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Against All Odds: A Study Of Success Attainment Among African American Males From Single-Parent Households

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Against All Odds: A Study Of Success Attainment Among

African American Males From Single-Parent Households

by

Judith Roberts

A Dissertation Presented to the
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences of
Nova Southeastern University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Nova Southeastern University
2012
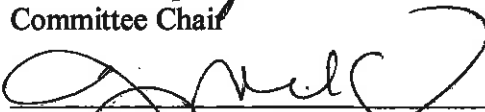
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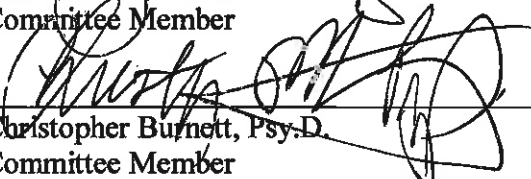
This dissertation was submitted by Judith Roberts under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University.

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Dedication

"Praise God from whom all Blessings flow;

Praise Him all creatures here below;

Praise Him above Ye Heavenly Host;

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."
                                             - Thomas Ken, 1674

To God be the Glory and to whom this dissertation is dedicated. Thank you for your grace, mercy and peace which provided me with the motivation and determination to complete this study.

To my parents, Grace and Alvin Barnett, who instilled in me the joy of learning. You taught me to put God first and allow Him to direct my path, to be accepting of self and others, to pursue my dreams, but most importantly, to always remember that life is not about my personal pursuits, but about helping others, being "my brother's keeper". Growing up and watching you give so unselfishly taught me what that truly meant and ultimately inspired me to follow in your footsteps. You have been, and continue to be, my greatest inspiration. Thank you mom and dad!

To my sons, Shaun and Craig; children are indeed, Blessings from God. Thank you for your unconditional love and support. You are the reason for my joy and I love you both very much. I am so proud to be your mom.

To my siblings, Dave, Paula, and my dear departed sister Charmaine who left to be with our Lord in 2009; thank you for your unconditional love, friendship, support and

encouragement. Charm, your earthly presence is deeply missed, but I feel your spirit with me every day.

To single parents who strive tirelessly, despite the numerous challenges, to remain committed to your children. Your strength, determination and resolve merit recognition and appreciation, and for these reasons, I salute you.

Acknowledgments

"In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."
1 Thessalonians 5:18

First and foremost I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to my dissertation chair, Dr. Jason Campbell, who so graciously accepted the responsibility to serve in this capacity following the resignation of my initial chair. Your guidance, patience, and words of encouragement gave me a sense of hope, and it was your constant reminder that I would get to the finish line that has brought me to the finale.

I would also like to acknowledge my committee members, Dr. Judith McKay and Dr. Chris Burnett for their wisdom and support throughout this process. Your feedback and perspective were extremely valuable.

A heartfelt *"Thank you"* is also extended to Dr. Marcia Sweedler who interviewed me upon my acceptance into the program ten years ago. During that first encounter, she inquired as to my research interest and encouraged me to begin to contemplate what that would be. My immediate response was that I was interested in raising awareness about successful African American males who had been raised by a single parent, with the hope of shifting public discourse on the negative consequences of single-parenting. She encouraged me then, and in the subsequent years of my doctoral studies, to remain true to my passion.

I would like to graciously acknowledge my participants who so openly shared their personal stories, revealing the love and admiration each had for their single parent,

their mother. Their inspiring stories touched my heart deeply, and I am sure, will touch others as well. Thank you for allowing me into your world.

This journey began 10 years ago with much joy and tribulation along the way. There have been so many other family members, friends, former and current colleagues who have provided invaluable support and words of encouragement. I must however, mention a special "thank you" to those who have been my constant companions along the way, my daughter-in-law Bibi, my sister-in-law Liv, my cousin Karlene, Carl, Jean, Bev, Audrey, Muriel, Spencer, Percy and Kenneth, thank you for your prayers, love, unwavering support, and most importantly, your friendship. I am truly Blessed to have been touched by all of you.

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SUCCESS ATTAINMENT AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

Abstract

The extensive body of literature that exists which focuses primarily on the negative outcome of single parenthood concludes that products of such a family structure, in particular African American males, are more likely to drop out of high school, be unemployed in their late teens and early twenties, engage in disruptive behaviors, incarcerated, or suffer an untimely early death (Hale, 2001; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). The negative stereotypes depicting the plight of the African-American male have been extensively documented. This has led to widespread bias in society as a whole, and in particular among social scientists who have also contributed to these biases as their collected data and findings form the basis for many public policies. The prevalence of this family structure coupled with the lack of research on successful African American males as products of this household, stimulate a need for better understanding of how the single-parent household functions.

My study sought to understand how African American males experience being raised in a single-parent household and what factors have allowed them to achieve success despite the many challenges they face. The participants included eight African American males who were raised in a single-parent household and who were identified as being successful, as defined by this study. A qualitative phenomenological approach was utilized which allowed participants to provide rich, detailed descriptions of their lived experiences through in-depth semi-structured interviews. A thorough analysis of each interview exposed the following themes: mother's influence, a sense of security, sense of

self-worth, high expectations and support systems which helped to elucidate the phenomenon of being raised in a single-parent household.

Their stories revealed a positive perception of the phenomena under study, contributing their success primarily to their single parent's inspiration and motivation, an inner desire and determination to succeed and debunk the negative perceptions of the African American male. The findings will serve as a valuable contribution to (a) the ongoing scholarly research on African American males and single-parent households, (b) single-parents raising African American sons, and (c) professionals working with this population.

Key Words: Single-parent Household, African American Male, Success

Chapter One: Introduction And Statement Of Problem

Historically the African American male has had to endure insurmountable dilemmas which have inhibited their desire to achieve success (Bryant, 2000; Tucker, 2000). A vast body of literature decrying the plight of the African American male reveal that these dilemmas persist (Howard, 1996; Wright & Younts, 2009). In discussing the status of African American males in America, Gibbs (1988) described them as an "endangered species" (p. 1) further concluding that those in the 15-24 age range were the most vulnerable, most victimized, and most violated. This perception has been echoed by current social scientists who noted other terms such as deviant, dangerous, and dysfunctional to characterize African American males (Jackson & Moore, 2008; Majors & Billison, 1992). Their demise has been extensively documented over the years with discussions of the African American family focusing exclusively on the single-parent household, widely believed to be a major contributing factor for the inability of the African American male to become a productive citizen (Demuth & Brown, 2004; Gordon –Simmons, Chen, Simons, Brody & Cutrona, 2006).

For years society has maintained that a typical family unit, or nuclear family, includes both parents and child or children (Coontz, 2000; Gottlieb, 1993; Karpel & Strauss, 1983; Popenoe, 1993). This nuclear family became a symbol deeply rooted in Western culture. Over the last four decades there has been a dramatic shift away from the typical two-parent family to a myriad of alternative, more contemporary family structures including single-parent households (Coleman & Ganong, 2004). The highest incidences of these households are more prevalent in the African American community

where the number of single-parent households has tripled over the past 50 years with the most significant increase in the African-American community, when compared to the general population (Taylor, 2000; Tucker & Mitchnell-Kernan, 1995).

The US Census Bureau reports that as of 2011, 66% of African American children live in a single-parent household compared to 24% of white children. The most commonly held belief is that children from nuclear families will develop in a healthy environment thus ensuring their emotional well-being, enabling them to be successful in life (Amato, 2005). The outlook for children being raised in a single-parent household is not as promising, especially for African American males (Johnson, 2010). Years of social science data have demonstrated an inexplicably link between single parent households and an increased frequency of adverse outcomes for the children (Hymowitz, 2006; Johnson, 2010; Kowaleski-Jones & Dunifon, 2006).

Frequently replicated studies on single-parent households have concluded that (i) children who grow up with both parents are more likely to succeed than those who are raised in a single-parent household, and (ii) single-parent households are associated with higher rates of delinquency that are intact homes (Noguera, 2003; Zimmerman, Salem & Maton, 1995). They not only face numerous challenges making the transition from childhood to adulthood but will also face significant barriers in education, and in the employment arena. Extensive research has concluded that African American males living in a single-parent household have little hope of surviving and being successful (Carlson & Corcoran, 2001; Miller, 1996; Roche, Ensminger & Cherlin, 2007). Notably absent from the review of literature is that segment of the African American male

population who have been raised in a single-parent household and who have been able to demonstrate their ability to become responsible and successful members of society. This study's goal was to identify and interview those African American males raised in a single-parent household who have been able to successfully transition from adolescent to adulthood, and who have defied the odds against them and emerged as successful products of a single-parent household.

Statement of the Problem

The literature throughout the years has found that single-parent households are associated with higher rates of delinquency than are intact homes (Griffin, Botvin, Scheier, Diaz & Miller, 2000; Smith, Rivera, & Thornberry, 1997). Following their 10-year longitudinal study on family structure, McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) posit that

> children who grow up in a household with only one biological parent
>
> are worse off, on average, than children who grow up in households
>
> with both biological parents, regardless of the parents' race or
>
> educational background, regardless of whether the parents are
>
> married when the child is born, and regardless of whether the
>
> resident parent marries (p.1).

They further concluded that family structure has a larger effect on the behavior of young Black males than on young men from other racial and ethnic groups. Furthermore, repeated efforts have been made to explain the development of deviant behaviors among African American males in particular, focusing on family structure (Coontz, 1992; Slavkin, 2001).

It has been reported that African American males are more likely to exhibit problem behaviors (Dornbusch, Carlsmith, Bushwall, Ritter, Leiderman, Hastorf, et al., 1985, Dumas & Laughlin, 2001), engage in alcohol and drug use (Brook, Whiteman, & Gordon, 1985; Griffin, Botvin, Scheier, Doyle & Williams, 2003), fail high school (Hoffman, 2006; Zimilies & Lee, 1991) and exhibit low self-esteem (Parish, 1991). Within this extensive body of research, the authors emphasize the inability of African American males to exercise responsibility further asserting that their lack of coping mechanisms is positively correlated with unproductive lifestyles (McWhorter, 2000). The perception of these authors is that a single-parent's innate desire to meet the needs of his or her child or children often leads to more time away from home due to employment commitments, which could entail holding two or more jobs simultaneously (Ardelt, Elder, Eccles & Lord, 1995). These constraints ultimately result in less time for effective parent-child relationship (Buchanan, Maccoby & Dornbusch, 1996; Jarrett, 1997).

Much of the literature on African American males has overwhelmingly focused on their inadequacies and inability to become productive members of society. Thompson and Lewis (2005) contend that "most often, African American males are viewed in terms of their failure as opposed to their success" (p.6). Low self-esteem, irresponsibility which leads them to engage in criminal activities, inadequate family support due to family disruptions, lack of any formal education and unemployment are identified as contributing factors. These challenges coupled with the negative perceptions, have adversely impacted the perceived ability and behavior of African American males thereby impeding their pursuit of becoming successful (Hill, 2001; Hoffman, 2006).

