting the data analysis, the researcher utilized both NVivo Pro and a qualitative codebook. NVivo is a qualitative software program that assisted the researcher in identifying common words and phrases that the participants used by placing them as codes. The codes were then grouped and the researcher identified any emerging themes from the dataset (Assarroudi et al., 2018).

When completing the qualitative content analysis, the researcher followed these specific steps:

1. Identified and collected the data.
2. Determined the coding categories.
3. Coded the qualitative content.
4. Checked for reliability. When checking for reliability, the researcher ensured that the participants had reviewed the transcripts to reflect exactly what they reported in their interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This helped decrease any instances of researcher bias, where the researcher injects her personal thoughts, values, and opinions into the dataset (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).
5. Determined themes.
6. Analyzed and presented the findings of the study (Elliot, 2018).

It was important to note that when using the qualitative codebook, the researcher was able to highlight the different codes (commonly used words and phrases) and the participants that contributed to each of the themes that emerged from the dataset. When determining the coding categories, the researcher followed a two-step approach (Elliot, 2018). First, the researcher reviewed the transcripts that had been approved by each of the participants and searched for commonly used words and phrases. The researcher highlighted common words and phrases. During the second step, the researcher then used NVivo to check for codes found throughout the transcripts. The researcher then determined appropriate themes that were aligned with precisely what the participants said.

Delimitations, Assumptions, and Limitations

There were some limitations that needed to be addressed in this study. Limitations are experiences in research that can affect the outcome of the results. The first limitation that needed to be addressed was that of the population being studied. Because this study concentrated on Black single mothers raising their sons in the United States, this study's results were limited to both the population and geographical area being studied. Therefore, to understand how mothers

perceived resilience and grit in the raising of their sons in other populations and geographical regions, further studies would need to be completed. Therefore, the results of this study could be transferable but not generalized to other populations and geographical areas.

A second limitation of this study included that of the research design. Because the researcher utilized a qualitative phenomenological design, the study could experience researcher bias. Researcher bias occurs when the researcher injects her thoughts and values into the research, affecting the study results. To account for researcher bias, the researcher created and developed an interview protocol, utilized a panel of experts to review the participant questions, and completed member checking to review the transcripts of their interviews.

Delimitations in the research were boundaries that the researcher had set. Because participants in this study met specific criteria, this was an instance where the researcher included delimitations. The participants of this study met the following requirements:

1. All participants identified as being Black.
2. All participants had raised a Black son. In this study, the raising of a Black son was defined as a mother who had raised a son throughout the different developmental years, and their sons were now 21 years or older.
3. All participants perceived themselves as being successful in raising their Black sons.
4. All participants resided in the United States.

Therefore, this study was delimited to individuals who met these criteria. In other words, individuals who did not identify as being Black had not raised a Black son, whose sons were younger than 21 years of age, individuals who did not perceive themselves as being successful in raising their Black sons, and individuals who resided outside of the United States were excluded from this study.

This study also followed basic assumptions. The first assumption was that the participants of the study answered the semi-structured interview questions openly, honestly, and candidly. This would especially be assumed when the participants discussed how they had perceived that they had successfully raised their sons. A secondary assumption was that the participants had the knowledge and experience to answer the interview's open-ended questions, which in turn answered this study's research questions.

Ethical Considerations

When completing this study, the researcher followed specific ethical procedures to protect the study participants. The first ethical procedure that was followed included the researcher receiving permission from her university's institutional review board (IRB) before beginning the study. Only after receiving approval did the researcher begin recruiting participants and collecting the data. Additionally, the researcher ensured that each participant reviewed, signed, and agreed to a consent form. The consent form provided information to the participants that described the study's purpose, what was required of the participants, how confidentiality, privacy, and data were maintained, and the level of risk associated with the participation in the study. Additionally, the researcher informed each participant that they could remove themselves from the study at any time and without any repercussions.

Within the area of confidentiality and privacy, the researcher also followed specific ethical procedures. For example, the researcher did not identify participants by their name or identifying information throughout the study. Therefore, she referred to participants in numerical order (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.). Additionally, when conducting the semi-structured interviews, the researcher ensured that they were in a location that supported confidentiality and privacy. For example, the interviews were held in a quiet place and away from other people.

Finally, regarding data management, the researcher ensured that any paper copies of consent forms and interview transcripts were locked in a filing cabinet located inside the researcher's residence and home office. Additionally, any electronic documents were stored on a password-protected removable hard drive locked inside the filing cabinet inside the researcher's home office. Only the researcher had access to the data. After five years, the researcher will then destroy all forms of data by her university's IRB policies. When destroying the data, the researcher will shred any paper documents and delete electronic copies from the password-protected file and her computer's hard drive.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the study's methodology and research design. The researcher utilized a convenience sampling method when recruiting participants and recruited 10 participants. The researcher collected data by completing semi-structured interviews with each of the participants and ensured that she developed and followed an interview protocol while completing member checking to limit any instances of researcher bias. This proposal also outlined the study's procedures and discussed the data analysis plan, where the researcher used NVivo Pro, a qualitative software program that aided in data analysis. NVivo Pro assisted the researcher in identifying common words and phrases from the participants that were labeled as codes, where she then determined themes that emerged from the dataset. The researcher followed a content analysis that allowed her to interpret the data to determine themes based on the participants' perceptions and lived experiences of the phenomenon. The next chapter will provide an overview of the study's results and findings.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Overview

Black single mothers face a variety of barriers when raising their sons. Such barriers include economic hardships (Taylor & Conger, 2017) and residing in disadvantaged areas (Barkan & Rocque, 2018; DeLuca et al., 2019). Additionally, Black mothers may oftentimes be excluded from their son's schools, making it a challenge to be involved in their children's education (Allen & White-Smith, 2018). As a result of being raised in a single-parent household, current research has suggested that Black boys are placed in a higher at-risk category as they experience higher rates of educational problems (Thomas et al., 2016), substance abuse disorders (Tache et al., 2020), and mistreatment from law enforcement officers (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018), all in comparison to Black girls. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of Black single mothers in the raising of their sons. Furthermore, this study explored how these mothers had experienced resilience and grit in assisting them in raising their Black sons, as well as how they experienced self-defined success in their mothering. How they defined grit, resilience, and success and made meaning of them was also explored.

The researcher collected data via semi-structured interviews with 10 participants. Each semi-structured interview was conducted via Zoom to follow the CDC's social distancing guidelines regarding COVID-19. During the semi-structured interviews, the researcher followed the interview protocol that she had previously developed and ensured that she asked each participant the same questions as depicted in the interview protocol (see Appendix E). Additionally, the researcher asked the participants any additional questions if they needed to clarify a participant's answer or receive further information. The researcher electronically

recorded each of the interviews and transcribed the recordings in preparation for data analysis.

The study's four research questions guided the analysis:

RQ1: How do Black single mothers who have raised their Black sons describe their lived experiences in the parenting of their sons?

RQ 2: How do Black single mothers who have raised Black sons describe their experiences of grit in their parenting?

RQ 3: How do Black single mothers who have raised Black sons describe their experiences of resilience in their parenting?

RQ 4: How do black single mothers define success as it relates to the raising of their sons?

This chapter presents the study's results. This chapter begins by highlighting the descriptive results of the participant's demographic characteristics. An overview of the study's findings with a discussion of codes and themes that answer the research questions is also provided.

Descriptive Results

Ten participants were included in the analysis of the study. Participant demographic characteristics are displayed in Table 1 below.

Table 1. *Participant Demographic Characteristics*

	Age	Education	Number of Sons	Age of Child	Total Number of Children
Participant 1	69	Associate	1	37	3
Participant 2	74	Some High School	2	52	4
Participant 3	61	High School	6	25,28,32, 36 41 & 43	7
Participant 4	45	High School	1	22	1
Participant 5	58	Bachelors	2	30 and 35	4
Participant 6	62	Masters	1	35	1
Participant 7	70	High School	1	50	5
Participant 8	55	Doctorate	1	30	3
Participant 9	53	Masters	1	27	3
Participant 10	72	Some High School	2	45 and 52	4

As depicted in Table 1, the participants ranged in age from 45 to 74 years. Additionally, the participants reported a variety of education levels. Two participants reported having completed some high school; three participants reported graduating from high school; one participant reported having completed their associate degree; one participant reported having a bachelor's degree; two participants reported having completed a master's degree, and one participant reported having a doctorate. Six of the participants reported having one son; three participants reported having two sons, and one participant reported having six sons. All participants reported that their sons were over the age of 21 years, and some further reported that they had other children. Eight of the participants reported having more than one child.

Data Analysis

In this phenomenological study, the researcher captured the lived experiences of the participants. The researcher reviewed the semi-structured interview transcripts multiple times and began identifying codes, themes, and ideas that emerged from the dataset with the assistance

of NVivo Pro. The data analysis for this study was conducted as discussed in Chapter 3. The analysis included the researcher following these steps:

1. Identified and collected the data.
2. Determined the coding categories.
3. Coded the qualitative content with the assistance of NVivo Pro.
4. Checked for reliability. When checking for reliability, the researcher ensured that the participants reviewed the transcripts to reflect exactly what they reported in their interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This helped decrease any instances of researcher bias, where the researcher injects her personal thoughts, values, and opinions into the dataset (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).
5. Determined themes.
6. Analyzed and presented the findings of the study (Elliot, 2018).

The following are the codes used along with short definitions, highlighted by direct quotations from the participants that aid in embracing the meaning of the codes. It is important to note that NVivo listed the codes separately; therefore, they were not being interpreted or analyzed at this juncture of the coding process:

Code 1: Challenging

The code *challenging* emerged when participants were discussing their experiences of being a single parent. This theme was substantiated by Participant 2 (P2) who stated, “the experience raising my sons as a single mother was very challenging. You have to be a mother; you have to be a father. You have to be a counselor. You have to be a nurse. You have to be everything”. Participant 6 (P6) stated, “raising my son as a single parent was of course challenging in many ways. I had to be a mother and a father; I had to make it work financially and then I had to ensure that my son had what he needed emotionally.”

Code 2: Difficult

The code *difficult* emerged within the dataset when parents were discussing specific examples of how they viewed their single-parent experiences. Participant 7 (P7) stated, “raising my son was not easy; it was challenging but I did it anyway. Looking back, I can tell you that it was really difficult but when I was going through it, it was something that I felt that I had to do.” P2 also contributed by stating, “the difficulty I have in raising my sons, was teaching them to do the right thing. I had to take them out and let them have experiences for themselves.”

Code 3: Support

The third code that emerged from the dataset was *support*. Many participants were able to discuss the lack of support and the importance of support. For example, Participant 4 (P4) stated, “I believe that had I had support then probably I would not have been so severe with my discipline.” Additionally, Participant 8 (P8) stated, “I had very little support because the area that I was in was where my husband and I had relocated to get a new start and new opportunities.”

Code 4: Shortcomings

Shortcomings was another code that was derived from the participants’ dataset and was highlighted when P7 discussed her experiences as a single parent. P7 stated, “I had to figure out how I was going to make it and not have my kids pay for my mistakes or shortcomings.”

Code 5: Isolation

The fifth code that was identified within the dataset was *isolation*. This theme was substantiated by Participant 9 (P9) who reported, “raising my son without a father was very new to me. I had to face the backlash and isolation of my family.”

Code 6: Negative Stereotypes

The term *negative stereotypes* were identified as a code within the dataset when participants were describing barriers to success. For example, P7 stated, “success to me is my son not living up to the stereotypes of being a thug or a gang banger or a drug user.”

Code 7: Not Giving Up

Not giving up was identified as the seventh code in the dataset. This code was identified when participants were discussing their experiences of grit. For example, P2 stated, “how I define grit is not giving up. I didn’t want things to be just given to me.” Additionally, P3 was able to discuss not giving up in terms of resilience. She stated, “I define resilience, um, in my parent and I kind of said it, like you said, but I, I also can say, um, never giving up, honestly.”

Code 8: Communication

Communication was a key code that was identified when the participants were discussing grit. For example, P2 discussed how grit is displayed through strong communication. P2 stated, “you have to have a communication with them. You have to talk to them. That’s the basic. You have to show them good and bad.”

Code 9: Friends

The ninth code identified in the dataset was *friends*. Friends were discussed by multiple participants when focusing on how they experienced grit when parenting as a single parent. For example, P2 stated:

You have to show them good and bad. You don't want them to go out there and get into the wrong crowd, the wrong company, the wrong friend. So, one thing I did when my kids were going to school, I knew their friends. I knew who their friends are. I knew where who they're coming from. I knew their parents, you know? So those are the things

you have to know about your children, their company, their friends, their friend's background, and their parents' background because there are so many things in this world to influence young people, and being a single parent, you have to take the whole world of mother and father (P2).

Code 10: Perseverance

Perseverance was the tenth code that was identified. This code was identified when the participants were discussing how they defined grit. For example, P5 stated, "I define grit and the ability to endure no matter what. Perseverance." Additionally, P7 reported, "I define grit as going through it no matter what. Its perseverance for me", and P10 stated, "grit is perseverance being able to deal with things despite the difficulty."

Code 11: Endure

Many participants were able to use the word *endure*, which emerged as the eleventh code. P5 was able to discuss that grit is defined by both perseverance and being able to endure a situation or event. Additionally, P6 stated, "I define grit and the ability to endure no matter what."

Code 12: Kept Going

Kept going was a code that emerged from the dataset when participants were discussing how they experienced grit in their single-parent life. For example, P6 stated, "I just kept going. My son was a lot in that he was challenging but failure was not an option or a luxury for me." Additionally, P7 stated, "I just kept going. When someone told me no, I figured out another way", and P8 reported, "I just kept going. If something that I planned didn't work, then we are going to move on to the next one."

Code 13: It Takes a Village

It takes a village was the 13th code that was identified within the dataset. This code was identified when the participants were discussing resilience. For example, P1 exemplified this code when she stated, “I think, I believe that it takes a village and like created, cause you gotta realize that we, when we say village, it's a village, it takes a village to raise a, um, a child.”

Code 14: Working Hard

Working hard was the 14th code that emerged from the dataset. This code was also highlighted when the participants were discussing resiliency. For example, P2 stated, “I define resilience in my parenting as by working hard work towards the things I want to achieve in life despite the challenges.”

Code 15: Never Quitting

Never quitting was also a way in which the participants defined and discussed resilience. For example, P5 stated, “I define resiliency as never quitting even when you want to.”

Code 16: Failure is not an Option

Like *never quitting*, some participants were able to discuss that *failure is not an option*. This code was identified when the participants defined and discussed resiliency. For example, P10 stated, “resiliency means failure is not an option. You have to keep going no matter what. When my son got into trouble, I just felt so defeated, but I kept going.”

Code 17: Independent

The word *independent* was identified as a code when the participants were discussing their definitions of success. For example, P5 stated, “success to me is my children being independent and not a drain on society. I believe the success is for them to take care of themselves in a legal and productive way.”

Code 18: Further in Life

The 18th code that was identified within the dataset was *further in life*, which was identified when the participants were providing their definitions and lived experiences of success. For example, this code was exemplified when P6 stated:

Success to me my son going a lot further in life than I did. It is seeing him make the choices and live the values that he was taught. He has done just that (P6).

Code 19: Live the Values

Live the values was the 19th code within the dataset when the participants were providing examples of how they experienced success within their single parenting. This code was exemplified when P6 stated, “It is seeing him make the choices and live the values that he was taught. He has done just that.”

Code 20: Accomplishing Goals

The final code for this analysis was accomplishing goals. This code was identified when P9 stated:

I define success as not living up to the expectations of failures. My son far exceeded my goals for him as I just wanted him to graduate from high school and find a job. I just wanted him to be able to take care of himself and he has been able to do just that (P9).

The identified 20 codes translated into 16 major themes, which will be discussed in the following section in relation to the research questions that guided this study.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was assessed in the study and was defined as the level of accuracy of the research findings (Connelly, 2016). Trustworthiness was ensured by the researcher by accounting for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Confirmability was defined as the level of neutrality of the findings (Connelly, 2016). Therefore, the researcher

accounted for confirmability by completing member checking. Member checking is a process where the participants reviewed the transcripts to ensure that the transcripts were accurate. In this instance, the researcher emailed the interview transcript to each participant to review the information for accuracy. If the participants found any area of their transcripts to demonstrate any inaccuracies, they had an opportunity to recommend to the researcher to make any changes to reflect exactly what was said. Member checking aided in ensuring that the data was reliable (Varpio et al., 2017).

Credibility was defined by the researcher's understanding of how the study's findings were true and accurate, which was also undertaken by the process of member checking (Connelly, 2016). Additionally, credibility was ensured by the researcher employing the assistance of a panel of experts. Finally, transferability and dependability included the researcher ensuring that the study's findings could be repeatable and applicable to other contexts (Connelly, 2016). Because the researcher was following a qualitative approach, the findings may not be generalized to other populations and geographical regions. Therefore, future research is required to understand this phenomenon in other settings. To account for future research, this researcher had developed strong interview protocols and study procedures that can be followed.

Study Findings

Four research questions guided this study, with 16 themes emerging from the dataset which included: (a) single parenting as a Black mother is challenging and difficult, (b) the determination for positive outcomes, (c) the power of vulnerability: asking for help, (d) dual role of the church, (e) importance of perseverance, (f) keeping busy, (g) use of existing systems, (h) use of creativity, (i) overcoming adversities and moving forward, (j) tough love (k) forgiveness and redemption, (l) independence and goal accomplishment, (m) mentorship/linkages (n)

importance of education, (o) defying stereotypes, and (p) changing their story for the next generation. Table 2 below highlights how the codes emerged into themes; some codes overlapped due to the information that the participants conveyed in their direct quotations.

Table 2. *Merging the Codes into Thematic Categories*

Codes	Thematic Categories
Challenging	Single Parenting as a Black mother is challenging and difficult
Difficult	Single Parenting as a Black mother is challenging and difficult
Support	Power of vulnerability: Asking for help Dual role of the church Use of existing systems Mentorship/linkages to prevent mistakes
Shortcomings	Forgiveness and redemption
Isolation	Independence
Negative stereotypes	Overcoming adversities and moving forward Forgiveness and redemption Defying the stereotypes
Not giving up	Determination for positive outcomes The importance of perseverance
Communication	Power of vulnerability: Asking for help
Friends	Power of vulnerability: Asking for help
Perseverance	Determination for positive outcomes The importance of perseverance Power of vulnerability: Asking for help
Endure	Determination for positive outcomes The importance of perseverance Creativity is vital
Kept going	The importance of perseverance Determination for positive outcomes

	Defying the stereotypes
It takes a village	Power of vulnerability: Asking for help
Working hard	Keeping busy
Never quitting	Determination for positive outcomes Overcoming adversities and moving forward
Failure is not an option	Determination for positive outcomes
Independent	Tough love Independence and goal accomplishment
Further in life	Keeping busy Forgiveness and redemption Education is key Changing the story for the next generation
Live the values	Tough love
Accomplishing goals	Creativity is vital Independence and goal accomplishment Education is key Changing the story for the next generation

RQ1: How do Black single mothers who have raised their Black sons to describe their lived experiences in the parenting of their sons?

The first research question aimed to understand the lived experiences of Black single mothers who had raised their Black sons. Within this research question, four themes emerged from the dataset: (a) single parenting as a Black mother is challenging and difficult, (b) the determination for positive outcomes, (c) the power of vulnerability, asking for help, and (d) dual role of the church. Although some of these themes appear to have negative connotations to them, it is important to highlight that all the participants were able to experience success, which is discussed within the fourth research question. Therefore, although many participants were able to

discuss challenges and difficulties at the time of single parenting, all were happy with the way that their sons grew up, into strong, independent men.

Theme 1: Single Parenting as a Black Mother is Challenging and Difficult

The first theme that emerged to describe the lived experience of black single mothers who have raised their black sons to adulthood was that single parenting as a black mother is challenging and difficult. This theme was substantiated by all 10 participants who were able to provide examples of their experiences as single Black mothers. For example, P2 stated:

The difficulty I have in raising my sons was teaching them to do the right thing. I had to take them out and let them have experiences for themselves. I had to teach them to be contented and be satisfied with what they had because I had a lot of financial challenges. You know, money was limited. And some of them they wanted, I could not afford it and that was a challenge. You know, seeing that they need things, and you cannot afford to give it to them. So, I had to tell them that they cannot have some of the things they wanted but we had what it took to survive; they had what they needed (P2).

Similarly, P3 reported how single parenting as a Black mother was difficult due to the perceptions of society. She reported:

I'm gonna start by saying that was, um, you know, society tells, tells us that, um, it's better to have, um, two parents and, and the family, you know, for the child to, to grow up healthy and productive and, and all those things. Like I said, society said, you know, kind of, they, they wouldn't be healthy and productive without a two-parent, um, you know, without their fathers being there. And in the beginning, that may have been a little struggle, but like I said, um, or, or challenge, you know, because you kind of gotta pick up the slack of, of the other parent a lot of times (P3).

Additionally, P7 discussed the many struggles, challenges, and shortcomings as a single parent when she stated:

There was no one to offer much help because where I lived everyone was struggling as well. I had to figure out how I was going to make it and not have my kids pay for my mistakes or shortcomings (P7).

P10 was also able to discuss:

Raising my sons was really hard without the help of their father. There were things that they were experiencing that I could not speak to. Besides the obvious physical challenges, it was making sure they had something to do. I had to ensure they were busy and not getting in trouble with the wrong people (P10).

Theme 2: Determination for positive outcomes

Although, per the participants' responses, parenting their sons as a Black single mother was often fraught with difficulties and challenges, a determination for positive outcomes transcended the perceptions of any insurmountable odds they faced and emerged as a key theme in the interviews. Participants revealed this theme through the description of a willed determination towards the outcome they desired. More than just not wanting to fail, the second theme of their lived experiences was a determination for positive outcomes. This determined outlook seemed to contribute to their endurance in parenting. All 10 participants reported a determination to succeed regardless of the challenges they encountered. Statements such as "failure was not an option" were echoed throughout most interviews. P2 made statements such as "They were going to have better than me and whatever I had to do to get it done, then its gonna get done." P5 echoed similar sentiments:

I didn't make it to parent-teacher conferences. But I would send my neighbor; she had children going there too. I worked 16 hours a day- I had one shift where I worked the 7-3 shift and then came home, made sure their homework was done, they were washed and then I slept and went to the 11-7 shift again. I always knew we were going to always be like this. But this is what we needed so that they could have what they needed (P5)

Being intentional regarding having a positive outcome was also necessary even when encountering systemic issues. For P3, it was challenging the legal system and daring to believe that positivity can result even from this challenge. Per her statement, she recounted how she felt:

My boy got in trouble, and I knew I couldn't help him. He was arrested and I went to court. I was so scared, that I almost peed on myself. That judge, he was a white man, just looking at me. But I asked to speak with him, and he obliged me. I said to the judge 'my boy needs help. Don't send him to jail, send him somewhere he could get help. Don't send him back home either because I don't want him to die. Just please help me.' The judge sent my son to a rehab center, and he stayed there and got his GED. Now he ok (P3).

Likewise, P9 resonated these sentiments with statements such as:

I hope to never ever share with my children what they cost me. They cost a lot. They cost me sleep, pride, time, and some of the dreams I wanted to have. To have to do all of that and they fail? Hell no! My kids were going to be somebody. They knew they owed me. I told them every day; I'm working. What you need, you're gonna get it, but you have to give me what I need and that's good grades, good behavior, and a good meal when I get home! (P9)

For P10, her experience was dramatized in her statement she recounted:

I had a patient at the nursing home who threw their s—t at me and laughed. I almost lost my job that day. I wanted to kick this man's a--, but the faces of my kids came to me. I ate my pride. I cried, then wiped my tears and kept going. You know why? I made my mind up right then and there ain't no Goddamn body gonna throw s—t in my children's face. My kids will not do my job. They're gonna be better (P10).

Although most participants (80 %) highlighted their sons as their motivation, 3 (30 %) identified a more internal need for success. For this group, they felt they had already failed, and failing again would not be an option. For P6, she stated:

Failure wasn't something I could afford honey. I did what I had to do. His father left us...walked away like it was nothing...like we were nothing. Wasn't gonna let nothing stop me from getting him where he needed to be then his father would see what he left. He left something good (P6).

P3 also shared similar sentiments when she stated:

I'm gonna tell you like this. You can deny me; you can deny your kids, but you can't deny their accomplishments. I would go to work tired, but I knew my kids were gonna be something...and I was gonna rub it in everyone's faces that looked down on me (P3).

These statements are further corroboration of the challenges of single parenthood and provided insight into possible factors contributing to single parenting success. All participants in this study shared the importance of how a determined perspective and mental fortitude contributed to their success in parenting.

Theme 3: Power of Vulnerability: Asking for Help

Another emerging theme from the participants regarding their lived experiences of raising their sons was the notion of asking for help. Most participants admitted that asking for

assistance was humbling and hard but were able to transcend these feelings because they focus on their children. Asking for help for many of these single mothers was more than pride but often retraumatizing. P1 shared this agony:

The hardest thing for me was asking people for help. I should be able to take care of mine, but I just couldn't do it by myself all the time (P1).

P4 reported how debilitating it was to ask for help, especially for something she did not know how to do:

My son really wanted to play sports. I was hoping that he would just want to play basketball because I know how to do that. But he wanted to play soccer, baseball, and football. I was like who am I going to get to help him because I can't do that? I went to the coaches and told them that I would love for him to play but he might need practice. They took him in and helped me. My son was athletic, so he really blossomed (P4).

For P8, this act of asking for help dealt with confronting her own guilt and shame and pushing past it:

We were facing eviction for the third time in a row. I didn't want to borrow money and I tried going to his father. That was no help at all. I asked one of my friends, but she would even tell me how she was making it. After getting all these rejections, the last thing you want is to ask again. I had to eat so much humble pie literally begging people for help...but some of those people who helped me, I'm grateful because we survived (P8).

Asking for help for some of the participant's was challenging but also helpful in getting help not only for their sons but also for themselves as exemplified by P2's experience:

This is very hard for me to relive but for me asking for help was liberating. My kids would come home, and the teachers would call and say they didn't do their homework. I

couldn't help them because I didn't know how to read or write well. I had this old lady- a mean woman. She lived right across from me. She was always reading. One day, I said to her, 'you bored- you always reading some book.' She said no she wasn't bored and if that is what being bored looked like, probably I should be bored too instead of having kids. She was something. I went to her when I was by myself and told her I want to read too. I just told her I didn't know how to read so well. I took a chance because I didn't want anyone to know about my business. From that day I became her student, she made me read. I read to her, and my kids read to me. That's how we survived. Lord, you have me crying. She doesn't know what she did for me. I just kept reading. I was able to help my son so when they were telling me he needs special education, I told him he just needs to read some books...and he read...and now he's good (P2).

Theme 4: Dual Role of the Church

One of the unexpected themes from this study was the duality of the church. It was expected that single mothers utilized the church as a place of inspiration and hope, but for over 50% of the participants, the church was utilized as a safe place. Although all participants had a spiritual base, some of the participant's utilization of church was not spiritually based or religiously motivated. Instead for them, it was a place of safety. As stated by P9:

Look, I would like to think I'm a good person and if I died, I would go to heaven...but I was not concerned about my son's soul when they were growing up, I was concerned about their physical survival. So did they go to Sunday school, every Sunday. Did they go to vacation bible school? Every summer...were they in the choir? Absolutely? Did we go to church on Sundays? Yes ma'am. They went on trips through the church...they were

provided with food from the church...they had Christmas gifts every Christmas from the church...they gave me a break; my kids were safe and that's all I needed (P9).

Likewise, P3 stated:

Every Saturday my children had a place to go. They didn't have to hang on the street. They hated Sundays because it was a long day. Sunday school in the morning, Children's church, and then dinner. They didn't mind dinner. Those church ladies fed them and fed us. I didn't have to worry about cooking on the weekends because I knew they were going to be taken care of from church. Friday night was youth night, Saturday was some practice and group, and Sunday was church. My grocery bills got help from my kids eating at church. It's good to get Jesus but it's also good to get fed too (P3).

P4 also echoed similar sentiments in her statement:

I wished that some of these churches realize that if they preach less and do more, more people will come to church. How am I going to see God when you can't even see me? Or my kid? I never liked church no way, but this lady I met from the church from Friends and Family Day became my biggest supporter. I went there. I didn't want to be there to tell you the truth. I don't believe God needs all of that like what the church be doing. But this lady took to my son, and she became "little grandma." She kept him for me. She would invite us over and I would stay. She was so kind to me. I started going to church just because of her (P4).

RQ2: How do Black single mothers who have raised Black sons to describe their experiences of grit in their parenting?

The second research question aimed to understand the experiences of grit that single Black mothers experienced when mothering their Black sons. Within this research question, 7 of the 10 participants contributed to this theme (70%), which was identified as: the importance of

perseverance. The seven participants that contributed to this theme were positive in their responses when discussing the challenges. They were able to explain the importance of being gritty when raising their sons, which translated to never giving up, or persevering, despite the challenges and difficulties faced. Four themes emerged in their descriptions of the experience of grit: (a) the importance of perseverance, (b) keeping busy, (c) the use of existing systems, and (d) creativity is vital.