In his book, *I Will Wear No Chains,* Booker (2000) contends that due to the legacies of slavery, poverty, joblessness and education, African American males are unable to take advantage of the many opportunities that exist in today's society. Hymowitz (2005) posits that the fate of African American males raised in a single-parent household is a critical issue facing the United States of America. There is undoubtedly a need to highlight those African American males raised in a single-parent household who have resisted the shackles of a society whose dominant culture has historically sought to alienate them, and who, against all odds, have attained success. Their experiences have yet to be explored within the social science research. Johnson (2010) argues that "the challenge facing scholars and practitioners today is to learn from the experiences of Black males who somehow manage to successfully negotiate the too-often treacherous terrain" (p. 117).

The Need for the Study

In his review and critique of the large body of research on single-parent households, Barajas (2012) comments that "while the economic and social costs of single-parenting have been well documented, the strengths of single parents and their children have been largely overlooked" (p. 8). Within the scholarly arena there is a need for research that focuses on the positive outcomes, the strengths of single-parent households, and subsequently, the success of the African American male. A systematic exploration of the beliefs and attitudes of these African American males who are successful have not been fully explored. Creswell (1998) posits that a qualitative study should "lift the voice of the cultural or marginalized groups" (p. 27). This study sought

to address that gap by providing at least one avenue by which the African American male's voice will be heard.

It is my belief that in order to understand the effects of being raised in a single-parent household we need to shift the focus from the problems faced by the single-parent household to the successful individuals who have actually experienced this phenomenon, irrespective of the factors that contributed to such a family structure. Their stories will hopefully paint a positive picture of the African American male, stimulate opportunities for empowerment, and offer solutions to the myriad of problems faced by African American males in this society with the potential to bring about change in awareness, policy and practice.

As a society we continuously contribute to the plight of the African American male rather than identify solutions that would allow them to be successful. Crouse (2009) contends that we as a society have an obligation to get involved and save our children. My interest stems from my own personal experience as a single-parent and as a mental health professional, to fulfill that obligation to assist other single-parents. Therefore it is my contention that a qualitative study of African American males will allow not only for a new area of investigation, but will provide essential insight into the experiences of the African American male raised in a single-parent household.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain an understanding of how African American males experience single-parenting household and how, despite the odds against them, they have demonstrated successful social adjustment and achievement in their

personal and professional lives. Their stories further revealed the coping mechanisms that have allowed them to function well thereby refuting the idea that single-parenting is the operative variable that leads to "pathology-laden" Black families (Moynihan, 1965). Using a phenomenological tradition, this researcher conducted in-depth interviews with eight successful African American males in an attempt to uncover the essence of their lived experiences in a single-parent household. The following research questions were formulated to assist in achieving the study's objective.

Research Questions

1. How do African American males experience being raised in a single-parent household?

2. What factors contributed to their ability to cope in a single-parent household?

3. What factors have allowed them to be successful? What factors have contributed to their ability to not only adjust to a single-parent household, but to what extent has societal constructs influenced their views, attitudes, beliefs and behavior.

Definition of Terms

The definitions of the terms utilized within the context of this study are provided below for clarification:

African American male refers to a male person born and reared in the United States of America, of African descent. It is used interchangeably with *Black* and *Negro* as these terms were reflected more frequently in the literature.

Single-parent household refers to one parent present in the household with one or more dependent children. The parent is considered the primary custodian of the child or children in the household. The parent may be unmarried, divorced, widowed, or married, spouse absent (United States Census Bureau, 2004).

Success refers to sound decision-making skills that allow individuals to engage in activities that produce favorable outcomes such as educational achievement, sustained employment and the ability to identify and implement effective coping strategies as needed, abstaining from those activities that would result in criminal charges.

The eight successful African American males in this study had completed high school or its equivalent, are currently pursuing, or have pursued higher education, are gainfully employed, and have no criminal record. Other definitions of success were verbalized by the participants; these will be discussed later in chapter IV.

Significance of the Study

The study is intended to offer a modest contribution to the literature about (a) the factors that contribute to the success of African American males, and (b) the strengths of single-parent households. The experiences of these participants demonstrate in contrast to public perceptions, that there are positive outcomes of single-parent households. The participants acknowledged that while they did face insurmountable obstacles as African American males, their strong determination to be successful, an attribute modeled by their single parent, allowed them to handle a variety of situations. This revelation speaks to the one of the strengths of single-parenting and provides us with an alternative, more promising view of the functioning of such a household. Their parent's ability to

overcome adversities served as a stimulus for their own growth and offered them hope. The experience of growing up in a single-parent household was viewed as a positive one.

The results will be of particular interest to those individuals whose professions involve working with African American families. It is also my belief that these findings will be of significance to single parents, specifically those raising African American males as well as the scientific community, mental health/family therapy professionals, educators, conflict resolution practitioners, social workers, policy-makers, civil/human rights advocates, and the criminal justice system. More importantly, it is my hope that these findings will stimulate additional research that can contribute to the dissolution of the deficit perception of African American males being raised in single-parent households.

Theoretical Perspective

The primary purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how African American males experience being raised in a single-parent household and to identify the factors that contributed to their overall success. Their ability to achieve in an environment stereotypically perceived as broken or inadequate suggests, and acknowledges the unspoken strengths of the single parent household. Each participant was asked to reflect on their childhood and as such, it was necessary to consider the influences that helped shape their emotional experiences, their behaviors and their concept of self. Exploration of the lived experiences of these participants was therefore viewed within the context of the family system to which they belong.

A child's psychological well-being and subsequent development is greatly influenced by family processes (Acs, 2007; Auslander, Haire-Joshu, Houston, Krebill & Williams, 2000). One of the primary concepts of family systems theory is that the family is a collection of individuals who are interconnected and interdependent, and behaves as a unit, as opposed to the individual in isolation (Nichols, 1984). Pioneers of family systems theory, Minuchin, Ackerman, Jackson and Bowen posit that the family's consistent and organized patterns of behavior create the family structure, of which the essentials components are its subsystems and boundaries (Nichols, 1984). Family systems theory focuses on the "many structures, roles, strengths and adaptive characteristics that exist within African American family relationships" (Mosley-Howard & Evans, 2000, p. 429). Family systems theory provides a useful framework for understanding how the single parent household in which the participants were raised, was able to function, and contribute to their success.

General system theory views the world as one of interrelationships with an emphasis on how things work together and not how they fall apart (von Bertalanffy, 1969). Systems theory also recognizes that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (Parsons, 1955; Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). The aim of this study was to identify and recognize African American males who are successful products of a system that was able to function well, the single-parent household. Family systems theory, derived from general system theory, regards the family as an open, organized social system in which members' actions are interrelated (Mook, 1985).

Karpel & Strauss (1993) posit that one characteristic of all systems which has a significant impact on the family is that of the subsystems. These subsystems which comprise the family unit are the individual family members (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2006). Interaction between these family members within the system stems from mutual expectations regarding individual behavior. These expectations are triggered by prior behaviors which can contribute to healthy or unhealthy relationships. Behaviors are thus not the result of individual experiences but occur through the circular causality of interactions (Schellenberg, 1996).

Following their exhaustive review of theoretical models, Cox and Paley (1997) suggest that family systems theory provides us with a better understanding of child development, adult adaptation, and the development of close relationships. In order to understand the interactions at work in a single-parent household, a researcher needs to delve into the lived experiences of those individual members. Consequently, my goal was to understand the experience of single parenting through the lens of the product of such a household, drastically shifting the focus of previous research.

Summary

As noted, a substantial body of literature on single-parenting predicts extremely daunting consequences for African American males. There exists a paucity of research on the ability of the African American male to become a responsible and productive member of society. Equally absent from the literature is the strength of the single-parent household. As this family structure becomes more prevalent in the United States, it is critical for us to learn more about how this family functions. By exploring the lived

experiences of successful African American males raised in a single-parent household,

we can begin to understand the factors that lead to positive outcomes.

This chapter served as an introductory framework for the significance of this

study and the need to explore this line of inquiry.   The remainder of this study is

organized in the following chapters: chapter II presents an overview of the body of

literature reviewed for this study. Much of the research examined focused on family

structure with an emphasis on single-parenting, citing this household as a precursor for

delinquency. This chapter is divided into three sections – the first section provides an

historical perspective of the African American family and of the African American male.

The second section discusses the changes in family structure and its impact on children.

Section three addresses single-parenting within the African American community, with

subsequent sections on family disruptions, delinquency and crime, academic

performance, and employment. Chapter III describes the study's methodology which

employed a qualitative phenomenological approach. The results of the study are

presented in chapter IV to include quotations from each participant's description of their

experience, and a composite description of the phenomenon. The final chapter, chapter

V, presents a discussion of the findings, limitations of the study, contributions to the

field, and implications for practice and further research.

Chapter Two: Review Of The Literature

Introduction

Since the 1960s, the general assumption from social scientists was that children from single-parent households are at an increased risk for negative outcomes (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). This assumption was later echoed by Daniel Patrick Moynihan who in his report on the Negro Family blamed family structure for the deterioration of the Negro family, suggesting that the Black family and the "deviant" males associated with it, was a social problem (Moynihan, 1965). While his report triggered further conversation and controversy, Gary (1981) argues that much of the research conducted on African American males continue to "perpetuate many myths, stereotypes and distortions about African American men (p. 11).

The extant literature on African American males has focused on their failures and dysfunctional behaviors attributed, as most scholars contend, to the lack of a nuclear family structure (Brown, 2004; Demuth & Brown, 2004). The negative consequences of single-parenting which has been the foci of a vast body of literature concluded that children in these homes experience a plethora of problematic behaviors that inhibit their ability to succeed. The increasing prevalence of single-parent households continue to receive much attention, generating much debate and concern for the children in these households, particularly in the Black community where as of 2010, 66% of African American children lived in a single-parent household compared to 24% non-Hispanic White (United States Census Bureau, 2007). Black male youths are more likely to grow up in a single-parent household putting them at a greater risk for physical, psychological,

educational, vocational and social maladaptive behaviors (Boyd-Franklin, Franklin & Touissaint, 2000; Whaley, 1993).

In their review of the research literature on African American males, Gordon, Gordon, and Nembhard (1994) identified four major categories of issues that are consistently addressed: (1) role of family structure, (2) education, (3) economic issues, and (4) psychosocial issues. These issues, collectively, impact the African American male's ability to attain success: poor academic performance which results in an inability to secure and maintain employment, emotional detachment, a lack of effective coping mechanisms, and poor decision-making skills which oftentimes leads to undesirable and criminal activities are viewed as negative outcomes of single-parenting.

Despite the negative portrayal of African American males raised in single-parent households, this study sought to identify successful African American males. The purpose of this study was to understand how African American males experience being raised in a single-parent household and to identify the factors that contributed to their success. This chapter presents an examination of the literature that addresses the categories mentioned previously, and is subsequently divided into three main sections. Section I presents a brief historical overview of the impact of slavery on the African American family and the African American male. Section II discusses the family structure and highlights the growing phenomenon of single-parenting. Section III focuses on the major consequences of single-parenting as depicted in the literature: academic performance, delinquency and crime, and employment.

Historical Overview of the African American Family Experience

The African American Family. To better understand the plight of the African American male in America and the prevalence of the single-parent households within the Black community, one must first examine the African American from a historical perspective (Billingsley, 1992).

Much of the early literature that discussed the African American family adopted a pathological approach (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). Social theorists from 1880 through 1980 such as W. E. B. DuBois (1898) and E. Franklin Frazier (1932) have argued that slavery resulted in the disorganization and instability of the African American family. DuBois (1898) chronicled the life of the African families who were brought to the Americas from Africa, separated from each other, stripped of their cultural identity and sold into a life of servitude. Booker (2000) writes that "slaveholders resisted attempts to humanize Africans and battled to view the people as commodities for profit. In the final analysis, they were capital assets and a supply of labor." (p. 3). Slavery dehumanized captured Africans brought to the United States, stripping these individuals of their basic human rights (Boyd-Franklin, 2003).

One such right denied to these enslaved Africans was the desire to marry. Alexis de Tocqueville comments,

> there exists indeed, a profound and natural antipathy between the
> institution of marriage and that of slavery. A man does not marry
> when he cannot exercise marital authority, when his children must
> be born his equal, irrevocably destined to the wretchedness of their

father; when having no power over their fate, he can neither know

the duties, the privileges, the hopes nor the cares which belong to

the paternal relation. It is easy to perceive that every motive that

incites the freeman to a lawful union, is lost to the slave by the

simple fact of his slavery (as cited in Franklin, 1997, p. xxii).

As slaves were denied the right to marry, many engaged in common-law marriages. Selling a mate, however, proved more economically profitable for the slave owner resulting in primarily female-headed households (Schmitz & Steiger Tebb, 1999). Frazier (1932) argued that Blacks endured a difficult transition from the South escaping discrimination in search of a better life in the urban communities of the North. He further contends that as the job opportunities diminished, men deserted their families contributing to the disintegration of the African American family.

In his study of the African American family structure from 1880 – 1980, Billingsley (1992) contends that during the post-slavery era, the African American family became more stable. Nuclear families with husband, wife and children began to emerge. However by the 1970s, the percentage of married couples began to decline, creating alternative family structures, in particular female-headed households with children. By the 1980s, Billingsley notes female-headed families had outnumbered married couples with children. Ruggles (1994) contends that the incidence of single-parenting within the African American community is not a new phenomenon, given its emergence during slavery. The prevalence of this family structure has generated much interest and debate regarding its consequences as will be discussed later in this chapter. Additionally, the

literature has exposed the role of extended family members whose influence on child and

family development is viewed as crucial (Wilson, 1986; Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991).

In 1965 Daniel Moynihan, the then Assistant Secretary of Labor, released his

findings on the problems affecting the Negro family. In his report, *The Negro Family:*

The Case for National Action, commonly referred to as the *Moynihan Report*, Moynihan

disclosed that the Negro community contained a "tangle of pathology". He argued that

the disintegration of the Black family, plagued by socio-economic problems, was directly

linked to the increase in female-headed households, climbing divorce rates and

illegitimacy. Moynihan concluded that the Negro's apparent lack of family values had

contributed to a higher rate of criminal activity, academic failure and poverty. Further

alienation and rejection fueled by the Moynihan Report which portrayed the Black family

as a "social problem"; exacerbated by the stigma associated with single-parenting,

contributed to the misconceptions about the African American family (Collins, 1989).

Although Moynihan's report stirred much controversy, some social scientists

continued to paint a pathological picture of the African-American household (Carouthers,

1990; J. H. Franklin, 1997). Critics argued that Moynihan based his assumptions of the

African American family on a White family social structure and ignored the strengths and

the resilience of this community of African descendants (Hill, 1972; D. Franklin, 1997;

Hines, 2005). Hines asserts that "it is a true testimony to the resilience of the human

spirit and nothing short of a miracle that African Americans have survived and made such

significant gains in the educational, economic, political and many other arenas" (p. 328).

Despite the disruption in family life, African Americans remained deeply rooted in their values, demonstrating strength and perseverance in response to the inhumane conditions evoked by slavery (Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 2005). This strength and perseverance would be challenged however due to pervasive discrimination post-slavery, segregation, and other social injustices through present-day America despite advances made toward equality as evidenced by the Civil Rights Movement, affirmative action, Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka, and fair housing legislature (Jewell, 2003).

The African American Male. Historically the life for the African American male was one of servitude, forced into a role that rendered him inferior. Given the injustices and oppression endured by the African American male, it is inevitable that he has to overcome tremendous obstacles to attain the social standards of today's society. Dubois (1898) contends that even as a free man, generations of economic disadvantages "have given rise to educational and economic problems and have become the cause and excuse for discontent, lawlessness, laziness and injustice" (p. 8).

Booker (2000) describes the struggle of the African American male to find his masculinity, and a sense of identity. He recounts the fear instilled in White America by Thomas Jefferson who announced that the Black man was promiscuous and therefore must be held back, to the emergence of negative portrayals as seen in minstrel shows of the 1800s in which the Black male is seen as inferior and foolish. Booker concludes "throughout history, most white Americans have not expected Black men to be able to fulfill the ideal gender role" (p. ix).

Eyerman (2001) posits that the "heritage of slavery continues to affect Black America" (p. 22). Historical hardships and social injustices that prevail in the United States in the 21st century have crippled the African American male and subsequently they appear unsure of their own racial identify, and continue to experience failures, rejection, and discrimination (Gamoran, 2001; McLain, Vogel, Wei, & Wester, 2006).

The failure of the African American male to elevate his status contributes to the pervasiveness of the negative stereotypes, fueled in part by the media (Kitwana, 2002). In their study of the images of African American males portrayed in the entertainment industry and the effect those images have on Whites' attitudes toward Blacks, Entman & Rojecki (2001) concluded that the industry fails to showcase African American males in superior roles, roles of intellect and power, instead they are typecast as subordinates, athletes, entertainers, or criminals. The implication, they argue, is that African American males cannot achieve success. These images play a significant role in influencing the attitudes and behaviors of young minds further inhibiting their drive and motivation to pursue a better quality of life (Lum, 2009).

In a 2008 interview with Thabiti Lewis, Haki R. Madhubuti, educator, poet and author of *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous?: The African American Family in Transition (1991),* admits that the issues that plagued the African American male in 1991 still persist. He described the African American male as beaten and broken men, filled with anger, confusion, disappointment and pain. He referred to them as the "forgotten". Johnson (2010) presents a similar picture, noting that African American males are predominantly products of a single-parent household, more likely to experience

psychosocial challenges, difficulty in school, and are more likely to be unemployed, resulting in their "characterization as both pathological and dangerous" (p. 8).

The basis for their alleged pathology is divided among those who content that the African American male's lack of personal responsibility has created their current demise (McWhorter, 2000) and others who argue that their fate can be attributed to their environment which limits their opportunity to achieve individual success (Johnson, 2001; Brody et al. 2001). The research reviewed for this study as presented, indicates that the struggles facing African American males stem from a breakdown in the family structure.

Family Structure

Over the past 40 years, the family structure has evolved beyond the traditional make-up of mother, father, and child or children. Alternative family structures - single-parent, step-families, gay and lesbian families, and other non-traditional arrangements, have become increasingly more prevalent (Gottlieb, 1993; Karpel & Strauss, 1983; Rouse, 2002). Smith et al. (1999) contend that "the composition of families is one aspect of family life that is consistently associated with delinquency" (p. 1). Fields (2003) argues that these emerging trends in family structure have significant implications for the well-being of the children. There exists a vast body of literature that has focused on the impact of these varying family structures on the children, putting them at risk for adverse outcomes (Barbarin & Soler, 1993; Carlson & Corcoran 2001; Cherlin, 1999).

One of the most prominent studies which focused on the family structure and its impact on the children's well-being was conducted by McLanahan and Sandefur (1994). They regarded the single-parent household as a "disrupted family" (p. 49) which had

severe consequences for the children. Their 10-year longitude study from 1979-1989 led them to conclude that children raised in a single-parent household will have lower grades in school and increased absences, are twice as likely to drop out of school, will experience difficulty making the transition from adolescence to adulthood, will have less access to job opportunities, and impede any chances for future success. They determined that

> children who grow up in a household with only one biological
> parent are worse off, on average, than children who grow up with
> both biological parents, regardless of the parents' race or
> educational background, regardless of whether the parents are
> married when the child is born, and regardless of whether the
> resident parent marries (p. 1)

They further concluded that family structure has a larger effect on the behavior of African American males than on young men from other racial and ethnic groups, making them not only more disadvantaged, but also more susceptible to overt discrimination.

Further studies have been conducted linking family structure on a child's well-being (Ackerman, D'Eramo, Umylny, Schultz & Izard, 2001), a variety of academic measures (Kurdek, Fine & Sinclair, 1995), emotional stressors (Amato & Keith, 1991a), deviant behavior (Barnes, Farrell & Thomas, 1996), and school completion and educational attainment (Battle, 1997; Hale, 2004; Zimilies & Lee, 1991) resulting in significant differences between children of two-parent household and single-parent households. Although other studies exist that have produced statistically insignificant

differences such as family structure on anxiety disorders in children (Dunn, O'Connor & Levy, 2002), and sex initiation (Deliere & Kalil, 2002), the overwhelming evidence of the risks associated with life in a non-traditional household for children have raised serious concerns.

The alarming increase in the number of these non-traditional households and the number of children residing in these households resonate in current literature, suggesting a need for further understanding of the consequences of alternative family structures on children (Coleman & Ganong, 2004). Of particular interest is the proliferation of single-parent households among African American families which has shown a dramatic increase in divorce rates during the last century (Tucker & James, 2005).

Family Disruptions

As the functions of the family have changed and stresses have mounted, family disruptions such as desertion, marital separation and divorce have increased (Waters, 2001). One stressful event that ultimately has a devastating effect on the individuals (subsystems) as well as the family (system) as a whole is divorce.

Cooper (2003) posits that divorce is one of the most prevalent disruptions that have threatened the nuclear family thereby creating single-parent households. Doss, Atkins and Christensen (2003) report "recent data suggest that approximately one-half of first marriages will result in divorce and even more second marriages will dissolve" (p. 165). According to some estimates, as many as 40% of white children and 75% of African American children will experience parental separation or divorce before they reach the age of 16 (Smith et al., 1997).

In an interview with writer Rob Waters, Dr. Judith Wallerstein whose thirty years of research on the impact of divorce of children have been published in a number of books, *Surviving the Break-up* (1996), and *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce* (2000), to name a few, contends that: the radical shift in divorce laws in the 1970s was a cataclysmic earthquake that ushered in a period of wrenching change for millions of American families.

For many children, divorce is a scarring and enduring calamity that heightened anxiety, aggression, and depression, disrupting their performance in school and their professional achievements as adults. For all children, divorce creates a legacy of anxiety that left them ill-equipped to form intimate relationships as adults (cited in Waters, 2001, p. 43).

Wallerstein's findings spurred additional studies with comparable results indicating long-term negative consequences on children (Coontz, 1997). Furstenberg (1990) reported that the impact for African American youths was greater as the single parent tends to suffer more drastic financial hardship post divorce. These economic constraints may exacerbate psychological distress which persists unattended due to the single parent's inability to seek mental health services for themselves and for their child (Lerman, 2002).