Theme 5: The Importance of Perseverance

The fifth theme that emerged from the dataset was the importance of perseverance. Many of the participants were able to discuss the importance of perseverance when operating as a Black single mother. Participants reported that it was important to ask for help to ensure of perseverance within their parenting styles. For example, P4 was able to discuss how it was important to persevere when facing obstacles within their child's schooling, which was difficult to get through due to her financial situation. P4 stated:

Well, I believe that the very idea of being unconventional in my parenting is gritty. What I mean is that there were times in which the school would tell me that my son was not making the grades. I could not afford a tutor so I came up with the idea that I could give me a surprise for each book I required him to read. So, I would hand him a book and tell me he had to read it by a certain time. He would then find the \$5 that I put in it. This helped him like reading a bit better. When we would go to the store, I would have him pay for his own snacks with monies that he would earn throughout the week. He had to figure out math quickly. So, that is how he got better with math. When he needed something and I couldn't afford it, I would look for it in secondhand stores...I did

whatever I could and used whatever resources I could to get him where he needed to be (P4).

Additionally, P5 was able to discuss how she was able to persevere through the utilization of different support structures. The participant stated that to persevere, it is important to ask for help. P5 stated:

I experience grit in parenting by utilizing my tribe...that's what I call the people that supported me. I asked for help, and I went out and sought it and got it. I never accepted no for an answer because I had already disappointed my kids and I was not going to continue to disappoint them by denying them something else that they needed. I became very intentional about what I wanted. So, I utilized every system and resources I knew to get my sons where they needed to be. I worked extra, barter, I even became a paid advocate for other mothers in the school. They would pay me to help them get what they needed from the school (P5).

P8 discussed how she persevered by recognizing how she could not always provide her son with everything, and in these instances, it was important for her to find others that could help in the support process:

I just kept going. If something that I planned didn't work, then we are going to move on to the next one. Raising my son in the neighborhood that we were in was very hard. However, when he got in trouble, I refused to bail him out. I used the system to show my son that he always had choices and his life would be contingent on the choices he made. I connected him to people and activities just to keep him busy and off the streets...whatever I could do, I did it (P8).

P9 provided a similar experience, highlighting the importance of perseverance through asking for help:

I just kept going and I became intentional and clear as to what I wanted. When my son wanted things, and I knew I would not be able to afford it, I ask for help. I believe that the most evidence of grit is my education. I was not doing well in school at first. I was just too tired. But I kept going. I met with the professors, I told them my story and things began to get better. My son saw me studying, crying, all of that. Now he can advocate for himself because he saw me do it (P9).

Finally, P6 discussed how it was important to persevere, not only in her son's life but her own, and provided examples of how she had to work harder to move her family forward in life:

I just kept going. My son was a lot in that he was challenging but failure was not an option or a luxury for me. I had to do it and he had to succeed. So, when he was not choosing the right crowds, I had to give him tough love. I did not give him the opportunity to just hang out...he was busy. I had him involved in everything. We were not very religious, but did he go to church? Yes, he did-just because it was a safe place to be. I took him to my second job when I could and while he was doing extracurricular activities, I was studying. While he was sleeping, I was writing papers. I had to do whatever was necessary to make this thing work (P6).

Another area of perseverance that the participants discussed was how the experience of fear assisted them in persevering and how it was used as a motivator. All the participants reported parenting out of fear. They all knew stories and experiences that they did not want their sons to encounter. Often statements such as "he was not going to end up on the streets" (P3) or "he was not going to be like his father," (P4) and lastly "he wasn't going to be like me" (P1) was

echoed in almost all the interviews. Fear is often debilitating but for these mothers, it was often a great motivator.

The experience of fear in relation to perseverance appeared significant in that it drove each parent to act or implement activities that would provide more assurance of changing the trajectory of what they feared as a negative life event into attempting something more positive. Fear of “the streets” were echoed by 70% of the participants. Statements such as “I did everything to keep them from the streets (P3), and “I know that if I didn’t keep close to them, they would wind up on the streets” (P10) were expressed. For many of these single mothers, their notion of raising their sons meant providing them an opportunity to avoid some of the pitfalls they observed or experienced. P7 reported that because of her experiences and what she observed, she wanted her son to do and have better. That meant “doing everything possible” to ensure that he would not repeat or replicate those things she feared. She acknowledged her fear in the following statement:

I don’t want him to end up like me, or his dad, or anybody I know. I know how hard this is but him being a boy, makes it even worst. Somebody gets killed every single day because they wanted quick money, quick things, or just caught up. I don’t want that for mine (P7).

Likewise, P5 sentiment was analogous to P7 in her statement:

I want my son to decide his own fate, not have someone decide for him. I push him because I’m his mother- I know how to and I know how far I can go. But the cops don’t know that; the drug dealers or gangbangers don’t know that. I refused to lose him to the streets; I refuse to lose him...period! (P5)

Other participants acknowledge their use of fear in keeping in touch with the schools. For them, they feared the schools' willingness and motivation for help. P2 shared her mistrust of the school system due to what she had observed and experienced over her children's developmental years.

I cannot trust these people with my kids and because of that, they are going to know me. If you don't show your face or get involved, your kids are not going to get the education they need. The schools will just toss them away...so I had to stay involved (P2).

Theme 6: Keeping busy

The second theme that illustrated the participants' experiences of grit in their parenting of their sons was keeping them busy and engaged. 80% of the participants reported engaging in activities as important to their parenting. As illustrated by P4 statement:

The devil finds words for idle hands, and I don't have a devil. He was not going to have time to do anything unproductive. I simply could not afford that(P4).

Likewise, Participant 6 stated:

I had a job, and even jobs, so he had to have a job too. His job, besides attending school, was keeping busy with activities. I didn't have a cellphone to track him, but I knew if I wanted to know where he was at, I needed to plan for that. I got off at 7 and he was finished with all his activities at 7:30. He wasn't going to have time to fool around and get in trouble, be a teenage father, or in jail. I wasn't having that (P6)

As these statements illustrated some participants find involvement in activities as a way of insulating their sons from some of the harshnesses of their environment.

Theme 7: Use of the existing systems

Another major theme of this research question centers on how respondents use the existing systems as a way of assisting them on their parenting journeys. Eighty percent of the

participants in this study utilized some form of housing or social service. These were in form of housing assistance, vouchers, food stamps, or any other tangible things. Participants reported that the use of existing programs assisted them in being able to worry less about needed essentials. Besides tangible goods, the existing systems also assisted in providing additional structure and safety. P8 acknowledged the humbling nature of utilizing such systems but chose to do that anyway.

Living in what people knew as the projects were stigmatizing but I had to make it work until we got where we needed to go. So, while I was there, I worked and saved as much as I could. We were talked about- and often my son got teased but to me, it was worth it. I got to get where I needed to go by getting the help I needed (P8).

For others, although they understood the stigma associated with utilizing the existing system, what they wanted for their children transcended any level of guilt. As P3 articulated:

My sons never wanted to go shopping with me because of how I paid. They didn't want people to know that we were on food stamps. But they faithfully went, and I would share with them how blessed we were because we had this help (P3).

Outside of receiving assistance and support with obtaining tangible items such as food or housing, the participants reported that they also utilized the systems within the school such as special education or community support. Thirty percent of the participants utilized educational services to assist their children. For example, Participant 5 acknowledged utilizing the special education system to assist her sons.

One of my sons needed help. I knew he had some difficulty with reading, and I had to get him some help in school. He was a special education student. I don't regret it. He needed the help and I got it for him (P5)

Theme 8: Creativity is vital

Being creative in acquiring needed resources was a common theme in this study as it related to the participant's experience of grit. Participants reported that due to financial constraints and their own limitedness, they needed to be creative regarding meeting the needs of their sons. This embodies their strength of character and courage in many ways. According to P10:

Money was hard to come by, but I knew how to do some things. I washed clothes, cooked, and babysat to help make ends meet (P10).

Similar sentiments were made by P3 in her statement:

I knew it wasn't the best thing, but I sold my food stamps to get real cash. My kids needed clothes and uniforms so I would try my best to make sure that I could sell my food stamps to help make ends meet (P3)

P2 utilized bartering as a way of assisting her. She reported that while she would cook and keep her neighbor's daughter, who was also a single mother, she was able to get transportation to and from work when she needed it. She stated:

For those who were receiving housing assistance, house sharing as a way of cutting expenses was done. My kids and I would sleep in one room and living area and keep a bedroom to rent out. Before Airbnb, I did that just so that I didn't have to work so much and be there for my kids as much as I could. I always rented to women, and I always rented to single women with children. That was a way in which we survived (P2)

RQ3: How do Black single mothers who have raised Black sons to describe their experiences of resilience in their parenting?

The third research question aimed to understand how Black single mothers who had raised Black sons described their experiences of resilience in their parenting. The three themes

identified within this research question were: (a) overcoming adversities and moving forward (b) exercising tough love and (c) forgiveness and redemption.

Theme 9: Overcoming Adversities and Moving Forward

All 10 participants contributed to this theme from a positive standpoint. They were able to discuss that despite the adversities that are presented during single motherhood, it is essential to keep moving forward to demonstrate resilience. This was highlighted by P1 who stated that it is important to find positive members of the community that can become a part of a support system. P1 stated:

I think, I believe that it takes a village and like created, cause you gotta realize that we, when we say village, it's a village, it takes a village to raise a, um, a child. We have a whole village out in the community. Good and bad mm-hmm <affirmative>. And we have, they look at this bad village and they realize that these are the things I don't want to be a part of. I don't like the way the outcome is. And then you create this positive village and give 'em something else to look forward to liking, if this is, this is positive reinforcement. If I do this, this is the rewards and the benefits that I get back from this. So, I think that my resilience came in when I was able to create positive reinforcement for him to have an outlet, to be like (P1).

P3 was able to discuss the importance of moving forward despite experiencing adversities when she stated:

There, there were a lot of moments. A lot of times where I just felt I was weak, like so weak where I'm just like, I can't do this no more. Uh, I can't do this no more. There were times I, I said out loud, I don't wanna do this no more (P3).

However, P3 continued to state the importance of acknowledging feelings and moving forward emotionally to stay strong:

But then something in, in inside of me in my core was like, okay, you said that now what you know now, what, um, you gotta keep going. You can't, you can't give up. Even, even if you feel like it. And the key to that thing is acknowledge your feelings. Yes.

Acknowledge what you're feeling. Because a lot of times what breaks us down is when we hold all that stuff in, it literally breaks down to where, you know, this way a lot, I found out a lot of sicknesses come from, um, it, it started trickling down to your mental health (P3).

P4 described their experiences of moving forward despite experiencing adversities by stating:

I saw other women with their husbands, and I was alone. But I had to tell myself, my son didn't ask to be here. There were times in which I was so tired...I would pull over on the side of the road just to sleep for 10 mins. I had to keep going. I lost jobs, relationships, sleep---you name it...because it is very difficult to explain that you can't do certain things and you hang out, and you can't afford something because you have that obligation as a mother. I only had myself and my family, so it was difficult to do everything with everybody. I had to always think about how I was going to make it (P4).

P6 reported that she kept going no matter what, and worked hard to find support that could assist her in her challenging moments:

I experienced resilience when I kept going even when I failed some classes because I was just too tired; when my son was experiencing some trouble in school, I worked along with them to get him the help he needed. I had to deal with financial constraints and depression. There were days on which it was painful to get out of bed. Breathing became

painful. I had to work through my own emotional trauma to get my son what he needed (P6).

P8 exemplified this theme by stating that resilience, for her, started when she became pregnant and followed through until her child had grown up. Additionally, she stated the importance of finding support that could help her with the legal system and housing. P8 stated:

The fact that I continue with my pregnancy knowing that I was going to be a single parent to me is being resilient. I also believed that just working with the system and in the system to get what I needed was being resilient. When my son got in trouble for stealing, I told them to keep him- I needed him to know that I was not going to always be there to bail him out, so he had to figure out what he was going to do. When we were evicted and still attempting to find housing and a stable environment were also resilient (P8).

Theme 10: Tough Love

One of the quintessential traits of single parenting, per all the respondents, was the idea of resiliency. For these participants, because they were parenting alone, they had to have a dual role of being a nurturer and a disciplinarian. That task was not always easy. For these participants, the application of tough love-allowing their children to face whatever consequences their actions necessitate was very difficult but also very necessary. The fear of losing their sons' affection for a moment was hard, but for these participants, sending the wrong message regarding natural consequences as it relates to life's actions and decisions were far more costly. The administration of tough love for many was the most challenging, but also adds to their resiliency. As P3 articulated, finding a balance was not always easy in the administration of discipline and providing nurturing:

Parenting my boys was hard- I couldn't love on them like I would love on my girls. I had to be hard because the streets were hard, the police were hard, and even the teachers were hard. I had to toughen them up because I didn't want them to break. There were times in which I just wanted to hug them and looking back I probably should have. At the time, I just didn't want them to be a wuss; I wanted them to be strong, so I had to show them tough love (P3).

Similarly, P7 also expressed similar sentiments when she stated:

When you are surrounded by gangbangers, drug dealers, drug addicts, and all sort of people around you, then you have the police and you are scared to have your kid in their hands and then when they go to school, they are around teachers who only see the bad first, there is no room for "my bad." Mistakes are detrimental and the wrong mistake can cost you your life. All these people were competition to me, they offered something that I couldn't. Being bad for these teachers gave them a break from my kid; being in a gang my kid could have notoriety and drugs and drug dealing was quick money. I was competing against all of this. So, when he got in trouble, I did not rescue him. He had to know what real consequences felt like cause if he didn't, I was going to lose him really quickly (P7).

Sometimes, tough love was not only in the consequences of drugs or negative living but also even with systemic figures. P4 demonstrated this when she stated:

My kid was not going to school all the time; he had an attendance problem. We got called to the attendance counselor's office. He sat there with my son and told him 'You know, you're 16. You can sign yourself out of school.' My son was almost excited, but I didn't say anything to that attendance counselor. When we left, he said to me 'mama, what you

think?’ I told him that it was ok for him to sign out of school, but he would be signing himself out of my house as well. I told him that the only way he was going to stay with me is if he stayed in school. He did (P4).

In a similar situation, P9 reported that her son’s grades jeopardized his promotion to the next grade. She reported “wanting to fight them and make them change their minds,” but she reported that this “was a way of letting him know I was not always going to rescue him.”

Theme 11: Forgiveness and Redemption

An unexpected theme for this researcher was the participants overwhelming responses on how forgiveness led to levels of redemption in their parenting journeys. Eighty percent of the participants reported that exercising forgiveness played a vital role in their ability to remain resilient. Some reported the importance of acknowledging their own pain, and “moving forward” meant forgiving the people they thought were the source of hurt. P3 epitomized this when she stated:

I hated that man...my son’s father. Bad enough he left but then he ended up not far from us with a whole new set of kids and family. I remember one time one of my sons did something...I can’t even remember what he did, but he did something and I gave him a whooping. I was so mad at myself because I just felt like I was taking out my anger on my son instead of his father. I didn’t like how I was feeling, and I knew that for the sake of my son, I had to make peace with him and peace with the situation. It is what it is, and I couldn’t change that (P3).