Another major disruption in the African American household is the incarceration of a parent. Harrison and Beck (2005) reported that in 2004, Black males represented 40% of the nation's prison population although they only account for 6% of the general population; 13% of those imprisoned were between the ages of 20 and 29. The

incarceration of African American males has tremendous implications for the Black communities (Western & McLanahan, 2000).   Following their study on the impact of incarceration on family formation, they reported that couples were less likely to marry when a child was involved, contributing to the increase of single-parent households. They propose the need for further study of this population and the impact a parent's incarceration has on the children, in particular, those of the African American male child.

Single-Parenting

The phenomenon of single-parenting has drastically increased since the 1960s with the African American family undergoing structural changes reflecting a major shift away from marriage (Tucker & James, 2005). Historically the single parent within the African American household has predominantly been the mother however a growing trend has uncovered fathers who are also assuming the primary custodial role (Alverdo & Kumpfer, 2000). The emergence of father-headed households has been stimulated in part by President Obama's *Fatherhood Initiative* aimed at encouraging fathers to become more actively involved in the lives of their children (National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, 2008). Despite the number of scholarly research on the effects of absent father households, there have been few studies on African American fathers; the focus has primarily focused on the effect of single-parenting on child outcomes (Coleman & Ganong, 2004; Dickerson, 1995).

It should also be noted that it is not uncommon for African American children to reside with a grandparent or other family member. Extended family members play a significant role in their lives and oftentimes serve as custodial parents (Ruiz, 2000).

Instances in which grandparents would assume parental responsibilities include desertion

by parent, death of one or both parents, drug addictions, neglect and/or abuse by one or

both parents and medical issues (Hill, Yeung, & Duncan, 2001; Ruiz & Zhu, 2004).

Given the extensive studies on the impact of family structure on a child's well-

being, the prevalence of the single-parent household has stirred a vigorous debate. The

majority of scholarly work on single-parenting households has depicted a bleak outcome

for the child or children involved. The preponderance of these works which has appeared

from the mid 1980's to the late 1990's have found that single-parent households are

associated with higher rates of delinquency than are intact homes (Bray & Hetherington,

1993; Buchanan et al, 1996; Coontz, 1992; Dornbusch et al., 1985; McLanahan &

Sandefur, 1994; Zimmerman et al., 1995).

Between 1970 and 2003, while the number of two-parent households remained

stable at about 26 million, over the same period, the proportion of single-parent

household grew from 12% to 26% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). As of 2006, there were

12.9 million single-parent households in the United States; 77.6% of these households

were headed by a female while 22.4 % were headed by a male (U.S. Census Bureau,

2007). It is estimated that 1 in 4 families with children under 18 years of age is headed

by a single parent. In the African American community, statistics are even more

staggering. According to the 2009 United States Bureau, only 45% of African American

households contained a married couple with child, compared to 80% for Whites and 70%

for Hispanics. Demographic trends that may have contributed to this decrease in two-

parent households include a higher proportion of births to unmarried women, the delay of

marriage for some, and family disruptions such as divorce, separation, death or

incarceration (Zimmerman et al, 1995). This is consistent with similar assumptions that

have prevailed in the social science literature (Brown, 2004; Casper & Fields, 2001;

Schmitz & Steiger, 1999).

Tucker and Mithchell-Kernan (1995) offer another perspective; they argue that

the decline in marriages among the African American families is directly linked to the

absence of eligible males who have secured economic stability. The lack of formal

education, unemployment or underemployment, physical and mental health challenges,

incarceration, and high mortality rates have limited the availability of African American

males who would be a responsible life-long partner (Tucker & Mithchell-Kernan, 1995).

In 2010, 34% of children resided with one parent, of which 66% were African

American children compared to 24% non-Hispanic children. African American males

will spend most of their child-rearing years in a single parent household (Johnson, 2010).

The statistics which have consistently drawn much public discourse, have led researchers

to conclude that African American males from these households are in crisis (Kunjufu,

2005). It has been argued that African American males growing up in single parent

household lack social skills, exhibit problem behaviors, and have no desire to perform

academically hence a disregard for scholarly achievements, subsequently, they have been

labeled "at risk" (Barton, 2004; Donnelly, 1987; Gurian, 2007).

Collins (1989) contends that the African America male's inability to achieve self-

sufficiency is largely attributed to the single-parent's minimal educational background,

limited financial resources and ineffective parenting style. This argument is a common

theme throughout the major scholarly work which focuses on the impact of single-parenting on African American males.

Delinquency and Crime

Any family disruption is bound to have a negative impact on all individuals involved. The literature repeatedly indicated that children who have experienced some form of family disruption such as a separation, divorce, death, or incarceration are inevitably more at risk for serious behavior problems than those in an intact family (Bilchik, 1999). The child strives to develop a sense of identity, a philosophy of life, a view of the world, a set of moral beliefs and standards; he or she gradually works toward independence, sexual maturation, and developing appropriate and meaningful relationships with peers. The child's capacity and readiness to meet these demands is a function of such factors as physical and physiological development, cognitive ability, surrounding environment, and most importantly, the family (Conger, 1973; Mandara & Murray, 2001).

Cooper (2003) contends that in the absence of a parent, children are twice as likely as children from intact families to develop a psychological disorder, typically conduct problems or to engage in substance abuse. Other studies reviewed indicated a distinct correlation between family disruptions and the onset of delinquent behaviors in the affected children, further revealing that children in single-parent households were at a greater risk for aggressive behaviors (Ary, Duncan, Duncan, & Hops, 1999; Roche et al, 2007). Mclanahan & Sandefur (1994) contend that African American males are more likely to engage in these behaviors because of "idle time" (p. 2), having dropped out of

school and unemployed, increasing the likelihood that they will be arrested and incarcerated.

Johnson (2010) reported that a concerning number of African American males from single-parent households suffer from psychological problems. Research has shown that single parents seldom seek professional help as it pertains to their physical and mental health and its impact on their well-being as well as their child's have lasting effects. The single parent's life is confounded by multiple stressors such as parental responsibilities, economic difficulties, frustrations experienced at their inability to help their son academically possibly due to their limited educational background, few coping strategies, and the lack of support from external sources (Paschall, Ringwalt, & Flewelling, 2003).

Paschall et al cite two major studies, the National Health Interview Study conducted by Dornbusch from 1966-1970, and a 1996 study by Paschall, Ennett, and Flewelling, which found a significant correlation between delinquency in African American males and single-parenting. The studies further revealed that indicators such as parent monitoring, checking homework for instance, and parent-child interactions had a more adverse effect on the behaviors of the African American male adolescent. Paschall et al contend that

> parent control and supervision maybe the most important
> deterrents of delinquent behavior, while parent-son communication
> and relations may contribute to adolescents' cognitive
> development and psychological well-being (p. 29)

advocating the necessity of a strong parent-son relationship as a major driving force behind the attainment of success.

Academic Performance

On September 13, 2011, PBS aired the third episode of the *Tavis Smiley Reports*, a documentary entitled *Too Important to Fail* (PBS, 2011). The project illuminated the increasing dropout rate among African Americans teenagers, particularly among the males. More specifically, it examined the disparity that exists in education among African American males and other student population. While the findings were not surprising, the statistics paint a somber picture, some of which are as follows: (a) 14% of African American eighth graders read at or above grade level, (b) in 2007, approximately 6.2 million African American male students dropped out of high school, (c) African American male students in grades K-12 are 2 ½ times more likely to be suspended from school, (d) reading scores for twelfth graders were significantly lower than those from other racial and ethnic groups, (e) African American males are more likely to be placed in special education classes. The documentary chronicled Mr. Smiley's journey across the United States as he met with education leaders and policy makers to discuss possible causes for what he calls "a national crisis" and to investigate what practices exist or need to be in place to ensure a young person's future is not lost.

A quality education is perceived by many as essential to self-sufficiency (Hilliard, Perry & Steele, 2004). African American males experience a number of difficulties that prevent them from achieving such an education. The disparity in the educational achievement of African American males in comparison to their white counterpart, has

been the focus of many researchers (Brown & Fultz, 2008; Cauce, Friedman, Gonzales & Mason, 1996; Kunjufu, 2004). This academic gap is evidenced by unequal access to formal education, teachers' low expectations, inadequate educational resources and lack of family support for academic achievement (Hale, 2001; Lattimore, 2005). Some factors that hinder academic success among African American males have been linked to drug and alcohol use at an early age, delinquent behaviors, poor academic performance, and single-parent households (Noguera, 2003).

The vast body of research on African American males and education concluded that children in single-parent households have lower academic performance and higher drop-out rates from high school (Battle, 1998; Blake & Darling, 1994; Floyd, 1996; Noguera, 2003). Researchers agree that parental involvement promotes the academic achievement of their children and parents need to be encouraged to invest the time to support their child's educational experience (Davis, 2003). Davis suggests African American males perform well when they attend school consistently, complete homework, and have parents that are actively involved.

Children are more inclined to become more engaged in their learning if the parent is actively involved (Bornstein, 2002; Clark, 1983). Faschola (2005) posits parents have a responsibility to project a strong interest in the education of their children by presenting a positive image of school, maintaining open communication with their child's school and providing supervision of homework and other assignments. This proactive stance will help to increase the child's motivation and likelihood of remaining in school. Kafele (2009) contends that the issue of motivation is a factor vital to African American

males in order to be successful in school and in life. Lack of motivation derived from a

parent's disengagement, risk of academic failure, and other challenges such as

discrimination and negative perceptions, inhibits the African American male's drive to

attend school. Single parents fail to establish a home environment conducive to learning

consequently setting their African American sons on a negative trajectory (Noguera,

2003).

Employment

The challenges faced by many African American males from single parent

households are not limited to education. Poor academic performance and the lack of

parental guidance or involvement reduce the prospect of securing employment (Holzer &

Offner, 2004). They contend that obtaining a high school equivalency (GED) does not

guarantee entry into the labor force as employers are less likely to hire African American

males with a GED. Prospects of gaining employment become increasingly more difficult

for African American males who have a history of incarceration (Western 2006). What is

more alarming, Western explains, is the high rate of incarceration among African

Americans males which adversely affects those without a criminal background.

Opportunities for employment for African American males become extremely

restricted forcing them into less demanding jobs that offer minimum wage with little to

no benefits. Their ability to be self-sufficient is never completely attained, catapulting

them back into a life of criminal activity, or psychological distress (Belcher, Harris-Britt,

Ofonedu & Percy, 2012). The numerous challenges the African American male faces

leave them void of any motivation to seek employment (Kunjufu, 1986).

Summary

For years the vast body of literature on single-parenting has focused on the weaknesses experienced by the family and the adverse consequences for the children who reside in such a household. The literature reviewed for this study postulate African American males raised in single-parent households perform poorly academically, are more likely to drop out of school, experience emotional difficulties, and are unable to attain self-sufficiency. Researchers have also argued that African American males from single-parent households are more vulnerable to delinquent acts than those of two-parent households. These acts can lead to incarceration or death.   One arena that it would appear has not been thoroughly examined is the single-parent household in which the African American male has been able to achieve emotional stability and academic success, abstaining from deviant behaviors. My intent was to gain insight into the lived experiences of African American males raised by a single parent who was able to counteract the negative effects of maintaining such a household, and whose son was able to successfully navigate the challenges faced. Richards and Schmiege (1993) in addressing the foci on single-parenting argue

> This emphasis on negative consequences reflects societal ambiguity toward single-parent families. Whereas the cultural ideal is the two-parent family, the increased prevalence of single-parent families necessitates consideration of this alternate family form and the potential problems as well as the strengths of single-parent families (p. 277).