For P7, it was a “never-ending ache” and a “weighty burden” that she no longer wanted to carry.

Other participants, who also believed that forgiveness was essential, used statements of “not

wanting it to hurt” their sons like they have been hurt. As P1 expressed, bitterness and anger infiltrated her parenting and would be hurtful more to her than to anyone:

I didn't think that forgiveness was necessary. I had every right to be upset and hurt over what this man did. But I was just tired of carrying him everywhere. I was so angry and bitter that it was literally seeping out of my pores. One day I saw him...I watched him for a while and realize he ain't thinking about us. He is good, but I'm not. My sons were not because I was always mad. So, I just buried him. I had me an emotional funeral and just made myself forgive (P1).

In contrast to the weight and negativity brought on by lack of forgiveness, participants found that forgiveness could be freeing. As articulated by P8, forgiveness allowed her the opportunity to reconnect with herself:

Forgiving myself made me free to love me again; because I loved me again, I started taking better care of myself and that was good for my son. When he graduated from high school, I just cried and cried, not because I was happy but because I could finally see that I did good. That made me feel better about all that we had to go through. I felt like my pain had a purpose and now I don't have to hate that part of me that I believed fail (P8)

Along with forgiveness, some participants identified redemption being a part of their path of the resilient parenting experiences. Such participants like P1 reported how seeing their sons gave her the space to acknowledge her own strength and resilience.

I spent so much time making sure that they were ok, I had forgotten much about me. When I felt they were good...I felt good. Now they're grown, with their own family and I get to see these boys that I had become what I believe to be successful- it makes me proud. From me being a teenage mom, no high school diploma, a welfare recipient to

know someone who is able to sit at my son's table, it's an amazing journey and it feels good. I ain't that nobody anymore. Their success gave me something to be proud of (P10).

Others echoed similar statements when speaking about the redemptive nature of their resilience.

As stated by P4:

When he was walking across the stage, he was looking at me. He walked and to me, my heart soared. This is what I wanted. I didn't do it the right way...I had a lot of mistakes, but I did the best I could with him and now he is good (P4)

And in similar ways, P8 resonated this sentiment when she stated:

My son graduated and gave me his diploma because he said since I didn't have one, I could have his. I may not have been somebody, but my son is...and that's enough for me (P8).

In essence, for these mothers, the road to parenting also showed them ways in which they can themselves reclaim parts of themselves that may have been forgotten in their singular focus of parenting.

RQ4: How do Black single mothers define success as it relates to the raising of their sons?

The fourth research question aimed to understand how Black single mothers defined success as it related to the raising of their Black sons. Five themes emerged from this research question: (a) independence and goal accomplishment and (b) mentorship/linkages to prevent mistakes, (c) education is key, (d) defying stereotypes, and (e) changing their story for the next generation. Within this research question, overall, the participants defined success as ensuring that their sons became educated and worked toward their goals. The participants perceived that these two key factors ensured that they would be able to become independent when they grew

up. In essence, this allowed them to defy stereotypes while changing their story for the next generation.

Theme 12: Independence and Goal Accomplishment

The first theme to emerge as black single mothers defined success was independence and goal accomplishment. Nine of the 10 participants contributed to this theme (90%), with all participants providing positive overtures when it came to discussing how their sons grew up into successful men. For example, P4 stated:

Success to me is seeing the product of what I put in. Is he respectful? Was he able to get through school without getting into real trouble? Was he on drugs or hanging out with bad people? For my son, he was always respectful; he had good friends and he did well in school. He graduated from high school and is now in the Navy. I prayed for him every single day and God was faithful because I tell you that I am proud (P4).

Additionally, P5 discussed that success relates to independence:

Success to me is my children being independent and not a drain on society. I believe the success is for them to take care of themselves in a legal and productive way (P5).

P8 was able to discuss how accomplishing goals defined success for them as a Black single mother:

My son's father was a college-educated man. To me, I wanted my son to reach that level and then some. I felt that if I could get him there then my husband's death would not be in vain. I was always aware of where I wanted him to go. Everything I did was geared toward accomplishing this goal. So, for me to feel like I was successful had to be ensuring that he was able to go and graduate from college. He accomplished that along

with his Masters. When I sat and look at him crossing the stage, I felt that his father was telling me I did a good job (P8).

P9 was able to discuss the importance of goal accomplishments, too:

I define success as not living up to the expectations of failures. My son far exceeded my goals for him as I just wanted him to graduate from high school and find a job. I just wanted him to be able to take care of himself and he has been able to do just that (P9).

Finally, P10 summarized how independence and goal setting was her definition of successful parenting as a Black mother:

My son is a college graduate; he has not been arrested; he is a good citizen and is working. What else can I ask for? He is able to take care of himself and now can even take care of me should I need it. I believe that success is when you are able to make your kids achieve more than you. Both of my sons can do that (P10).

Theme 13: Mentorship/Linkages to Prevent Mistakes

Another theme that arose from the participants' discussion of success was the importance of mentorship and linkages as a way of preventing their sons from making mistakes or engaging in negative behaviors. All the participants reported that having a relatable mentor was vital to the success of their sons. Connecting their sons to mentors provided the opportunity for their sons to see success besides basketball players and music artists and proved to be an attribute of the participants' positive parenting experience. All 10 of the participants articulated positive experiences with the idea of mentoring:

I am so grateful for the teachers who took the time to spend extra time with my sons.

When school would be too much, he had someone that he could go to. Even after my son was finished with that grade, that teacher made himself available to my sons (P3).

Similarly, for P2, it was the acknowledgment that she alone was not enough to shield and protect her sons from the attraction and the persuasion of negative influences that surround them.

I am a woman. I knew that they needed to see that they have more than just drugs or basketball or rap to get ahead. I may have been a good mother, but I always knew I was a bad version of a man. So, getting them to see themselves in another man, I believe, helped them to know that they too can be successful and that they have more options (P2).

The idea of mentorship also reverberated with P10 who shared her experiences of mentorship even with outside community support.

Where I was living, there weren't a lot of positive things or people to connect with. For my sons, I needed them to know what was possible. So, the DARE program became a standard program in our book. This was a program that taught kids about drugs and about being a good citizen. So, the police officer that was over our section got to know all my sons. He would check on them...talk to them for me and even when I had an issue, I would call him to help me. They saw what a good man was like and because of that, I believe that it helps make them who they are today (P10).

Maintaining linkages with teachers, and community partners such as church, sports, and other community organizations such as the Boys Scouts and Little league was also another way the participants attributed some of their parental success. When linkages were maintained, some respondents reported an increase in their sons' ability to maintain focus in school, avoid irreversible negative life circumstances, and improve their success levels. As articulated by P5:

My sons belonged to a group in which they were mentors and then were also mentored.

In addition to this, they were able to be surrounded by like-minded individuals that made

doing well in school or attended normal activities. I didn't have to explain why I don't allow them to sag their pants or go to the hangout down the street; they were ok because they had other options (P5).

Theme 14: Education is Key

In comparison to single Black mothers, parents, regardless of marital status shared the commonality of wanting their children to succeed (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020). This very passion begins often at the very start of conception. In this research question, the participants lamented their own past mistakes and as previously shared, increased the redemptive nature of their tenacity via their resilience and grit through the sheer knowledge of their children's success. Often, this hinges on education, which most believe to be the bedrock of success. While all 10 participants believed that attaining some level of education was paramount to their definition of their son's success, education was more loosely defined. Regardless of the level of education, all participants agreed that education was a key component in what they would consider being successful parenting of their sons. As stated by P2:

I stopped attending school when I was 14 years old. My parents saw no benefit in me attending school. My father felt I was more useful in the home than at school. When I came into this country, I decided that my children would have what I didn't have. That starts with education; anything was possible with that (P2).

Similar statements were said by P10:

I dropped out of school and became a teen mom. I am a living, breathing statistic. I wanted more and the only way that they were going to have different than me is if they had more than me and that means that they had to have an education (P10).

Likewise, P4 echoed similarly but also illustrated that the type of education was not as important as just pursuing some education past high school.

I really wanted my sons to have a college education. It would make me so proud. See no one in my family went to college; they barely graduated high school. So, you know what, I wanted them to have a way out. Out of the projects, out of the ghetto, just out! Man, I hated school, but I wasn't about to tell them that; nope, the school was it for them. But they really didn't want to go to college; they worked better with their hands and so I just gave up on that dream. But they all did something with their lives; one is a barber; one is a mechanic; one works as a janitor and the other one works for himself. They all don't need me anymore; they can take care of themselves; what else do I need (P4).

But for others, such as P8, being successfully educated had a stricter definition:

I'm sorry but he was going to college; no exception; I made that clear and he complied. Education for a black man is more than an opportunity, it is vital to his life. When he walks anywhere, yes, they will see him as a black man, but when he opens his mouth, they will know he is more than just a black man, he is educated and that means he is somebody (P8).

Theme 15: Defying the Stereotypes

In following what they believe to be a success as part of their parenting journeys, these 10 participants also noted that defining success in their parenting of their sons meant that their sons defied the odds of not living up to stereotypes. In this emerging theme, all the participants defined success as doing what they were told that their sons could not do. Eight out of the 10 participants reported the importance of avoiding what they believed were stereotypical caricatures. As stated by P9:

I don't want him just to survive. I did that; survival is easy, but to thrive despite all the odds written against you is spectacular. Here I am a single mother who raised a man; a black educated man who is now a father to his kids works a good job and is taking care of his family (P9)

As shown in P9 statement, the weight of raising the stereotypical black boy seemed to be an ever-present reality for these participants. Each laments the stereotypes and reports a desire to “not be more of a statistic” (P5), “not living upon the black thug image” (p8), and “not being a baby-making machine” (P2). For these mothers, success for them was often the simplicity of knowing that their sons did not become what they feared or what society believed they would be.

Theme 16: Changing their Story for the Next Generation

Another theme that resonated with 60% of the participants was the desire to give to their sons' partners and grandchildren more than what they were given. In addition to the hurt, anger, and pain that was expressed throughout the interview process, most of the participants acknowledged that their son's fathers did not have good role models and thus perpetuated the pain they had for their own children. P6 stated:

You know when I think about it, his father didn't know any better; he didn't know how to be a father because he didn't have one. How could I ask him to be somebody that he never had? My sons would not use that excuse. He was going to be there for his children because I did not want my grandchildren to have what he had, and they don't (P6).

A similar sentiment was stated by P3:

I wholeheartedly raise my sons into the men that I wish I had. Their fathers were not nice, didn't know how to love, or give; they were selfish. I wanted my sons to know how to

treat a woman. So, if I couldn't get it for myself, I was not going to give the pain that I was given to another woman (P3)

This sentiment was equally important to P7 when she stated:

My son was going to be like his daddy; not that pain was too much. His father was not kind and that's all I'm going to say about that. My daughter-in-law tells me thanks every time we spent time together; my son is resent; my grandchildren will not know the pain their father endured. No, changing his life helps my daughter-in-law's kids' life and that's how you change everything (P7).

In summation of how these parents defined their sons' success in changing the lives of the next generation, P8 statement encapsulated it best when she stated:

Success to me was stopping this generational that has infiltrated the Black community; it's sick. I remember telling my son whatever he produced, he was going to take care of or else I could take care of him. I'm not having the Maury show in my house and they knew that. Imagine if his father's mother had that intention towards me. My son is a husband; his kids will not know any other reality and that simply makes it all worth it (P8).

Summary

The problem being studied was that Black mothers face a variety of barriers when raising their sons. Such barriers include economic hardships (Taylor & Conger, 2017) and residing in disadvantaged areas (Barkan & Rocque, 2018; DeLuca et al., 2019). Additionally, Black mothers may oftentimes be excluded from their son's schools, making it a challenge to be involved in their children's education (Allen & White-Smith, 2018). As a result of being raised in a single-parent household, current research has suggested that Black boys are placed in a higher at-risk

category as they experience higher rates of educational problems (Thomas et al., 2016), substance abuse disorders (Tache et al., 2020), and mistreatment from law enforcement officers (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018), all in comparison to Black girls. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of Black single mothers in the raising of their sons. Furthermore, this study explored how these mothers had experienced resilience and grit in assisting them in raising their Black sons; how they defined these constructs and made meaning of them was also explored.

Sixteen themes emerged from the dataset, which included: (a) single parenting as a Black mother is challenging and difficult, (b) the determination for positive outcomes, (c) the power of vulnerability: asking for help, (d) dual role of the church, (e) importance of perseverance, (f) keeping busy, (g) the use of existing systems, (h) the use of creativity, (i) overcoming adversities and moving forward, (j) tough love (k) forgiveness and redemption, (l) independence and goal accomplishment, (m) mentorship/linkages (n) the importance of education, (o) defying stereotypes, and (p) changing their story for the next generation. Although the Black single mother participants discussed negative experiences when raising their sons, they were able to demonstrate many instances where positivity, perseverance, setting goals, and asking for help and support from others helped them achieve success. This allowed them to move through instances of adversities and become successful over time. The next chapter of this dissertation is the conclusion, where the researcher will discuss the findings about previous literature, while also highlighting limitations, implications, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5: Discussion

Introduction

The problem being studied was that Black mothers face a variety of barriers when raising their sons. Such barriers include economic hardships (Taylor & Conger, 2017) and residing in disadvantaged areas (Barkan & Rocque, 2018; DeLuca et al., 2019). Additionally, Black mothers may oftentimes be excluded from their son's schools, making it a challenge to be involved in their children's education (Allen & White-Smith, 2018). Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of Black single mothers in the raising of their sons. Furthermore, this study explored how these mothers had experienced resilience and grit in assisting them in raising their Black sons; how they defined these constructs and made meaning of them was also explored.

Sixteen themes emerged from the dataset which included: (a) single parenting as a Black mother is challenging and difficult, (b) the determination for positive outcomes, (c) the power of vulnerability: asking for help, (d) dual role of the church, (e) importance of perseverance, (f) keeping busy, (g) the use of existing systems, (h) the use of creativity, (i) overcoming adversities and moving forward, (k) tough love, (l) forgiveness and redemption, (m) independence and goal accomplishment, (n) mentorship/linkages (14) the importance of education, (o) defying stereotypes, and (p) changing their story for the next generation. The themes indicated that although the Black single mothers discussed negative experiences when raising their sons, they were able to demonstrate many instances where positivity, perseverance, setting goals, and asking for help and support from others helped them achieve success. This allowed them to move through instances of adversities and become successful over time. This chapter will conclude the dissertation by providing a discussion of the findings about previous literature and the theoretical

framework. The researcher will then discuss the implications, the study's limitations, and recommendations for the field and practice of study. Finally, the researcher will provide recommendations for future research.

Discussion of Findings

Sixteen themes emerged from the dataset under the research questions that guided this study:

RQ1: How do Black single mothers who have raised their Black sons describe their lived experiences in the parenting of their sons?

RQ2: How do Black single mothers who have raised Black sons describe their experiences of grit in their parenting?

RQ3: How do Black single mothers who have raised Black sons describe their experiences of resilience in their parenting?

RQ4: How do black single mothers define success as it relates to the raising of their sons?

This section will discuss the findings that emerged under each research question.

RQ1: How do Black single mothers who have raised their Black sons describe their lived experiences in the parenting of their sons?

The first research question aimed to understand how Black single mothers who have raised their Black sons described their lived experiences in the parenting of their sons. Within this research question, four themes emerged from the dataset: (a) single parenting as a Black mother is challenging and difficult, (b) the determination for positive outcomes (c) the power of vulnerability: asking for help, and (d) dual role of the church.

Theme 1. Single Parenting as a Black Mother is Challenging and Difficult

The first theme highlighted that the participants perceived that single parenting as a Black mother is challenging and difficult. Within this theme, the participants reported that without the fathers involved, parenting presented with more challenges, as well as financial challenges and stigma involved in raising a child alone. This theme is supported by previous literature. For example, Allen and Connor (1997) discussed how Black women oftentimes must occupy dual roles as both laborer and mother in a system where humanity was denied, and were forced to acclimate themselves to a concept of family that was far from what had been their cultural norm. This presents alignment with how the participants of this study discussed the difficulties of stigma and financial issues. The authors discussed how historical issues and experiences from slavery, the Great Depression, and World War II, resulted in housing shortages, financial distress, lack of educational and employment opportunities, increased occurrences of marital discord, and disruptions in the Black family, setting the stage set for what could be considered a norm of the Black single parenting phenomenon and its subsequent difficulties (Allen & Connor, 1997).

From a more contemporary perspective, previous research has depicted the importance of studying parental stressors and poverty. For example, various research has concluded that Black mothers raising their sons encounter the implication of poverty and parenting stress when compared to non-Blacks counterparts (Bernard & Maguire-Jack, 2016; Cooper et al., 2009; Jackson et al.; Ray et al., 2021; Vreeland et al., 2019). Additionally, Cassells and Evans (2017) evaluated and explored the impact of poverty on parenting stress to clarify and demonstrate the nature of the relationship across Black families and other ethnic minority families. The results of their study suggested three primary mediators in the link between poverty and parenting stress

for Black and other ethnic minority families. The three mediators included depression, family structure, and neighborhood environment. According to Cassells and Evans, the neighborhood environment or neighborhood poverty was often overlooked even though it had a massive impact on the family stressors felt by Black parents who belonged to a low-income or poverty background.

Stigma and stereotypes are also important to highlight in the face of a challenging and difficult environment where Black women raised their sons. For example, Powell and Coles (2019) conducted a study that focused on the challenges of Black single mothers who were raising children between the ages of 10 and 18 years to better understand how the mothers saw themselves and their situations as they navigated and negotiated their daily lives while raising their children alone. The results of the findings demonstrated that the Black single mothers' experiences may have similarities to other single mothers', but they appear to face specific challenges that other single mothers, especially White single mothers, do not face. These challenges included Black single mothers being often misunderstood and deprived of opportunities and being devalued, misconceived, and even negatively portrayed through stereotypes. Therefore, this theme is in alignment demonstrating the difficulties and challenges that Black single mothers face, that other minority or White single mothers would not face, making this population unique and important to study.

Theme 2. The Determination for Positive Outcomes

The second theme that emerged from the dataset highlighted how the participants perceived their intention to have positive outcomes. All 10 participants reported a determination to succeed regardless of the challenges they encountered. Statements such as "failure was not an option" were echoed throughout most interviews. This finding is also in alignment with previous

literature. For example, Jackson and Kiehl (2017) conducted a study that explored how mothers utilized resilience in their journey through motherhood. The study results highlighted how Black mothers demonstrated resilient behaviors. They adapted to challenging situations by ensuring that they taught their principles and morals to their children, which aided in their children making healthy choices in their lives as they transitioned into adulthood. Additionally, the authors argued that it was the positivity and resilience that also helped them be successful as single Black parents.

Additionally, Conger (2014) that it is paramount to not only have a positive perspective when raising a child as a single Black mother but equally an intention for positive results, because research has indicated that both resilience and grit play a role, urging mothers to continue and not accept “failure as an option”. Wilson (2016) appeared to agree with this alignment of this theme as well because they noted that the ability to persevere despite challenging situations has been a consistent pattern when examining success among single Black mothers, which was further highlighted and confirmed within this current study. Therefore, the importance of a positive perspective is paramount, because it can assist with a certain level of resilience and grit that can allow Black single mothers the motivation and energy to continue moving forward despite experiencing several barriers or challenges.

Theme 3. The Power of Vulnerability: Asking for Help

The third theme that emerged from the dataset was that the participants reported the importance of the power of vulnerability or asking for help. Asking for help is a critical theme that has been seen through previous research, as it allows Black single Mothers to not only receive more assistance in the raising of their children, but also provides an additional level of support that makes them successful as mothers. This theme appears in alignment with previous

literature, as Wilson et al. (2014) reported that Black mothers' use of available resources within their communities has also been linked as a contributing factor to parenting success. For example, the authors reported that it is imperative for Black single mothers to ask for help because it can provide additional assistance to their sons. Wilson et al. highlighted that without their fathers, they faced no shortage of mentors and role models. Research shows that Black students who had access to role models were better off in academics and beyond. Additionally, community support via extracurricular activities, after-school programs, sports, and other positive community supports have aided in assisting single parents in supervision and decreasing opportunities for their sons to be involved with negative behaviors. Findings of research suggest that even boys who were raised in absent-father families have reduced at-risk behaviors due to the involvement of mentors and role models in the Black community (Carson, 2004; Cartwright & Henriksen, 2012; Frieman & Berkeley, 2002; Warde, 2008; Zimmerman et al., 2002). Therefore, the power of vulnerability is a driving force that Black single mothers move through to ask for help to be successful as a parent and increase the success of the raising of their Black sons.

Theme 4. The Dual Role of the Church

The fourth theme for the first research question highlighted the importance of the dual role of the church. Within this theme, the participants reported that they utilized the church as a place of inspiration and hope, but for over 50% of the participants, the church was utilized as a safe place. Although all participants had a spiritual base, some of the participant's utilization of church was not spiritually based or religiously motivated. Instead for them, it was a place of safety. This theme appears in alignment with previous literature. For example, Henderson (2016)

reported that faith helps Black single mothers cope with their challenges because it served as a foundation for their personal growth, parenting values, and ultimately happiness.

Churches and other organizations that Black single mothers belong to can help provide them with the support they may not otherwise find from their husbands, relatives, or the wider community. For example, mothers who associate with the church can experience additional support and services that include healthcare, transportation, and financial support for their children. The fact that churches offer Black single mothers these additional levels of support and services, increases their feelings of safety and security. Researchers have noted that safety is oftentimes experienced because Black single mothers see the church as they find solace, concrete support, and spirituality; for them, this environment becomes a community whereby the members are like their extended family (Barbarin et al., 2020; Clark et al., 2017; McNeil & Landor, 2018; Widan, 2017). This theme was important to highlight because when it comes to successful Black single parenting, the church appears to be of paramount importance; single mothers in Black communities who found comfort and assistance from their churches have claimed that these churches positively shaped their personal and parenting values (Barbarin et al., 2020; Clark et al., 2017; McNeil & Landor, 2018; Widan, 2017).

RQ2: How do Black single mothers who have raised Black sons to describe their experiences of grit in their parenting?

The second research question aimed to understand how Black single mothers who have raised Black sons described their experiences of grit in their parenting. Within this research question, four themes emerged from the dataset: (a) the importance of perseverance, (b) keeping busy, (c) the use of existing systems, and (d) creativity is vital.

Theme 5. The Importance of Perseverance

The fifth theme in this study highlighted that the participants perceived perseverance as being important. Within the concept of grit, this is important to note, as many of the participants appeared to understand the definition of grit and how it can help them in their parenting success. For example, what has made Black single parents successful epitomizes the definition of grit. Grit has been successfully tied to increases in executive functioning, academic success, performance advantages in sports, and achievements when applied to different fields of study (Duckworth et al., 2016; Ivcevic & Brackett, 2014; Lucas et al., 2015).

When it came to Black single parenting, studies appeared minimal. Gantt and Grief (2009) conducted a study that examined grit in the parenting of Black single mothers. The authors found that when raising their sons, Black single mothers may use several parenting strategies to assist them in increasing grit. These strategies are oftentimes implemented to protect their sons and include shielding them from negative influences, avoiding harm, praying, educating, and interpreting (Gantt & Grief, 2009). Additionally, Black single parents also use grit to promote the growth of their sons. For example, Black single mothers use strategies such as providing social support and connection to fathers, providing resources, setting expectations, instilling a positive African American identity, and promoting responsibility (Gantt & Grief, 2009). As highlighted, perseverance is an essential component of the second research question that focuses on grit, and although there are minimal studies that have examined grit in the presence of Black single motherhood, the studies that have been completed have demonstrated how mothers use strategies of grit to persevere in the raising of their Black sons.

Theme 6. Keeping Busy

Many of the participants reported that it was important for them to keep busy when operating as a Black single mothers. For example, within this study, the participants reported that it was essential to keep productive, as maintaining intention and planning is crucial for parenting success. This theme appears to be in alignment with previous literature on the importance of keeping busy when raising a Black son. For example, Cox et al. (2021) purported that many Black single mothers keep busy with intentions and planning, simply because it is essential to provide positive focus on their family as a whole. In their study, Cox et al. reported that their Black single mother participants turned away from the undesirable activity, as they aimed to ensure positivity in their family unit. The authors reported that when turning away from undesirable activities, the participants reported focusing on other important aspects such as education, career aspirations, financial planning, and how to increase the success of their family in the future. In essence, this theme also supports previous literature as Cox et al. discussed that when entering single motherhood, Black mothers tend to put their children ahead of themselves, as they are forced to grow, change, become more mature, responsible, and motivated to live their lives for their children's success.

Theme 7. The Use of Existing Systems

The seventh theme highlighted the participants reporting that they use existing systems to help achieve success. In this current study, participants reported using housing assistance, food stamps, and vouchers, helping them to decrease their worry about essential items. This helped them focus on the more pressing matters of ensuring their success as a Black single mother. This theme appears in alignment with previous literature, as Black mothers' use of available resources within their communities has also been linked as a contributing factor to parenting success. For

example, research has cited those available resources can include mentorship, extended family support, the church, and higher education. Green et al. (2007) stated that the relationship between mother and child is affected by the level of support and other healthy relationships accessible to the parent. Therefore, obtaining the use of mentorship opportunities as an existing system can help shape their sons' character and provide additional levels of support to the family (Wilson et al., 2014). Additionally, existing systems can also be found in the church, as mothers who associate with the church can experience additional support and services that include healthcare, transportation, and financial support for their children (Barbarin et al., 2020; Clark et al., 2017; McNeil & Landor, 2018; Widan, 2017).

Theme 8. The Use of Creativity

The eighth theme that emerged from the dataset discussed how the participants perceived creativity as being vital. The participants reported that creativity is oftentimes used to ensure that they could provide for their families. For example, some participants reported that they were forced to sell their food stamps so that they could buy uniforms for their sons, or they had to babysit and complete extra side jobs to ensure the financial viability of their families. This theme appears in relation to previous research, even though it has not depicted the use of creativity in terms of financial means. However, Previ et al. (2020) reported that many Black and Latina single mothers must be creative when providing for their families. For example, the authors reported that creativity is the essence of protective and promotive strategies that are used by mothers so that their children can be appropriately provided for. Collecting data via semi-structured interviews, the participants reported that it was essential to demonstrate *prowess* and *creativity* so that they can provide for their children, while increasing important elements of their children's lives, such as academics, protecting them from a life of crime and drugs, or working

hard so that they are not affected as much by their experiences of poverty. Therefore, this theme appears essential when it comes to the success of a Black single mother, as when faced with many different circumstances of adversaries, it is important to be able to demonstrate creativity and spontaneity.

RQ3: How do Black single mothers who have raised Black sons to describe their experiences of resilience in their parenting?

The third research question aimed at understanding how Black single mothers who have raised Black sons described their experiences of resilience in their parenting. Within this research question, three themes emerged from the dataset: (a) overcoming adversities and moving forward, (b) tough love, and (c) forgiveness and redemption.

Theme 9. Overcoming Adversities and Moving Forward

The ninth theme that emerged from the dataset highlighted how the participants perceived the importance of overcoming adversities and moving forward. It is important to note that it appeared that all participants understood the definition of resilience because they appeared to be in alignment with Small's (2018) definition where they stated that resilience is an individual's ability to recover quickly from obstacles and difficulties in life. Many of the participants in this theme reported how they overcame adversities and moved forward quickly when parenting their Black sons. For example, some participants discussed the importance of finding positive people in their lives to assist with support to overcome such adversities, while other participants reported that they remembered it was important to continue moving forward when they were feeling weak, connecting with their emotions, both good and bad.

This theme appears in alignment with previous literature. For example, Widan's (2017) study is in alignment with this theme, especially when one participant discussed the importance of "it takes a village", meaning it is crucial to receive support from different people throughout

the community. Widan reported that single Black mothers also cope with the challenge of single parenting by striving to obtain support that they could not get from their partners or the father of their child. Usually, single Black mothers would receive support from close friends and neighbors, apart from relatives or kin. Additionally, research has shown that Black grandmothers are very helpful for single Black mothers. It is well established that supporting an extended family and loved ones is crucial to a single Black mother's success. Black single mothers with large families can cope better with their parenting issues. These findings are reflected in this theme because the participants aligned with previous literature where they discussed that support- no matter where it is from- is crucial when it comes to overcoming adversities and moving forward.

Theme 10. Tough Love

The tenth theme that emerged from the dataset highlighted that the participants used tough love when it came to experiencing resiliency in their parenting of their Black sons. In research, tough love is defined as mothers who promote their child's welfare through important actions such as enforcing constraints or requiring them to take responsibility for the actions that they have completed (Kitwana, 2019). In this study, the participants were able to provide examples of tough love, such as showing them how to be strong in stressful situations (e.g., police, drug dealers, crime, etc.). Another participant reported that she showed her sons' tough love more so than her daughters because she felt that her sons can be in higher danger when it comes to life experiences. This theme is particularly in alignment with previous literature, as it demonstrates the viability of this current study. For example, Black boys are placed in a higher at-risk category as they experience higher rates of educational problems (Thomas et al., 2016), substance abuse disorders (Tache et al., 2020), and mistreatment from law enforcement officers

(Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018), all in comparison to Black girls. Therefore, it was important for the participants in this study to demonstrate higher levels of tough love with their sons.