The study's focus was on African American males and how they were able to succeed, despite the odds. This also presented an opportunity to gain a better understanding of how the family functions and adapts to changes. What also emerged were strategies and resources utilized by these families that enabled them to effectively cope under tremendous stressors diluting some of the negativity directed at single parents. These will be discussed further in chapter IV.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Qualitative Research

The primary goal of this study was to gain an understanding of how African American males experience single-parenting. The principle question which guided the study was:

1.   How do African American males experience being raised by a single parent?

Secondary questions which probed further in an attempt to uncover how the family functioned, and contributed to the African American male's success, included the following:

2.   What factors contributed to their ability to cope in a single-parent household?

3.   What factors have allowed them to be successful in life?

The study investigated the lived experiences of eight African American males who, despite the adversities they faced as African American males, and as a product of a single-parent household, were able to attain success academically and professionally. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) in discussing the complexity of qualitative research which cuts across many disciplines, fields and subject matters, offers a generic definition: "qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world; qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3).

Marshall and Rossman (1999) in their work *Designing Qualitative Research*, while acknowledging the lack of consensus regarding a common definition of what is qualitative research, proposes the view that "qualitative researchers are intrigued with the complexity of social interactions as expressed in daily life and with the meanings the participants themselves attribute to these interactions" (pg. 2). Given the nature of this study, to better understand how African American males experience being raised in a single-parent household, a qualitative approach was the choice of research methodology. Flick (2011) posits that "qualitative research aims at grasping the subjective meaning of issues from the perspective of the participants" (p. 12). The value placed on context and setting, along with participants' perspectives, are all essential features of qualitative research (Flick, von Kardoff & Steinke, 2004; Glesne, 1999).

Qualitative research has traditionally been used to investigate topics related to this study's proposed inquiry. Much of the research reviewed examined the effects of family structure on the African American male's academic performance (Battle, 1998; Blake & Darling, 1994; Mandara, 2006; Maton, Hrabowski, & Greif, 1998; Noguera, 2003) and the negative outcomes of single-parenting (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Schmitz & Steiger Tebb, 1999; Zimmerman et al., 1995). While these researchers share an interest in gaining a better understanding of the African American family, our focus differs. Our shared intent, however, to observe and interpret meanings in context, serves to justify our use of a qualitative research paradigm.

Qualitative research methods were developed in the social sciences to enable researchers to study social and cultural phenomena (Creswell, 1994; Marshall &

Rossman, 1998). The attractiveness of qualitative research practice is based on the following characteristics as identified by Creswell (2003): (1) it takes place in a natural setting, (2) there is no single method rather multiple methods are used that are interactive and humanistic providing rich data in the form of texts, pictures or artifacts; "Researchers look for involvement of their participants in data collection and seek to build rapport and credibility with the individuals in the study" (p. 181), (3) is emergent – an understanding of the phenomenon of interest "will emerge as it begins with initial codes, develops into broader themes, and coalesces into a broad interpretation" (p.182), (4) is interpretive, (5) the qualitative researcher views social phenomenon from a holistic perspective, (6) uses complex reasoning, (7) takes into account the reflective capability of the qualitative researcher, and (8) employs one or more strategies of inquiry. A discussion follows on Creswell's strategies or "traditions" of inquiry.

Phenomenology. Creswell (1998) identifies five traditions of qualitative research: ethnography, grounded theory, case studies, biography, and phenomenology. The latter, phenomenology, was the tradition adopted for this study. The phenomenological tradition was first introduced by German philosopher Edmund H. Husserl (1859-1938) who believed the reality of an object is only perceived within the meaning of the experience of an individual (Polkinghorn, 1989; Priest, 2004). The task therefore of a phenomenologist is to temporarily suspend any presumptions in search of the essence or central underlying meaning of an experience. Wertz (2005) asserts that Husserl's phenomenological research was "uniquely fashioned to assist researchers in the investigation of human experience and behavior" (p. 167). Having its roots in the

philosophical perspective of Husserl, Patton (2002) defines a phenomenological approach

as one that

> focuses on exploring how human beings make sense of experience
>
> and transform experiences into consciousness, both individually
>
> and as shared meaning. This requires methodologically, carefully,
>
> and thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience
>
> some phenomenon- how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it,
>
> judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with
>
> others. To gather such data, one must undertake in-depth
>
> interviews with people who have *directly* experienced the
>
> phenomenon of interest; that is, they have "lived experiences" as
>
> opposed to secondhand experience. (p. 104).

Husserl, often regarded as the founding father of phenomenology (McLaughlin

Gray, 1997; Porter, 1998r), believed that "we can only know what we experience by

attending to perceptions and meanings that awaken our conscious awareness" (as cited in

Patton, 2002, p. 105).   Intentionality of consciousness, one of the major concepts of

phenomenology, is reflective of how one perceives the reality of an object. This

reflection of what one has seen allows the individual to finally begin to grasp meanings

of an object that appears in consciousness (Dukes, 1984). It is therefore this act of

consciousness and the object of consciousness that are intentionally related. Moustakas

(1994) explains that "what appears in consciousness is an absolute reality while what

appears to the world is a product of learning" (p. 27). My primary purpose was to

uncover the intentionality of the experience of being raised in a single-parent household, to better understand the *noema*, what is experienced, and *noesis*, the way in which it is experienced (Moustakas, 1994).

Husserls also believed that the researcher must suspend all judgment about what is real, a term Husserl termed *epoche*, and put aside any prior assumptions, biases, to *bracket* one's experiences, until they are founded on a more conclusive basis. Through these processes of epoche and bracketing, Wertz (2005) contends that the researcher is able to "emphatically enter and reflect on the lived world of other persons in order to apprehend the meanings of the world as they are given to the first-person point of view" (p. 168). It is this first person point of view that makes phenomenological research valid (Groenewald, 2004; Moustakas, 1994).

Having raised my two African American sons single-handedly after my marriage ended, it was important that as the researcher, I recognized the potential impact my own assumptions could have on the data and how crucial it was for me to set aside those prejudgments, leaving out my own thoughts, feelings, and biases with the intention of understanding and accepting my participants' perceptions and not presenting my own view or reactions (Moustakas, 1995).

Researchers influenced by Husserl's philosophical perspectives, such as Heidegger, Sartre, Schutz, Merleau-Ponty, Garfinkel and Moustakas, have made substantial contributions to broaden the core idea of phenomenology (Donalek, 2004). Austrian sociologist, Alfred Schutz (1899-1959) proposed a sociological perspective which articulated the essence of phenomenology for studying everyday social acts and

interactions. Moustakas (1994) while embracing some of Husserl's earlier philosophical tenets, placed much more emphasis on the need to bracket one's prejudgments and developing universal structures based on what people experience, and how. He further contends this particular approach is most effective if the objective is to determine "what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience" (p. 13).

A phenomenological study is the appropriate choice when the researcher's focus is on the essence or structure of an experience (Merriam, 2002; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Researchers who use phenomenology look at the meaning that lived experiences have for individuals and is often the preferred method in the fields of sociology, psychology, nursing, health sciences and education (Adorno & Sadala, 2002; Boyd, 1993; Jasper, 1994; Omery, 1983; Somekh & Lewin, 2005). The choice to utilize this methodological approach was evidently most suited to this study, with a focus on understanding the essence of the lived experience of being raised in a single-parent household.

Family Systems Theory and Phenomenology. Family systems theory and phenomenology provided the framework used to guide this study. Both view the family as an interactional system, or household, ultimately influenced by each of its members (Mook, 1985; Spencer, 1995). Based on this presumption, Richards and Schmiege (1993) contend that "systems theory provides a useful framework for understanding single-parent households; views single-parenting as an ever-changing process; that is, families change over time as a consequence of the development of individual members" (p. 277). It presumes that single-parent families are constantly changing in response to

the development of individual members and the interactions within the family and the larger community (Mosley-Howard & Evans, 2000).

Researchers reviewed who utilized systems theory and phenomenology include Richards and Schmiege (1993) who sought to understand how the single parent viewed single-parenting; O'Connor-Davis (1993) who focused on single-parent households headed by females and their perception of being a single parent, Stewart (2010) who interviewed single African American and Hispanic mothers regarding their perception of academic success and Duckett (2009) who explored the experiences of African American adolescent mothers. These theoretical perspectives offer insight into the behavior of complex organized systems, offer a means to understand the lived experiences of individuals and acknowledge the interconnections of the family experience (Christian, 2006; Eggenberger & Nelms, 2007). Both frameworks are relevant to the study of African American males who are successful products of a single-parent household. Understanding the meaning that the individual, in this study, the African American male, gives to the experience of being raised in a single-parent household is critical to our understanding of the factors that facilitate child development and growth, and subsequently, the factors that will allow them to become productive and responsible members of society.

Sample

When conducting a phenomenological study, Creswell (1998) contends that "participants need to be carefully chosen to be individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (p. 55). Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to seek information-rich

cases that will provide in-depth understanding of the problem central to the purpose of

the inquiry (Patton, 2002). Criterion sampling was the strategy utilized for purposefully

selecting participants based on the following predetermined criteria:

1. African-American male

2. 18 years of age and older

3. raised in a single-parent household

4. educated - high school diploma or equivalent, or higher

5. history of employment

6. no criminal record

Perusal of the scholarly literature which focused on African-American males and

their inability to achieve any success, resulting in incarceration for many, fueled my

decision to use these specific criteria. Ten African American males were recruited for

participation in the study through invitation letters that had been distributed to family

members, friends, current and former colleagues, and professional contacts. While

Patton (2002) contends there are no specific rules for sample size, "to interview as many

subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know" (p. 101), Creswell, (1998)

posits that a reasonable number of participants needed for a qualitative study should be

no more than ten.

The Researcher's Role

   The Researcher as the Main Instrument. Flick (2002) contends that while the main

instrument in a qualitative study is the researcher, the respondent, and the researcher's

communicative competencies are also essential. Crano and Brewer (2002) posit that "the

interactive nature of the interview and its dependence on verbal and linguistic responses constitutes its major strength as a method of social research" (p. 223). This traditional source of data allows for a close interaction between researcher and participant discussing a theme of mutual interest which can evoke positive feelings, reciprocal respect, and ultimately a more trusting bond between both (Kvale, 1996).

I felt quite comfortable in my role as a researcher, employing the skills I had acquired during my graduate studies in marriage and family therapy as well as my professional experience providing individual, couples and family therapy in a community mental health clinic as well as private practice. As a therapist I am trained to actively listen, be authentic, empathetic, sincere, and although it may be necessary to self-disclose and reveal our own beliefs, to refrain from imposing my value system on my clients; all essential qualities that enhances the interviewer-interviewee relationship. The role of the researcher is therefore crucial in establishing a safe environment conducive to sharing personal information (Mason, 2002; Maxwell, 2005).

The aim of this qualitative study was to gain an understanding of how successful African American males experienced being raised in a single-parent household. Due to the lack of research on the achievements of this population, and on the positive outcome of single-parenting, I felt it was of utmost importance to reference the positive side of African American males. The extant research literature on African American males who were raised by a single parent have been limited in its scope, focusing primarily on the African American males' aggressive and delinquent behaviors, poor academic performance and increased levels of unemployment (Mandara, 2006).