Other research has also investigated the phenomenon of tough love with Black mothers. For example, Jackson et al. (2019) conducted a study that examined single mothers' harsh parenting techniques when it comes to addressing Black boys' behavior problems. Collecting data from over 700 Black families, the researchers found some interesting results. The results of their study concluded that harsh parenting is used by mothers who experience higher rates of depression and economic hardships. However, it is important to note that the authors found that providing too many styles of harsh parenting techniques for children in middle childhood can increase behavior problems at school. Therefore, there must be a balance between using harsh parenting styles and positive parenting styles when demonstrating instances of tough love.

Theme 11. Forgiveness and Redemption

The eleventh theme that emerged from the dataset was forgiveness and redemption. Eighty percent of participants in this study reported that it was important to forgive because it aided in increasing resilience. There is limited research that has focused on forgiveness when it comes to Black single mother parenting; however, the few research studies that have focused on forgiveness tend to demonstrate the importance of forgiveness of historical aspects and trauma. For example, Golden (2022) reported that forgiveness is essential when it comes to the oppression of ancestors, and how Black single mothers are in a sense forced to dispel the stereotype of the "angry Black woman". However, in this study, it appears that the participants discussed forgiveness and redemption from their sons' points of view. For example, forgiving their sons for things they have done was paramount because it continued promoting resilience within their relationships. Quickly adapting and moving on from negative experiences can ensure

that Black single mothers are focused on the future, while still being able to provide a strong and structured environment that keeps their sons safe.

RQ4: How do black single mothers define success as it relates to the raising of their sons?

The fourth research question aimed to understand how Black single mothers defined success as it relates to the raising of their sons. Five themes emerged from the dataset: (a) independence and goal accomplishment (b) mentorship/linkages to prevent mistakes, (c) education is key, (d) defying stereotypes, and (e) changing the story for the next generation.

Theme 12. Independence and Goal Accomplishment

The twelfth theme that emerged from the dataset highlighted how the participants defined success as independence and goal accomplishment of their sons. The participants were able to discuss that they viewed success at the end of the day when their sons were independent and had accomplished goals in their lives. For example, one participant reported that it was important that she can see her son as respectful; another participant reported success was being college education; another reported it was her son not being arrested. No matter how they defined success, the participants reported that their sons' success was a direct product of how they raised them. In relation to previous literature, this theme appears in alignment. For example, Nomaguchi and Milkie (2020) reported that it is important for parents to understand the social aspects of their children when raising them. The authors argued that providing Black single mothers with support is crucial when raising their sons, because it not only assists them in being successful in parenting but also provides positive outcomes for their child due to increased positive experiences. Therefore, understanding how Black single mothers define success is essential, as it also appears to provide a stronger pathway to experiences of resiliency and grit so

that they can reach the ultimate end goal; that is, successful, independent, and goal-orientated sons.

Theme 13. Mentorship/Linkages to Prevent Mistakes

The thirteenth theme that was highlighted in the dataset was that the participants reported that mentorship/linkages help to prevent mistakes. For example, participants in this study reported that mentorship and linkages were important to help their sons not make as many mistakes, increasing their chances of being successful. This theme appears in alignment with previous literature, as Wilson et al. (2014) reported that Black students who had access to role models were better off in academics and beyond. Additionally, Harris (2006) and Warde (2008) reported that being surrounded by positive role models and mentors encourage Black youth to become successful members of society. Research has indicated that children, especially Black males, need and will look for someone to identify with to develop their self-image (Harris & Taylor, 2012). Finally, findings of other research studies suggest that even boys who were raised in absent-father families have reduced at-risk behaviors due to the involvement of mentors and role models in the Black community (Carson, 2004; Cartwright & Henriksen, 2012; Frieman & Berkeley, 2002; Warde, 2008; Zimmerman et al., 2002).

Theme 14: Education is Key

All participants in this study show a strong reliance and persuasion that success was tied to their son's access and achievement in acquiring education. From his study's findings, Warde (2008) determined black males believed their mothers' resilience and grit contributed to their matriculation to college and even graduation from these institutions. While these studies explored the idea of college education, this current study showed that some participants did not

believe college attendance was required to be considered educated, but rather that their sons had enough education to ensure employment for a financially independent life.

Theme 15: Defying Stereotypes

Defying the stereotypes was a strong emerging theme connected to what the participants define as success. For most, their sons' connection or likening to stereotypes was not only negative but could prove to be dangerous and fatal. These adverse outcomes seemed to be a constant awareness that the participants had when raising their sons. Most of the participants raised their sons with the constancy of reminders not to live the stereotypes such as involvement with the law, low education, becoming teen fathers, and avoiding at all costs the characterization of being a thug. For Black mothers, regardless of being married or single, the criminalization of their son's race and gender is a constant worry as often it is rooted in legitimate fears of law enforcement officers or white citizens taking the laws into their own hands, as evidenced by a number of deaths by officers and racists. Hence, it is understandable that their sons' ability to avoid these characteristics was purposeful and tied to what these mothers believed to be a success.

Theme 16: Changing the Story for the Next Generation

The final theme identified from the data set of this study was the participants' desire to change their story for the better through the next generation. These participants acknowledge the history that their partners had in maintaining a paternal relationship with their children. In knowing and living the consequences of not having a partner or a father within the homes, most respondents identified that seeing their success as parents were being able to ensure that their sons' future partners and children did not inherit the pain of their past. Teaching their sons the importance of their family values and being open and honest about their struggles were ways in

which these respondents thought it best to ensure that their sons did not become what they were given, thus allowing the next generation to change the trajectory of their lives.

Results in Relation to Theoretical Foundation

This study was guided by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory highlighted five categories of external influences that are found throughout a child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The five different categories that guided this study included:

1. The microsystem (immediate environment)
2. The mesosystem (connections)
3. The ecosystems (indirect environment)
4. The macrosystem (social and cultural values)
5. Chronosystem (changes over time) (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 41).

This theoretical framework assisted the researcher in better understanding how the different systems were tied to resilience and grit when Black mothers were raising their Black sons into successful men during the different developmental years. This was shown in many of the themes where the participants reported similar experiences: the microsystem (immediate environment), connections with society, the ecosystem (indirect environment), the macrosystem (social and cultural values), and the chronosystem (changes over time).

For example, the results of this study demonstrated how the participants used the theoretical framework to navigate their parenting experiences. The Black single mother participants were able to discuss their immediate environment by highlighting the current situation they were in, such as being a single parent, experiencing economic hardships, and struggling to meet work demands. Then, the participants were able to discuss connections. These connections appeared in the form of mentors, support from their church, or extended family

members, helping them to be successful parents. Other indirect environments can include the school and other areas where their children interact.

The macrosystem is also important to highlight as it discusses cultural and societal values. This was an important component because many times in this study, participants reported having to avoid living up to stereotypes as not only a person of color but also a single parent. These experiences highlighted the additional difficulties that they had to maneuver due to racism and prejudices, not only for them but also for the protection of their sons. This is highlighted in research because Black boys are placed in a higher at-risk category as they experience higher rates of educational problems (Thomas et al., 2016), substance abuse disorders (Tache et al., 2020), and mistreatment from law enforcement officers (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018), all in comparison to Black girls. Finally, the chronosystem was also highlighted in this study, as the participants were able to discuss their perceptions of success, or changes over time, where they discussed how they defined success as their sons' reaching goals and being independent, all of which reflected on their direct parenting processes.

It is also important to discuss the theme of breaking generational patterns within Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner described a chronosystem as all environmental changes that occur over one's lifetime; therefore, the breaking of generational patterns is highlighted within the fifth level of the chronosystem. The results of this study demonstrated that the participants were able to change the narrative of their lives, as well as their sons so that they used grit and perseverance to overcome the many adversities and stereotypes that they experienced throughout their lives. By changing their mindset and asking for support on different levels, the participants reported that they were able to break generational patterns and demonstrate success in raising of their sons.

Implications

Several implications must be discussed in this study. For example, the findings of this study have suggested the journeys and processes that Black single mothers experienced when raising their Black sons. Within the themes that have been identified, the participants reported issues and experiences that can help policies be implemented that can provide them with greater support. Currently, many of the participants in this study have reported that they utilize their churches because that is an area that makes them feel safe and secure. The participants reported that the church also provides them with additional support that they may not necessarily find in other areas. Therefore, Black single mothers must be provided with stronger levels of support within the community, not just within their church or spiritual group. Therefore, policies can be built that can work towards programming that can make them feel safe and secure, not only within their church environment but throughout society.

Another implication is the kind of support that is necessary. Many participants reported the importance of mentorship and linkages for their sons. Although there are many forms of mentorship opportunities available to Black boys within society, the agencies that support these families must continue to be aligned with the needs of the Black single mothers. It is important to create a feeling where asking for help is encouraged, as many of the participants in this study reported that they felt vulnerable in asking for help, but it was paramount to provide stronger opportunities for their sons and their overall well-being. For example, themes that support this implication include the power of vulnerability: asking for help, the dual role of the church, the use of existing systems, mentorship/linkages, and the use of creativity. Therefore, focusing on policies and support systems that can support Black single mothers in this area can assist in

providing them a sense of safety and security, not just within their church, but throughout all areas of society.

A third implication that is derived from the results includes the themes parenting is challenging, challenges are surmountable, keeping busy, and overcoming adversities. A Black single mother is oftentimes overcome with stressors that make her parenting difficult. Therefore, resources and support groups should be put into place that can better support these mothers, allowing them to build resilience and utilize grit when raising their Black sons. Ensuring that this phenomenon is approached from a community standpoint can assist in overcoming and breaking down societal stereotypes such as “the angry Black woman” so that Black single parents are provided with the same opportunities and resources as their different counterparts.

One important implementation of this study is the need to have a supportive systems approach to single parenting. This study revealed that while there are noted challenges associated with single parenting, success is indeed possible and can even be more so if there is a collaborative approach of the engagement of all systems to ensure the success of Black males in this country. What has been determined by this research, and in alignment with the literature review and the theoretical approach utilized, is that success within this growing population is possible. The systems of education, religion, and community must be in alignment with the identified needs of single parents to change the currently accepted deficit model into something that offers more positivity. Such changes in education mean lessening the barriers that single parents and their children might have as it relates to access. One must understand that single parenting of boys is almost a culture within itself; therefore, employing a culturally competent model in the classroom and parenting meetings could lead to more of a partnership. For community stakeholders such as policymakers, political affiliates and even mental health

professionals, it is vital to understand the specific needs of this community and the importance of ongoing engagement and dialogue that will result in a more informed understanding. An increased understanding will not occur based upon any results of protest or adversarial means. However, such an understanding will provide an increased clarity regarding the needs of Black single mothers and the benefit of meeting those needs, not because of race, but simply because meeting these needs and having increased understanding would lead to a better society for all.

A Call to the Church

One of the main missions of the church is to be a light to the dark world. For Black single mothers, the church has been a place of refuge, strength, and safety. From this phenomenological study, the vitality and the need for the church were clear, resonating with the church of its necessity and resonating with its intended purpose. In recent years, we have witnessed the unsuccessful attempts of political and capitalistic endeavors to respond effectively to the needs of people. These failures serve to prove that the church's role as a beacon of light to the needs of people is essential. While evangelism and spiritual renewal are paramount to the role of the church, the church must also understand its practical and spiritual roles. In all of the parables and stories of Jesus' ministry, it was clear that his relationship and seeing the needs of people was first before he attempted to reach them spiritually. For example, He helped the woman at the well get water; he healed; he resurrected, and he acknowledged even before he attempted to reach people spiritually. In this study, it was clear that for some participants, their first concern was not about finding Jesus or getting spiritually enlightened as it was for their present needs. All the participants report that mentorship was an important aspect of their sons' success; besides school, the church was identified as the place where these mentorships were found. In addition to mentorship, the participants in the study emphasize the importance of

safety and keeping their children busy; the church offered safe relationships and socialization through youth groups, vacation bible school, and other weekly programs. The church also provided help through outreach programs such as tutoring, having dinners, and other tangible support that is often not available within the community.

An equally important discussion of the results of this study lay within the church. For the church, it is equally important to understand its role, its position, and the opportunity to be a trendsetter in the world in addressing the needs of single Black mothers and their sons. What has been revealed in this study is that while the church's fundamental aim and purpose are for spiritual renewal, the need to address the tangible need of their congregation and the community may be the initial point of entry. For example, many of the participants in this study reported that they heavily relied on their church, not only for a spiritual or religious purpose but also as a safety net. Some implications can be focused on the church's role, as they can provide important mentorship and support to Black single mothers, while also aiding in the breaking of negative and harmful stereotypes, and their ability to promote and encourage grit and resilience.

Recommendations for the church involve developing strong programs and support for Black single mothers so that they can continue utilizing the church in all its glory. For example, churches and spiritual organizations could ensure that they develop a strong mentorship program that can assist Black single mothers in providing religious and spiritual guidance to their sons. Because the church appears to be the backbone of support for Black single mothers, working as a community to provide guidance and support to single Black families can ensure that resilience and grit continue to be utilized within the journey of a Black single mother.

Additionally, it is recommended that churches continue to develop programs that can meet the earthly needs of the community. Because many Black single mother participants

reported that they relied on the church for basic living needs, it is paramount that churches understand their important role of support for such individuals within their congregations. This recommendation is in alignment with scripture; therefore, the development of ensuring that the basic needs are met for struggling Black single mothers can only strengthen the ministry and evangelization of the church in promoting and living by the word of God. For example, as stated in James 2:15-16, "Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?" (*New International Version*, 2016). Likewise, Jesus said in Matthew 25:40, "whatever you do to the least of these, you do it unto me" (*Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2016).

As a result of this, a call to the church becomes paramount as it will aid and reinforce the level of grit and resilience in Black single mothers in the raising of their sons. To respond accordingly to this call, the church must first accept that some of its parishioners may not always come to church seeking God, but they will be more open to the message of Christ once they see it in motion.

Limitations

Some limitations must be discussed in this study. The first limitation is the population and geographical region in which the study took place. Because this study concentrated on Black single mothers raising their sons in the United States, this study's results were limited to both the population and geographical area being studied. Further studies would need to be completed to understand how Black mothers perceive resilience and grit in raising their sons in other populations and geographical regions. Therefore, the results of this study could be transferable but not generalized to other populations and geographical areas.

A secondary limitation could have included researcher bias. Because the researcher of this study has been a Black single mother, her values, beliefs, and experiences could have been injected into the study, possibly affecting the results. However, it is important to note that the researcher took steps to mitigate this limitation. For example, the researcher utilized a panel of experts that reviewed the semi-structured interview questions to ensure that they were appropriate and in alignment with the study's problem, purpose, research questions, and methodology. Additionally, to ensure that the researcher was analyzing data that was directly from the participants, she completed member checking. Member checking occurred when the researcher had the participants review their transcripts to ensure that they reflected exactly what they said, instead of that of the researcher.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are some recommendations for future research that must be offered. Because the researcher focused on the experiences of Black mothers, it would be beneficial to conduct future research on the same topic but from the experiences of their sons. Conducting qualitative research that focuses on the experiences of successful sons can provide a stronger understanding of not only how single Black mothers utilized resilience and grit from their child's perspective, but also provide a deeper synthesis of how such resilience and grit have been transferred to the sons so that they can be successful in their lives and parenting skills.

A second recommendation is to conduct a quantitative study that focuses more on the needs and requirements of programming and resources that are required by Black single mothers to be successful. Programming could be developed that focuses on building resiliency and teaching mothers how to increase gritty behaviors. This recommendation is paramount because it will help provide Black single mothers with alternative levels of support, as in this current study

they reported using their religion or church as a place where they can feel safe and secure. It is important that Black single mothers can have these feelings throughout society and not just in the sanctuary of their church.

Another recommendation is for future research to focus on the COVID-19 pandemic and how it has affected the parenting of Black single mothers. Because during the pandemic many services were closed to promote social distancing measures, it is imperative to focus on how this could be handled better, ensuring that Black single mothers do not experience a decrease in support during public health emergencies.

A final recommendation stems from two concepts that while not a part of this study, can offer additional insight and serve as additional assistance and support to Black single mothers, as well as to society as a whole. Since the end of slavery, the struggle to create a “more perfect union” has alluded politicians, parents, whites, blacks, and all demographics as a whole. The concept of race has infiltrated all aspects of life. While progress has been noted in race relations, the idea of equality and justice continues to be hotly debated and influenced by race. Hence, it is important to consider that a new way of building understanding that is more based on the best interest of all. The Critical Race Theory has come to light as a way of offering insight into the nature of racism and its effects (Ladson-Billings, 2021). However, this study shows that while there may be a consensus regarding the inception and consequences of racism along with its systemically embedded nature, it may not offer how and what to do with systems that have been affected. Hence, all theories, including this theory, may need to offer more regarding language to increase insight and understanding. The insight gained from this study came from the phenomenological design, which allowed the researcher to strongly explore the phenomenon and derive meaning and language from the participants that experienced it, especially when it came

to the concept and impact on social justice. Thus, it is recommended that in light of this research findings, understanding the impact of resilience and grit in positive outcomes for black males raised by their mothers might also positively affect how social justice is imputed

Conclusion

The problem being studied was that Black mothers face a variety of barriers when raising their sons. Such barriers include economic hardships (Taylor & Conger, 2017) and residing in disadvantaged areas (Barkan & Rocque, 2018; DeLuca et al., 2019). Additionally, Black mothers may oftentimes be excluded from their son's schools, making it a challenge to be involved in their children's education (Allen & White-Smith, 2018). Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of Black single mothers in the raising of their sons. Furthermore, this study explored how these mothers had experienced resilience and grit in assisting them in raising their Black sons; how they defined these constructs and made meaning of them was also explored.

Results of this study showed that single Black mothers described their experiences raising their sons as challenging and difficult, but by focusing on positive outcomes and relying on help from the community and church, they felt supported them in their single motherhood. Participants characterized grit as never giving up and reported that it was important to persevere, keep busy, use existing systems for support, and be creative with how they approached parenting. Likewise, resilience was characterized as having to continuously overcome adversities to move forward, demonstrate tough love to their sons, and practice forgiveness to focus on redemption. Finally, single Black mothers defined success as having their sons be independent and achieving their goals, utilizing mentorship opportunities for additional support, and defying stereotypes so that the story can be changed for the next generation. The themes indicated that

although the Black single mothers discussed negative experiences when raising their sons, they were able to demonstrate many instances where positivity, perseverance, setting goals, and asking for help and support from others helped them achieve success. It is paramount that Black single mothers are provided stronger levels of support throughout the entire community so that they are provided with a more robust essence of safety and security when raising their Black sons through turbulent and challenging times.

REFERENCES

- Abbott, Z. M. (2017). *The perceived challenges and experiences that alternative high school administrators and low-income single mothers encounter regarding increased parental involvement* (Doctoral dissertation, California Lutheran University).
- Allen, Q., & White-Smith, K. (2018). "That's why I say stay in school": Black mothers' parental involvement, cultural wealth, and exclusion in their son's schooling. *Urban Education, 53*(3), 409-435.
- Assarroudi, A., Heshmati Nabavi, F., Armat, M. R., Ebadi, A., & Vaismoradi, M. (2018). Directed qualitative content analysis: the description and elaboration of its underpinning methods and data analysis process. *Journal of Research in Nursing, 23*(1), 42-55.
- Atkins, R. (2016). Coping with depression in single mothers. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing, 37*(3), 172-181.
- Atkins, R., Gage, G., Kelly, T. A., Joseph, P. V., Johnson, S., Ojo, K., & Williams, W. (2018). Exploring expressions of depression in Black single mothers. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing, 39*(11), 935-945.
- Atkins, R., Luo, R., Wunnenberg, M., Ayres, C., Lipman, T. H., Pena-Cardinali, V., ... & Deatrck, J. A. (2020). Contributors to depressed mood in Black single mothers. *Issues in mental health nursing, 41*(1), 38-48.
- Barbarin, O. A., Tolan, P. H., Gaylord-Harden, N., & Murry, V. (2020). Promoting social justice for African American boys and young men through research and intervention: a challenge for developmental science. *Applied Developmental Science, 24*(3), 196-207
- Barkan, S. E., & Rocque, M. (2018). Socioeconomic status and racism as fundamental causes of street criminality. *Critical Criminology, 26*(2), 211-231.

- Beckmeyer, J. J., Troilo, J., & Markham, M. S. (2020). Parental academic involvement and youth well-being in post-divorce families. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 1-20.
- Berryhill, M. B., & Durtschi, J. A. (2017). Understanding single mothers' parenting stress trajectories. *Marriage & Family Review*, 53(3), 227-245.
- Bogenschneider, K. (1996). An ecological risk/protective theory for building prevention programs, policies, and community capacity to support youth. *Family Relations*, 127-138.
- Bogenschneider, K. (2000). Has family policy comes of age? A decade review of the state of US family policy in the 1990s. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 62(4), 1136-1159.
- Bolds, L. M. (2019). *African American single mothers and their influence on the academic success of their middle school-age sons* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro).
- Brodsky, A. E. (1999). "Making it": The components and process of resilience among urban, African American, single mothers. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 69(2), 148-160
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). Ecological models of human development. *Readings on the Development of Children*, 2(1), 37-43.
- Brown, S. N. (2018). Black mothers' counter-narratives of agency: A pulse on racism and parent involvement strategies in twenty-first-century schools (Doctoral dissertation: Seton Hall University).
- Campbell-Grossman, C., Hudson, D. B., Kupzyk, K. A., Brown, S. E., Hanna, K. M., & Yates, B. C. (2016). Low-income, African American, adolescent mothers' depressive symptoms, perceived stress, and social support. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 25(7), 2306-2314.

- Cassells, R. C., & Evans, G. W. (2017). Ethnic variation in poverty and parenting stress. In *Parental stress and early child development* (pp. 15-45). Springer, Cham.
- Castillo-Montoya, M. (2016). Preparing for interview research: The interview protocol refinement framework. *Qualitative Report, 21*(5).
- Cheeks, B. L., Chavous, T. M., & Sellers, R. M. (2020). A daily examination of African American adolescents' racial discrimination, parental racial socialization, and psychological affect. *Child Development, 91*(6), 2123-2140.
- Chun Tie, Y., Birks, M., & Francis, K. (2019). Grounded theory research: A design framework for novice researchers. *SAGE Open Medicine, 7*, 2050312118822927.
- Clark, S., Madhavan, S., Cotton, C., Beguy, D., & Kabiru, C. (2017). Who helps single mothers in Nairobi? The role of kin support. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 79*(4), 1186-1204.
- Cooper, S. M., Burnett, M., Johnson, M. S., Brooks, J., Shaheed, J., & McBride, M. (2020). 'That is why we raise children': African American fathers' race-related concerns for their adolescents and parenting strategies. *Journal of Adolescence, 82*, 67-81.
- Crane, C., & Christopher, K. (2018). "Parenting like a White person": Race and maternal support among marginalized mothers. In *Marginalized mothers, mothering from the margins*. Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Crawford, O. H. (2019). *Here in my own mind: Examining the penetration of stereotypes in Black feminist ideation, Black mothering praxis, and American welfare policy* (Doctoral dissertation, The George Washington University).
- Danforth, L., & Miller, J. (2018). African American males from female-headed households: Using family resilience to navigate their way to college. *Journal of Family Social Work, 21*(1), 63-79.

- Daniel Barnes, R. (2016). She was a twin: Black strategic mothering, race-work, and the politics of survival. *Transforming Anthropology*, 24(1), 49-60.
- DeLuca, S., Wood, H., & Rosenblatt, P. (2019). Why poor families move (and where they go): Reactive mobility and residential decisions. *City & Community*, 18(2), 556-593.
- Dickerson, B. (Ed.). (1995). *African American single mothers: Understanding their lives and families* (Vol. 10). Sage.
- Dickson, C., Morgan, B., Mack, O., & Moore, R. (2020). Cultural apathy: The# 1 killer of the African American mothers and infants. *Undergraduate Scholarly Showcase*, 2(1).
- Donald, E. J., & Carter, A. (2020). Support groups for single mothers. *Group Development and Group Leadership in Student Affairs*, 213.
- Dow, D. M. (2019). *Mothering while black: Boundaries and burdens of middle-class parenthood*. University of California Press.
- Elam, K. K., Sandler, I., Wolchik, S., & Tein, J. Y. (2016). Non-residential father-child involvement, interparental conflict and mental health of children following divorce: A person-focused approach. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 45(3), 581-593.
- Elliot, D. L., Baumfield, V., & Reid, K. (2016). Searching for 'a third space': A creative pathway towards international PhD students' academic acculturation. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 35(6), 1180-1195.
- Elliott, S., & Reid, M. (2016). The super strong Black mother. *Contexts*, 15(1), 48-53.
- Elliott, V. (2018). Thinking about the coding process in qualitative data analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(11), 2850-2861.
- Erato, G. (2016). Relationships between resiliency, parenting styles, and child behavior problems (Doctoral Dissertation: The University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee).

- Fetterman, D. M. (2019). *Ethnography: Step-by-step* (Vol. 17). SAGE Publications, Incorporated.
- Filiz, S. E. (2015). Mothers' involuntary job loss and children's academic achievement. *Journal of Labor Research*, 37(1), 98–127. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12122-015-9218-8>
- Finzi-Dottan, R., & Cohen, O. (2017). Fatherhood: Comparison between divorced custodial fathers, married fathers, and divorced non-custodial fathers in Israel. *Marriage & Family Review*, 53(4), 320-346.
- Francis, A. P., Drake, N., Chen, M., & Young, L. (2020). Reduced gritty perseverance partially explains the relationship between overinvolved parenting and stress in physician assistant graduate students. *The Journal of Physician Assistant Education*, 31(3), 150-154.
- Fryer, L. K., Larson-Hall, J., & Stewart, J. (2018). Quantitative methodology. In *The Palgrave handbook of applied linguistics research methodology* (pp. 55-77). Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Gammelgaard, B. (2017). Editorial: The qualitative case study. *The International Journal of Logistics Management* 28(4), pp. 910-913.
- Gatlin, B. T., & Wilson, C. L. (2016). Overcoming obstacles: African American students with disabilities achieving academic success. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 85(2), 129-142.
- Graves, L. (2017). Filters of influence: The help-seeking process of African American single mothers living in poverty seeking mental health services for their children. *Child & Youth Services*, 38(1), 69-90.
- Grillo, L. M., Andrews, M., & Whitehead, L. (2019). Mothering, fighting, and pouring into others: Theorizing Black women's educational leadership through the Afrocentric epistemological lens (Doctoral Dissertation: Howard University).

- Henderson, A. K. (2016). The long arm of religion: Childhood adversity, religion, and self-perception among Black Americans. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 55(2), 324-348
- Hill, K. A., & Roberts, D. D. (2019). Parent–adolescent communication and social impacts on Black American adolescents’ academic well-being. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 28(11), 3207-3219.
- Hills, T. A. (2019). *African American men and their mothers: The influence of this dyadic relationship on the sons’ adult romantic relationships* (Doctoral dissertation, Alliant International University).
- Hotez, E. (2020). How children fail: Exploring parent and family factors that foster grit. In *Exploring Best Child Development Practices in Contemporary Society* (pp. 45-65). IGI Global.
- Howard, J. (2020). Student-athlete success: An examination of parenting, grit, academic success, and mental health outcomes (Doctoral dissertation: The University of Southern Mississippi).
- Howard, J. M., Nicholson, B. C., & Chesnut, S. R. (2019). Relationships between positive parenting, overparenting, grit, and academic success. *Journal of College Student Development*, 60(2), 189-202.
- Howard, S., & Johnson, B. (2000). What makes the difference? Children and teachers talk about resilient outcomes for children ‘at risk’. *Educational studies*, 26(3), 321-337.
- Ispa, J. M., Su-Russell, C., & Im, J. (2020). Conversations between African American mothers and children about school and education. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 26(1), 92.

- Jachimowicz, J. M., Wihler, A., Bailey, E. R., & Galinsky, A. D. (2018). Why grit requires perseverance and passion to positively predict performance. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 115*(40), 9980-9985.
- Jackson, A. P., Choi, J. K., & Preston, K. S. (2019). Harsh parenting and Black boys' behavior problems: single mothers' parenting stress and nonresident fathers' involvement. *Family Relations, 68*(4), 436-449.
- Jackson, B., & Kiehl, E. M. (2017). Adaptation and resilience in African American mothers. *SAGE Open Nursing, 3*, 2377960817701137.
- Jackson, L. (2020). *Support, educational expectancy, and academic achievement of Black males* (Doctoral dissertation, Florida State University).
- Jacobs, C., & Daniels, D. (2020). Their capital has value, too: Exploring parental educational support in low-socioeconomic single-mother families. *Journal of Education, (80)*, 160-175.
- Janak, E. (2018). Bracketing and bridling: Using narrative reflexivity to confront researcher bias and the impact of social identity in a historical study. *Philanthropy & Education, 1*(2), 82-93.
- Jaskiewicz, P., & Dyer, W. G. (2017). Addressing the elephant in the room: Disentangling family heterogeneity to advance family business research. *Family Business Review, 30*(2), 111-118.
- Jaskiewicz, P., Combs, J. G., Shanine, K. K., & Kacmar, K. M. (2017). Introducing the family: A review of family science with implications for management research. *Academy of Management Annals, 11*(1), 309-341.