Having served in numerous volunteer capacities with the Broward County school district afforded me the opportunity to work with African American youths who aspired to become successful members of society but whose voices were not being heard, nor their accomplishments acknowledged. This became the driving force behind the need to pursue this study, to gain insight into their world, and understand how they experience what it means to be raised in a single-parent household, what it means to overcome the negative assertions of so many. Patton (2002) notes that the researcher must become fully engaged in the lives of their participants, by "going into the field" (p. 48) to understand the realities of those being studied.

Issues of entry. Negotiating entry to this population was made possible through the many relationships I had established with former colleagues, community members and members of professional organizations. My older son who had attended Howard University, an (HBCU) historically Black university, for his undergraduate degree, also provided referrals. Following approval from Nova Southeastern University's Institutional Review Board, recruitment of participants was initiated through an invitation letter (see Appendix B) sent to the above-mentioned professional contacts, family members and friends residing in Florida, Georgia, Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia to forward to anyone they believed met the stated criteria. The letter provided a detailed explanation of my research study, including its purpose and need, a brief statement of the problem, and subsequently, the significance of the study. Interested participants were requested to telephone me to confirm eligibility, to express their willingness to participate in the study, and to schedule an interview.

A total of twenty referrals were received with eleven potential participants who had received a copy of the invitation letter, calling me directly. The names and contact information of five potential participants were given to me to initiate the first contact. I was however only able to reach two individuals both of whom confirmed they did meet the criteria. Of the eleven who called, it was determined that they were all eligible to participate, however two expressed their disappointment at not being available due to their work schedule, and one applauded me for presenting a positive portrayal of African American males but declined in an apologetic manner, due to a family member's illness.

Ethical Concerns. Marshall and Rossman (1999) note that, "the researcher must demonstrate awareness of the complex ethical issues in qualitative research and show that the research is both feasible and ethical" (p. 90). As with any research one must be cognizant of maintaining proper ethical practices. As qualitative researchers, we must be concerned with promoting ethical practice in terms of research design, type of questions to be asked, manner in which the questions will be delivered, purpose of the study, and the implications of the study. In particular, my study included male participants, and therefore I was ethically bound to the requirements as stated by the Nova Southeastern University Institutional Review Board. As the principal investigator of my study, I was responsible for safeguarding the rights and welfare of my participants.

During the initial telephone call, potential participants were reminded of the purpose of the study, the scope of the study as outlined in the invitation letter each had received, the need for their involvement and their rights as research participants, in addition to the possible benefits of the study. Hudson (n.d.) points out that it is not

sufficient to only protect our participants from any harm, but to "actively promote

positive outcomes of participation." Participants were informed that while there were no

direct monetary benefits for participating, it was my belief that their stories would

hopefully inspire others. Participants were then given the opportunity to seek

clarification or ask questions that pertained to any aspect of the research study.

Moustakas (1994) suggests that

> the essential criteria must include the participant's
>
> experience of the phenomenon, the participant's genuine
>
> interest in understanding its nature and meaning, must be
>
> willing to participate in a lengthy interview, grants
>
> permission to the interviewer to record the interview and
>
> publish the data in a dissertation and other publications
>
> (p. 107).

Each of the ten participants expressed a strong desire to participate, adding that

the research topic had stimulated their interest. Some shared their anger at the negative

depictions of African American males, particularly in the media, and their longing for a

more positive representation of who they really are.

Interviews were scheduled based on each participant's availability and choice of

location. As my older son resides in Maryland, it was convenient for me to access those

participants living in the northeast. Face-to-face interviews were scheduled at the

participant's home, in my office, or via Skype. Skype was accessed in my office as well

as that of the participant's to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the interview. At

the onset of each interview, informed consent (see Appendix A) was once again explained and signatures secured. Each participant received a copy of his signed informed consent. Due to the sensitive nature of the interview where participants' disclosure could elicit personal feelings, participants were reminded that they could request a short break, re-schedule or discontinue the interview if they became too uncomfortable. A list of counseling resources (see Appendix D) was also available in anticipation of any issues that may arise whereby the participants felt the need to seek professional help.

All ten participants had been eagerly anticipating the interview and expressed how they now felt "obligated" to share their stories and show the critics that there are positive outcomes of single-parent households and most importantly, they are "living testimonies" of successful African American males. To protect the participants' anonymity, pseudonyms were used to identify the individual audio-recordings, transcriptions, field notes and the findings as described in chapter IV. The participants' actual names were only listed on the informed consent form as required by the Institutional Review Board.

Having such a personal connection with the research topic, I was cognizant of my own assumptions and preconceived notions not only as a single parent, but having raised African American males. It was paramount that I refrain from imposing any leading questions that could negatively impact the research process. *Epoche*, previously defined as the suspending of all judgment of what is real, was applied. Subsequently, it became necessary to *bracket* my own experiences, to engage in

disciplined and systemic efforts to set aside prejudgments

regarding the phenomenon being investigated in order to launch

the study as far as possible free of preconceptions, beliefs, and

knowledge of phenomenon from prior experience and professional

studies, to be completely open, receptive, and naïve in listening to

and hearing research participants describe their experience of the

phenomenon being investigated. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22)

Kvale (1996) contends that this type of phenomenological reduction does not

imply an "absolute absence of presuppositions, but rather a critical analysis of one's own

presuppositions." (p. 54). I therefore remained open and willing to enter each

participant's world in order to fully grasp the realities of their world and obtain

unprejudiced descriptions of their lived experiences. Throughout this process I also

remained vigilant of not assuming the role of therapist, to maintain a professional

distance, to maintain my integrity and that of the study, utilizing the skills learned,

intervening at times, but solely for clarification purposes (Corey, 1986).

Data Collection

   Interviews. In-depth interviews have been widely used in the social sciences as the

predominant data collection tool relied on extensively by qualitative researchers (Flick,

von Kardorff & Steinke, 2004, Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Kvale (1996) describes the

phenomenological interview as semi-structured, and defines it as "an inter view whose

purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to

interpreting the meaning of the described phenomenon" (p. 6). Data for this study was

collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews which served to facilitate an open

and honest dialogue guided by careful questioning and active listening. Participants

responded comfortably, disclosing their thoughts and feelings rather spontaneously,

producing rich and complete descriptions of their experience of being raised by a single

parent.

Although I was able to identify and speak with ten participants, interviews were

conducted with only eight. During one interview, while reviewing the informed consent

form, one participant who had previously affirmed his eligibility revealed that his parents

were in and out of his life and subsequently his mother suggested he live with a family

friend. Another participant re-scheduled the interview twice, sharing that he was not only

a delegate during the 2012 Presidential Convention but was also committed to a number

of public appearances. Although contact was maintained at his request, it was still

difficult to arrange a mutually convenient time and place due to his hectic schedule.

I began each interview expressing my appreciation to the participants for their

cooperation. After the informed consent forms were reviewed, signed and dated, the

interview proceeded with the same guiding questions (see Appendix C) posed to each

participant. Guiding questions were brief, eliciting lengthy, spontaneous responses from

participants. These guiding questions were designed to assist me in managing the early

direction of the interview and not as a strict protocol to be adhered to. They also

guaranteed that each participant received the same initial line of inquiry (Patton, 2002).

The research question guiding the interview was: How do African American

males experience being raised in a single-parent household? The following question was

posed to each interviewee: "please take a few minutes to recall your childhood years growing up in a single-parent household. Describe what that was like for you". These open-ended questions allowed the participants to respond in their own words. Patton (2002) describes this question type as a "truly open-ended question [which] permits those being interviewed to take whatever direction and use whatever words they want to express what they have to say (p. 354). Additional questions emerged throughout the interview as a result of the participants' responses and the dialogue that ensued. Follow-up and probing questions such as "who", "what", "where", "when", "how" and "why" were used to increase the richness and depth of participants' responses. At times it was necessary to ask participants to elaborate or I would rephrase what was expressed for the sole purpose of clarification.

Interviews were audio-taped using an erasable digital voice recorder. Patton (1990) described a tape recorder as "indispensable" (p. 348) as it has the advantage of capturing data more efficiently, allowing the researcher more time to focus on the interview. Interviews lasted from approximately one hour to one hour and forty-five minutes.

Each recording was identified using a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. Following each recorded interview, the tape was reviewed to ensure it had functioned properly during the interview. Patton (2002) contends that this post-interview strategy confirms the quality of the data. The participants were thanked again and reminded that there may be a follow-up telephone call to clarify any areas of ambiguity or uncertainty.

They were also reminded to expect a copy of their transcribed interview to be reviewed for accuracy and authenticity.

Field Notes. Although interviews were audio-taped, it was necessary to also capture the social atmosphere in which the interview took place. To fulfill this purpose and to assist with the data collection phase, a journal was utilized. Immediately following each interview, I recorded details about the setting and my observations about the interview. Loftland and Loftland (1999) recommend the addition of field notes to assist in the organizing and analyzing of data. Detailed notes included demographic information on each participant, a description of the physical setting, the participant's attire, and his non-verbal expressions throughout the interview.

I also chronicled my own thoughts, feelings, speculations and impressions throughout the research process. It was important to reflect on these issues and make notes while the experience was part of my immediate memory. Patton (2002) recommends that field notes be written during the interview as specific details may not be recalled at a later time. I however, wanted to remain totally engaged in the interview process therefore note-taking was deferred until each interview had ended. Kvale (1996) explains that it is not uncommon for therapists to refrain from taking notes during a session relying instead on active listening. Although my role was not as a therapist, I was able to incorporate the training and experience related to that role.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is critical to the research process and brings "order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Stainback and Stainback (1988) contend that:

> Data analysis involves organization, classification, categorization, search for patterns, and synthesis as well as determination of missing information requiring further search to achieve an in-depth, holistic understanding about a topic of concern. As data are collected from the field, generally they are organized into manageable units and/or synthesized into other available information in an attempt to define and/or refine research findings (p. 64).

Organizing the data. Creswell (2008) recommends that the first step in data analysis is the organization and preparation of the data which involves the transcribing of interviews. Once the interviews were completed, the audio-recordings were transferred to my firewall and password-protected home computer. Each recorded interview was played and re-played to assist me in visually re-creating the actual interview and to listen for any commonalities among the participants' stories. After listening to each audio-recording twice, I proceeded to transcribe each interview. This process proved quite daunting, consuming many long and tedious hours. It, however, offered me an extraordinary opportunity to become emerged in the data.

The initial transcript of each interview was handwritten. This handwritten copy was then read in its entirety as I listened once again to the audio-recording, making any necessary changes. Once that process was complete, the handwritten copy was typed using Microsoft Word. The handwritten copy along with a printed, typed copy was then filed with each participant's informed consent. Additional copies were printed for use during data analysis. A copy of the transcript was submitted via e-mail to each participant for member checking. Participants were given the opportunity to verify the authenticity of their story and if applicable, make changes.