- Joy, K., Prathap, V., Rajan, A. P., & Vandana, V. S. (2020). Influence of parent's grit on student's grit and the effect of other social determinants upon the relation. *Indian Journal of Positive Psychology, 11*(2), 71-74.
- Kallio, H., Pietilä, A. M., Johnson, M., & Kangasniemi, M. (2016). Systematic methodological review: Developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 72*(12), 2954-2965.
- Kaplan-Levy, S. A. (2017). Mothering values of Black student mothers: A grounded theory analysis (Doctoral dissertation: The University of Massachusetts Boston).
- Keefe, R. H., Brownstein-Evans, C., & Polmanteer, R. S. R. (2018). The challenges of idealized mothering: Marginalized mothers living with postpartum. *Affilia, 33*(2), 221-235.
- Kinard, A. D. (2020). Resilient African American men coping with the absent father phenomenon (Doctoral dissertation, The Chicago School of Professional Psychology).
- Kovera, M. B. (2019). Racial disparities in the criminal justice system: Prevalence, causes, and a search for solutions. *Journal of Social Issues, 75*(4), 1139-1164.
- Kuijper, B., & Johnstone, R. A. (2018). Maternal effects and parent-offspring conflict. *Evolution, 72*(2), 220-233.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2021). Critical race theory—What it is not! In *Handbook of critical race theory in education* (pp. 32-43). Routledge.
- Lan, X., Marci, T., & Moscardino, U. (2019). Parental autonomy support, grit, and psychological adjustment in Chinese adolescents from divorced families. *Journal of Family Psychology, 33*(5), 511.
- Maldonado, L. C., & Nieuwenhuis, R. (2019). Single parents in context. *Future Child, 5*, 75-96

- McGill, K. K. (2019). Experiences of African American mothers raising gifted children (Doctoral dissertation, Walden University).
- McLaughlin, K. A., & King, K. (2014). Developmental trajectories of anxiety and depression in early adolescence. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, *43*(2), 311–323.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-014-9898-1>
- McLeod, J. D., Kruttschnitt, C., & Dornfeld, M. (1994). Does parenting explain the effects of structural conditions on children's antisocial behavior? A comparison of Blacks and Whites. *Social Forces*, *73*(2), 575-604.
- McNeil Smith, S., & Landor, A. M. (2018). Toward a better understanding of African American families: Development of the sociocultural family stress model. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, *10*(2), 434-450
- Mendenhall, R. (2018a). The medicalization of poverty in the lives of low-income Black mothers and children. *The Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics*, *46*(3), 644-650.
- Mendenhall, R., Kramer, K. Z., & Bellisle, D. (2018b). Low-and moderate-income families' avenues to mobility: Overcoming threats to asset accumulation and remaining in undesirable neighborhoods. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, *53*, 26-39.
- Meyrose, A., Klasen, F., Otto, C., Gniewosz, G., Lampert, T., & Ravens-Sieberer, U. Benefits of maternal education for mental health trajectories across childhood and adolescence. *Social Science & Medicine* *202*, 170-178
- Moorman, J. D. (2020). Socializing singlehood: Personal, interpersonal, and sociocultural factors shaping Black women's single lives. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *44*(4), 431-449.
- Morse, J. L., & Steger, M. F. (2019). Giving birth to meaning: Understanding parenthood through the psychology of meaning in life. (pp. 1-17). Springer, Cham.

- Moser, A., & Korstjens, I. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 3: Sampling, data collection and analysis. *European Journal of General Practice, 24*(1), 9-18.
- Moynihan, D. P. (1965). *The Negro family: The case for national action* (No. 31-33). US Government Printing Office
- Murry, V. M., & Brody, G. H. (1999). Self-regulation and self-worth of Black children reared in economically stressed, rural, single mother-headed families: The contribution of risk and protective factors. *Journal of Family Issues, 20*(4), 458-484.
- Murry, V. M., Berkel, C., Inniss-Thompson, M. N., & Debreaux, M. L. (2019). Pathways for African American success: Results of three-arm randomized trial to test the effects of technology-based delivery for rural African American families. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology, 44*(3), 375-387.
- Mushtaq, A., Banu, N., & Zinna, A. A. (2019). The relationship between perceived parenting styles and grit in adolescents. *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews, 6*(1), 2348-1269
- Nieuwenhuis, R., & Maldonado, L. C. (2018). *The triple bind of single-parent families: Resources, employment, and policies*. Policy Press.
- Nikolaus, C. J., Schierer, M., Ellison, B., Eicher-Miller, H. A., Gundersen, C., & Nickols-Richardson, S. M. (2019). Grit is associated with food security among US parents and adolescents. *American Journal of Health Behavior, 43*(1), 207-218.
- Nomaguchi, K., & Milkie, M. A. (2017). Sociological perspectives on parenting stress: How social structure and culture shape parental strain and the well-being of parents and children. In *Parental Stress and Early Child Development* (pp. 47-73). Springer, Cham.

- Owens, D. C., & Fett, S. M. (2019). Black maternal and infant health: historical legacies of slavery. *American Journal of Public Health, 109*(10), 1342-1345
- Parke, R. D. (2017). Family psychology: Past and future reflections on the field. *Journal of Family Psychology, 31*(3), 257.
- Pierce, L. R. (2019). *The Impact of single mothers on the education of their highly successful African American male children*. Wilmington University (Delaware).
- Powell, T., & Coles, J. A. (2021). 'We still here': Black mothers' personal narratives of sense making and resisting antiblackness and the suspensions of their Black children. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 24*(1), 76-95.
- Price, M. J. (2017). What would mama do? Save our sons and daughters (SOSAD) and anti-violence organizing among Black mothers of murdered children in Detroit (University of Kentucky).
- Reed, S. (2017). Parenting, attachment, and resiliency among women who were bullied in high school (Doctoral dissertation, Capella University).
- Reid, B. L. E. (2019). Exploring the rates and determinants of prenatal care among non-Hispanic Black women (Doctoral dissertation, California Baptist University).
- Robinson, Q. L., & Werblow, J. (2012). Beating the odds: How single black mothers influence the educational success of their sons enrolled in failing schools. *American Secondary Education, 40*(2), 52-66
- Rodems, R., & Shaefer, H. L. (2020). Many of the kids are not alright: Material hardship among children in the United States. *Children and Youth Services Review, 112*, 104767.
- Rodriguez, C. (2016). Mothering while black: Feminist thought on maternal loss, mourning and agency in the African diaspora. *Transforming Anthropology, 24*(1), 61-69

- Ross, G. (2018). The absent father: One explanation of behavioral problems among African American males. *Available at SSRN 3203677*.
- Sakho, J. R. (2017). Black activist mothering: Teach me about what teaches you. *Western Journal of Black Studies, 41*(1/2), 6-19.
- Sanguras, L. (2018). *Raising children with grit: Parenting passionate, persistent, and successful kids*. Sourcebooks, Inc.
- Sankofa Waters, B. (2016). Freedom lessons: Black mothers asserting smartness of their children. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 19*(6), 1223-1235
- Sattler, L. J., & Thomas, K. A. (2016). Parents need a village: Caseworkers' perceptions of the challenges faced by single parents of system-involved youth. *Children and Youth Services Review, 70*, 293-301
- Sisselman-Borgia, A., Budescu, M., & Taylor, R. D. (2018). The impact of religion on family functioning in low-income African American families with adolescents. *Journal of Black Psychology, 44*(3), 247-272
- Small, A. W. (2018). *Overcoming adversity: A phenomenological study of successful fatherless African American men raised by single mothers: Their journey to propel forward using self-motivation and social capital as contributing factors to build resiliency* (Doctoral dissertation: Cardinal Stritch University).
- Smith, C. A. (2016). Facing the dragon: Black mothering, sequelae, and gendered necropolitics in the Americas. *Transforming Anthropology, 24*(1), 31-48
- Smith, D., Caruthers, L., & Fowler, S. (2019). *Womanish Black girls: Women resisting the contradictions of silence and voice*. Stylus Publishing, LLC.

- Staistica (2021). Number of Black families with a single mother in the United States from 1990 to 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/205106/number-of-black-families-with-a-female-householder-in-the-us/>
- Taylor, Z. E., & Conger, R. D. (2017). Promoting strengths and resilience in single-mother families. *Child Development, 88*(2), 350-358
- Troilo, J. (2016). Conceptualizations of divorced fathers and interventions to support involvement. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage, 57*(5), 299-316.
- Turner, J. L. (2019). # BlackMamasMatter: The significance of motherhood and mothering for low-income Black single mothers (Doctoral dissertation, Virginia Tech).
- Turner, J. L. (2020). Black mothering in action: The racial-class socialization practices of low-income Black single mothers. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity, 6*(2), 242-253.
- Unnever, J. D., Cullen, F. T., & Barnes, J. C. (2017). Racial discrimination and pathways to delinquency: Testing a theory of African American offending. *Race and Justice, 7*(4), 350-373.
- Varpio, L., Ajjawi, R., Monrouxe, L. V., O'Brien, B. C., & Rees, C. E. (2017). Shedding the cobra effect: Problematizing thematic emergence, triangulation, saturation, and member checking. *Medical Education, 51*(1), 40-50.
- Villarosa, L. (2018). Why America's Black mothers and babies are in a life-or-death crisis. *The New York Times Magazine, 11*.
- Vreeland, A., Gruhn, M. A., Watson, K. H., Bettis, A. H., Compas, B. E., Forehand, R., & Sullivan, A. D. (2019). Parenting in context: Associations of parental depression and socioeconomic factors with parenting behaviors. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 28*(4), 1124-1133.

- Wagener, M. (2019). Single-parenthood and the welfare state: Towards adaptive universalism? In *14th Conference of the European Sociological Association; Europe and Beyond: Boundaries, Barriers and Belonging*.
- Warner, C. C. (2020). Raising him: Testaments of five Black single mothers and how they perceive their experiences of raising their sons(s) in a contemporary urban America (Doctoral dissertation: DePaul University).
- Washington, K. C. (2017). The gritty Black single mother: Protective factors and the influence of Black single mothers' grit on young adult outcomes (Doctoral dissertation: Florida Technical University).
- Washington, T., Rose, T., Coard, S. I., Patton, D. U., Young, S., Giles, S., & Nolen, M. (2017, February). Family-level factors, depression, and anxiety among African American children: A systematic review. In *Child & Youth Care Forum* (Vol. 46, No. 1, pp. 137-156). Springer US.
- Wells, J. M. (2020). Am I still needed? Perceptions of purpose and belonging amongst African American men (Doctoral dissertation, North Carolina Central University).
- Widan, R. J. (2017). Aspects of social support associated with adaptation in middle-class, single-mother families: a mixed-methods approach (Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University).
- Williams, D. T. (2018). Parental depression and cooperative coparenting: A longitudinal and dyadic approach. *Family Relations*, 67(2), 253-269
- Wilson, A., Henriksen Jr, R., Bustamante, R., and Irby, B. (2016). Successful Black men from absent-father homes and their resilient single mothers: A phenomenological study. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development* 44(3) 189-208.

Wint, K., Elias, T. I., Mendez, G., Mendez, D. D., & Gary-Webb, T. L. (2019). Experiences of community doulas working with low-income, African American mothers. *Health Equity, 3*(1), 109-116

Yin, R. K. (2017). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. Sage publications.

Zagel, H., & Hübgen, S. (2018). A life-course approach to single mothers' economic wellbeing in different welfare states. *The triple bind of single-parent families*. Policy Press.

Zahavi, D. (2018). *Phenomenology: The basics*. Routledge.

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

Dear Suzette Fagan, Rachel Piferi,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the following date: April 1, 2022. If you need to make changes to the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit a modification to the IRB. Modifications can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

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.

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

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B: SITE APPROVAL

Dear Facebook Group Administrator,

As a graduate student in the School of Psychology at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to better understand how Black mothers overcome challenges and difficulties when raising their sons. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study. I am writing to obtain permission to post a recruitment flyer on your Facebook group page so that I can recruit participants to my study.

Participants must identify as Black, live in the United States, have a son that is 21 years or older, and perceive themselves as being successful in raising their son. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete a private interview. It should take approximately 45 minutes to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

A consent document will be given to each participant one week before the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you could let me know if I have permission to post the flyer and the steps that I would need to take it would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

(732) XXXXXX

Email:XXXX @gmail.com

APPENDIX C: FACEBOOK FLYER RECRUITMENT

ATTENTION FACEBOOK FRIENDS!

Are you a Black single mother raising a son?

Would you want to share your parenting experiences to help other mothers raising boys?

If you answered yes, I would love to hear from you!

I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy degree at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to better understand how single Black mothers overcome difficulties when raising their sons. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete a private interview, which will take approximately 45 minutes. If you would like to participate, please click the link provided at the end of this post to contact me. After you have contacted me, I will send you a consent document.

To participate, you must be living in the United States, identify as a Black woman, currently have a son that is 21 years of age or older and perceive yourself as having raised your son successfully.

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT

Consent

Title of the Project: Mothering While Black: Assessing Resilience and Grit in the Raising of African American Boys by Successful Mothers

Principal Investigator: Suzette Fagan

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study
--

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate you must identify as a Black single mother, reside in the United States, and perceive yourself as having successfully raised a son through different developmental years. Your son must be 21 years of age or older. 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 will be to examine the lived experiences of Black single mothers in the raising of their sons. Furthermore, this study will explore how these mothers have experienced resilience and grit in assisting them in raising their Black sons; how they define these constructs and make meaning of them will also be explored.

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. Complete a semi-structured interview- This should take approximately 45 minutes to one hour. You will be audio recorded during the interview. For accuracy purposes, member checking process will be included.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include better understanding not only of limitations or barriers, but also that of resilience and grit, which can assist mothers in finding more successful ways to raise their sons over the course of their development. The benefits can also include increasing resources and support to single Black mothers.

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.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential using codes. Interviews will be conducted in a private location where others will not easily overhear the conversation on Zoom video conferencing.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

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. 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 will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

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

The researcher conducting this study is Suzette Fagan. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at XXXXXXXX You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, [name], at [email].

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

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 study team 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 me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Demographic Questions

1. Age
2. Education level
3. Age of child
4. Total number of children
5. Number of sons

Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me about your experience raising your son as a single mother?
2. Can you tell me about any difficulties you had when raising your son?
3. How do you define resiliency?
4. How do you define grit?
5. Based upon your definition of resilience, how have you experienced that in parenting?
6. Based upon your definition of grit, how have you experienced that in parenting?
7. How do you define success in parenting?
8. Discuss any barriers that you had experienced when it came to raising your son successfully.
9. Based upon your definition of success in parenting, how have you experienced success?
10. Discuss how the role or presence of male mentors or other male role models have influenced your son's life?