Following verification from participants, each transcript was read twice, the first time to provide me with a general sense of the information and its overall meaning; the second time involved a line by line examination for the purpose of identifying and classifying any recurring ideas and concepts. Saldana (2009) suggests that as researchers we document our thoughts while reviewing field notes and transcribed interviews, to "jot down any preliminary words or phrases for codes on the notes, transcripts, or as an analytic memo for future reference" (p. 17). As I perused and analyzed each transcript, I made supplemental notes about ideas or key concepts that emerged from the text in the margin of the transcript. A similar procedure was adopted upon reviewing my field notes.

Generating categories and themes. Qualitative researchers engage in data analysis to generate themes and interpretations about the data collected and while this phase is difficult and complex, it lends shape and form to the tremendous amount of data (Marshall & Rossman, 1998). Creswell (1998) contends that the goal of a qualitative

phenomenological study is to describe the essence of an experience by analyzing statements, meanings and themes in the thoughts and feelings expressed by the participants. The specific procedures utilized incorporated strategies from Creswell (2008) and Moustakas' (1994) modification of the van Kaam method of analysis. A thorough review of each participant's narrative revealed a detailed and descriptive account of their lived experience as African American males who were raised in a single-parent household, all of whom had achieved success, as defined by this study.

Statements that pertained specifically to the participant's experience of being raised in a single-parent household were succinctly reviewed, with each statement having equal worth, a process Moustakas (1994) defined as *horizonalization*. This process facilitated non-repetitive and non-overlapping statements that were transformed into clusters of meaning. These clusters, relevant to the research questions, were then color-coded and categorized based on similar concepts that had emerged from each participant's experience (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003). After a thorough analysis of each transcribed interview and field notes, the following dominant themes were generated from the coded categories: (1) mother's influence, (2) sense of security, (3) sense of self-worth, (4) high expectations, and (5) support systems.

Composite Description of the Phenomenon

The common themes that emerged were utilized to develop a textural portrayal of each participant's experience as an African American male who was raised in a single-parent household and who have become successful despite the challenges they were exposed to. Moustakas (1994) states the textural description captures "the situation,

conditions, and relationships in which the situation occurs" (p.118). A structural description, the "how" of each participant's experience was then composed. The final narrative, a composite description integrating the textural and structural descriptions, was then constructed to convey the essence of the lived experiences of the participants.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Marshall & Rossman (1999) contend that all research must satisfy criteria that will evaluate its trustworthiness. There has been much debate over what specific criteria should be used to evaluate qualitative inquiry because as Eisner (1991) argues, "there are no operationally defined truth tests to apply to qualitative research" (p. 53).

For this study, I utilized the criteria as proposed by Lincoln & Guba (1985) in assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative research: *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability*.

Credibility. Credibility refers to the ability of the researcher to demonstrate that the phenomenon under study was accurately identified and described, and must be "credible to the constructors of the original multiple realities" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296). To achieve credibility, Lincoln & Guba (1985) recommend a number of strategies, two of which are triangulation and member checking.

Triangulation pertains to the use of multiple methods or data designed to "overcome the intrinsic bias that comes from single-methods, single-observer, and single-theory studies" (Denzin as cited in Patton, 2002). For the purpose of this study, triangulation involved comparing and cross-checking transcribed interviews with audio-recordings to ensure consistency of information. Additionally, field notes that were kept

in my journal as well as analytic memos recorded throughout data analysis served as data source to further corroborate what the participants had disclosed.

Member checking is considered the most crucial technique for establishing credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This process invites participants to review data, analytic categories, interpretations and conclusions, and provide feedback. The involvement of participants allows them an opportunity to correct any errors, provide additional information, challenge what is perceived as the wrong interpretation, or confirm the researcher's findings. Member checking was employed for this study during the interview phase to address any ambiguity and achieve clarification. Telephone calls were made to two participants after their interviews to further clarify statements that were inaudible on the audio-recordings. Once all the interviews were transcribed, a copy of the transcription was sent to participants to review for authenticity and to ensure that an accurate account of their experiences had been portrayed. All participants confirmed that the transcripts had accurately captured their thoughts and feelings. Subsequently, a copy of the composite description of their experience of being raised in a single-parent household was sent to all participants to identify any important areas that may have been missed, and to evaluate the validity of my findings.   Participants' responses confirmed the interpretations made as illustrated in the composite description.

Transferability. Transferability refers to the extent to which a study's findings can be applied or generalized to other contexts and is analogous to external validity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that

> the qualitative researcher cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry;

he or she can provide only the thick description necessary to enable

someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about

whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility (p. 316).

Thick detailed descriptions about the data will allow researchers interested in

transferring information to make informed decisions as to what is appropriate.

Dependability. To establish dependability, Marshall and Rossman (1999)

recommend providing a clear rationale for the research design and to account for changing

conditions within the research design. The daily use of a journal allowed me to record my

thoughts and subsequently, decisions regarding the research process. It was extremely

important that I recognize any bias through self-reflection, given my personal connection

with the phenomenon. Any presumptions were recorded in a daily journal, and bracketed

to avoid interference of the data.

Confirmability. Confirmability includes a re-examination of the data, findings,

and interpretations. One of the major techniques involves an audit trail. Copies of

transcribed interviews, field notes, and other notes used in the analysis phase were

maintained throughout the study. All files pertaining to this study are secured in a locked

cabinet.

Delimitation of the Study

Participants in this study were limited to African American males who were raised

in a single-parent household, and identified as successful. All the participants were over

the age of 18, had completed high school, had attended college, were employed and had

no prior involvement in the criminal justice system. The study excluded all others who

did not meet the criteria.

Chapter IV: Data Analysis And Presentation

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how African-American males experience being raised in a single-parent household, and what factors have contributed to their success. The study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of these participants. Criterion sampling was used to ensure each participant was a successful product of the phenomenon of interest. A thorough examination of their perceptions provided much-needed insight into the significant events that have allowed them to become successful members of society.

Participants were solicited through an invitation letter that was sent to family members, professional contacts in the community, colleagues and friends. Interviews were conducted at the participant's home, in my private office or by Skype and later transcribed by hand. Data analysis involved a color-coded process which allowed me to organize and categorize recurring ideas, experiences and concepts. This analytic process resulted in the emergence of themes which contributed to an overall understanding of what the participants experienced being raised in a single-parent household. This chapter introduces the participants using pseudonyms assigned to protect each individual's identity and maintain confidentiality. Also presented are the major themes which emerged from the participants' stories as revealed through in-depth interviews, illustrated by direct quotations from each participant. The themes are as follows: (a) mother's influence, (b) sense of security, (c) sense of self-worth, (d) high expectations, and (e) support systems.

Participants' Profiles

Participants included 8 African American males who were identified as being raised in a single-parent, and who are successful members of society as defined by this study. All eight participants had completed high school and had earned an undergraduate degree. Seven of the eight participants are currently employed. One participant had been employed since obtaining his undergraduate degree but resigned his position to pursue law school which he recently completed. None of them admitted to being disruptive in school or engaging in any criminal activities. All eight participants identified their mothers as their custodial parent, the single-parent of their household. The following information is provided to give the reader an overview of each participant's demographic information. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants:

Brian is 27 years old, resides in Maryland with his wife and son. He holds a Bachelor's Degree and is currently employed. He is unaware of his parents' marital status; his custodial parent was his mother. He does not know his father who was incarcerated at the time of his birth.

Anthony is 28 years old, resides in South Florida and is single. He has earned the title of Doctor of Optometry. His mother is single, never married.

Chris is 30 years old, resides in South Florida, and is married. He holds both a Bachelor's Degree and a Master's degree, and is currently employed. His parents are divorced; his custodial parent was his mother.

Simon is 21 years old, resides in South Florida, is single and holds an Associate's Degree. He currently works in a family-owned business. He however, aspires to become

a professional athlete and is currently pursuing that opportunity. His parents are divorced; his custodial parent was his mother.

Howard is 28 years old and resides in Maryland with his wife and two children. He holds a Bachelor's Degree and a Master's Degree, and is currently employed. His parents are divorced; his custodial parent was his mother.

Neville is 28 years old, resides in Pennsylvania, and is married. He earned both a Bachelor's Degree and a Master's Degree and is currently employed. His custodial parent was his mother. His mother is single, never married.

Lincoln is 38 years old, resides in Georgia, is married and has two children. He earned a doctoral degree and is in private practice. His parents are divorced; his custodial parent was his mother.

Jackson is 29 years old, resides in South Florida, is single and holds two Master's Degrees. He recently earned a Juris Doctorate. He has been in the work force since graduating with his Bachelor's Degree but is currently seeking employment in the legal arena. His parents are divorced; his custodial parent was his mother.

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how African-American males experience being raised in a single-parent household and to identify the factors that have contributed to their success. Each participant expressed that they were unaware of any differences in their family structure at an early age and was accepting of it. Their awareness of other family structures became evident in later years, while in middle school. The following quotes from their interviews illustrate their early perception of the family structure:

Brian: I didn't have that male presence in the household and it was okay. I've honestly felt like everything I needed I've gotten from my mother. My friend's father definitely looked out for me, took me to basketball practice, took me to Dodger's games and baseball games, basketball games, football games, just made sure you know he treated me like I was one of his own and definitely looked out for me because you know I didn't have that male presence in the household.

Anthony: It was always my mother and me. I didn't find it unusual or different from everyone else. I did become aware that other kids had both their mothers and fathers but somehow I was okay with our little family. My mom moved here with very little and her goal was to make a home for use – I was content with that. I knew she was going to be there for me and that's what mattered.

Chris: My mom was everything to me, my mother, father, friend so to me, that's the way it was. Growing up a lot of kids had their parents, both of their parents. I was about 12, it was middle school, when I began to pay attention to the people around me. The three people I spent most of my time with in my neighborhood had both their parents, and that's when I realized I didn't have a typical family.

Simon: This is how life is and my life isn't all that bad. My mom provided for me as much as she could; she did a good job of putting me in a good environment to really learn and grow.

Howard: Being raised in a single-parent household was not a major issue for me. I guess I always figured that I never had anything to compare it to, meaning, as long as I

can remember, my parents were separated, therefore never really knowing what it was like.

Neville: It didn't quite occur to me that my family arrangement was different or any different from anyone else's because there were people around all the time. If you fast forward to when we left New York, and it was really for a period of about five or six years, just my Mom and my brother and I, there were some family members there but really in those moments that's when it was realized. You would go to parent-teacher night and there was always just Mom. That's when you started to understand that there were individuals around who had both parents.

*Lincoln***:** I just remember this is how it was. I remember my mom telling us - she showed us a picture of her with me in the stroller with my sister in her hand walking to work, she had no transportation. The main three people that I hung around had both their parents, their uncles came by, their aunts came from out-of-town, two of the friends I had their parents remarried and their biological dads came and got them at different times, they all came around, so you know, they had their moms, their dads, their stepdads and their biological dads, a lot of family coming around.

Jackson: I didn't feel I was missing out on anything. I considered myself blessed. So for me, this was how life was. As I got older and saw families on TV, I began to realize that the typical family had mom and dad and the kids. I didn't know my dad, he left around the time I was born, but my relationship with my mom is a very good one so that made it easier to accept.

All eight participants shared that their recollection of their early childhood years revolved around their mother and siblings. They believed their mother's love for them provided a sense of security. This *sense of security* was one of the themes that emerged during close analysis of the data, and will be discussed later. Each participant was initially asked to identify their custodial parent and to describe their relationship with that parent. All the participants indicated that their custodial parent was their mother and described having a very strong relationship with her. Each participant expressed that because of this relationship with their mother, they were greatly influenced by her words and actions, to behave in a manner consistent with her teachings.

The participants described their mothers using qualities such as loving, caring, strong, determined, hard-working, patient, never complaining, willing to make sacrifices, unselfish. The participants voiced that these qualities inspired them to "want to please mom", to adopt similar traits that would allow them to be successful. They further reported that their mothers' strength, determination and unwavering support served as a catalyst for their pursuit of a college education and a career.

Themes

Participants were invited to share their experience of growing up in a single-parent household. Based on their account of this experience and the subsequent analysis of the transcribed interviews, field notes and analytic memos, the following themes emerged:

(a) *mother's influence*, (b) *sense of security*, (c) *sense of self-worth*, (d) *high expectations* and (e) *support systems*.

Themes are presented as follows, with supporting narratives from each participant. Excerpts from their individual interviews provide evidence of the love and pride each participant demonstrated as they shared their perception of their mothers and how they were motivated and influenced by her words and actions:

Mother's Influence

Brian: My mother means everything to me; she provided for me and everything I hold dear in my life my mother has instilled in me. I'm just happy that I had the mother that I had. I'm proud that I had the mother that I had. I work hard for myself, for my family first and foremost but I work hard really to make my mother proud as a 27 year old man. We still to this day have a very close relationship, one that I appreciate and cherish. I know that who I am as a person is directly attributed to my mother's upbringing. Growing up what drove me is not to disappoint my mother. Everything I hold dear in my life my mother has instilled in me.

Anthony: My mom has survived cancer twice. The first time I was too young to understand the ramifications of such a disease. The second bout occurred only last year and that's when I realized just how strong my mother is. She never complained even when she was too weak to move a muscle. That's her character, that's who she is – a woman of such inner strength, inner peace, and of strong faith. Her concern is always for me, and for that I will always be grateful. She has been my greatest blessing. I am about to open my own practice and this was made possible because of my mom's determination to see me succeed. I owe everything to her. My goal is to not only make her proud but to take care of her financially. She has struggled for too long.

Chris: My mom was everything to me so she was my mother, father and my friend growing up. She was you can say, my rock. That's who she is to me. That's who she is until this day. Our relationship has changed over the years as I have gotten older, in terms of our interactions, but she is and always will be my role model. I'll look for her or want to hear her opinion sometimes just to see what she thinks about a situation. She provides that neutral voice in my head that will tell you if you are doing something wrong or doing something right or maybe you just need to look at the situation a different way. My mom was involved in everything and that just shows how much she had vested in my sisters and I. That being said, I just never wanted to disappoint her.

Simon: It has always been a loving one. My mom has always been the type of person that put others before herself, especially her family and her kids. She taught me how to be unselfish and a big part of my personality today comes from her. I think when you really love somebody is when you can honestly look in the mirror and say, this person's needs are more important than mine. My mom showed me how to be a kind hearted person and really showed me what love is, being unselfish and putting others before oneself.

Howard: My mom is the strongest woman I know. She has consistently demonstrated her love for her family, making sacrifices for us, always neglecting to put her needs before us. Her teachings, choices she made for us, for example, choice of neighborhoods to reside, the power of her word, her deep desire to help others, these and other such character traits, positively influenced my subsequent thoughts and actions. She was super tough; she kept pushing me to be ahead of the curve.

Neville: It was unique. I think from an early age I was identified as a leader and was always given much responsibility. I spent a lot of time helping my mom manage everything, especially my younger brother and cousins. I think my relationship with my mom was strengthened as a result. It's unique in that we seem to know what we each need to do to help the other without any direct conversation – we just do. That is not only unique, but shows how close we are to each other. I saw a quiet persistence, strength, the ability to juggle and to manage and to never let on, to have that resolve, serves as an inspiration for others.

Lincoln: I had a very good relationship with my mother; actually we still do today. She instilled in me what I try to impart to my own children, to my clientele. She is a compassionate and loving person who taught me to share that compassion and love with others so that you can have a positive impact on their lives. She has had that positive impact on my life. She worked so hard, working two jobs to provide for my sister and I and yet I never saw her cry or hear her complain. Despite all the struggles, she put us through college, and I am proud to say, also went to college. As a matter of fact, we both began our doctoral studies together, and now she has her Ph.D.   I don't even remember when she completed her other degrees or when she would have had the time. But, she now has a doctorate and that makes me proud.

Jackson: We have a very close relationship. I have always been able to talk to my mother about anything; you could say we were 'room-mates' in that she was never contentious, I always felt quite relaxed at home, and I knew that she only wanted the best for me. I understood her and because of that, we still have a very good relationship. Mom

built an environment for success; her life lessons, her ability to serve a dual-role,

motivated me to keep moving forward, to achieve the American Dream. Despite her own

poor upbringing, she was able to pursue that dream – that's the greatest inspiration one

can have.

Sense of Security

Participants described their home as one of rules, defined roles and boundaries.

They stated that they all knew their place within the household, and each of them

respected that role. They added that as they became older, those roles changed as they

were given increased responsibility. The bond between mother and son, they reported,

had grown stronger as they had earned their mother's trust. They described feeling safe,

not worrying about anything as they knew their mothers would protect them, and provide

for them. They believed having boundaries helped create stability within the home. They

shared that their needs were always met, even when there were difficult times. Three

participants discussed their awareness of their mom's economic status as they got older,

and realized the severity of their financial conditions. They explained that there were

times when they wanted to attend an event, or get a new pair of sneakers, but knew it was

not realistic. Other participants shared that either they were unaware of their financial

status or that their moms did well financially and so "money was not an issue".

Brian: I had a strong mother who worked very hard to provide for me. I only

wanted to make my mother proud and that was a big deterrent for me going the opposite

way. There was never an option for me going the opposite way because mom **ONLY**

(emphatically) presented one option and that's to do well in school and to go to college to

begin a career, and you know, just be able to take care of yourself. She made sure, although she had to work so hard, that I had the tools I needed to do well in school and get into college. My mom didn't have a college degree and so it was extremely important to her that I go to college.

Anthony: We didn't have much but we had each other. It may sound cliché but I didn't require much. I remember when I was very little, my mom and I slept in a room in a family friend's room. We did eventually move but mom could only afford a small apartment; we didn't even have a bed at first, we slept on the floor. I think you quickly learn to appreciate what you have – we had our own apartment and although tiny, we had a place to live. My mom lived a simple life, never concerned about material things. I never felt poor; I never asked for anything because I didn't want to put more pressure on my mom.

Chris: I never felt like my mom put us on the back corner. We were always up front. I always felt like she went above and beyond to make sure certain things were met. My mom got me everything I wanted and then looking back at that, you see that I got everything I wanted within reason. She really made sure that at least maybe to her, that I never feel that I was at a disadvantage. She would sacrifice and make it happen.

Simon shared that his grandmother had migrated here from Jamaica and had started her own business which his mother has managed, and recently assumed ownership due to his grandmother's passing. He added that this offered his mom "peace of mind", not having to worry about her financial status:

Simon: Mom provided me with an environment where I never had to worry too much. We didn't have everything. We weren't spoiled, but she did a good job of allowing me to be able to focus on school. I didn't have to worry that I would have nothing to eat tonight, being hungry, or the lights are not going to come on tonight, or the shower water is not running tonight. She did a great job of allowing me to focus on all the things that I wanted to get done, which is a privilege.

Howard stated that he never worried about anything and added that "there was predictability – you knew what you were coming home to; you knew how each person would react, knowing each other's characteristics." He shared that one of his mother's priority was ensure that they would always feel safe as evidenced by her choice of neighborhoods and schools. He added that the choice of neighborhood always limited his exposure to negative images. He did recall watching his mother on the weekends trying to juggle the bills, to decide which to pay and which could be delayed "to ensure that we, my brother and I, had what we needed.

Neville spoke of the "financial limitations". He recalled:

You learn very quickly that you can only do so much on a single paycheck. We learned pretty quickly the value of patience, to appreciate what you have around you, even the cleanliness of your home, the people in your life. We didn't suffer in any way. For as much struggles as we've gone through, I've never lacked a want. You realize that the structure that's around you really solidifies the relationship you have, and ultimately that's what's important.

Lincoln: What I remember most is the times we had with our mother. She worked, she worked a lot during the evening time, but when she was home, we did so many things together. Life was difficult at times but we were content just enjoying being around each other. Mom used to work in a mall and we would be in the mall while she was at work, playing video games. So there were times when she was close-by and that was okay.

Jackson described being "comfortable" at home, and "relaxed" and even though he described himself as a "latch-key kid", he voiced that he never had any reason to doubt that his mother would not be able to provide for him as a single-parent.

Sense of Self-Worth

All the participants shared how their mothers encouraging words would inspire them to do their best. The participants talked about their mother's acknowledgement of the "small successes" they had which contributed to them feeling proud of their accomplishments. No task was ever overlooked, a part in a school play, first T-ball game, a band concert, first A on an assignment, and the positive reinforcements received fostered repeated performances to illicit similar responses. The participated reported that over time, they also began to feel an intense sense of pride and success. They soon realized that the external motivation was not warranted as they had learned to appreciate their achievements, and that feeling of accomplishment was sufficient.

Brian made reference to his physical features and recalled with much fondness, his mother teaching him how to accept himself. He shared that this not only helped him feel good about himself, but it also helped him develop a strong coping mechanism for dealing with adversities:

Brian: My mom you know, taught me to have thick skin, she taught me that things aren't always fair and people in life can be cruel and will make fun of you and she taught me that it's going to happen, but how are you going to respond to that? You can let that hold you back or you can take that and build upon that and don't let it hold you back. My mom definitely did that; she made sure I knew that one day somebody would appreciate those things people made fun of…..and somebody did (smiling). I am married to a beautiful wife. She taught me to have confidence in myself and that with that confidence I could make the right decisions.

Anthony spoke of helping his mother from an early age. He recalled being assigned chores and receiving positive reinforcements for completing them. He felt this introduction to responsibilities and the pride he also felt, helped build his self-esteem. He added that the better he felt about himself, the more confident he became. His contributions were seen as valuable and once he was able to recognize his capabilities, he was more equipped to handle any challenges that may arise as evidenced by the following excerpt:

"I started working at 16 and was able to buy my own car – that gave me a sense of pride, a sense of accomplishment; that showed a great deal of responsibility on my part."

Chris remembered how his mother despite her financial struggles, bought him a pair of Nikes when he earned all A's in school. He recounted that even though he was thrilled to receive a new pair of sneakers he was more touched by the gesture because he knew his mother could not afford them, and that act really helped to boost his self-confidence and self-image. He shared that prior to that experience, he had struggled to get

A's and this recognition from his mother gave him the confidence he needed to persevere. He stated "I think it was things like that why I am the person I am today".

Simon: My drive and not ever wanting to give up on something I'm really passionate about I get from my mother, and my grandmother. My mom has always been supportive and encouraging. She made me feel that my life was worth all her hard work, all the sacrifices she made. I understood the sacrifices she made and that brought about a sense of urgency on my part to be more actively involved in the home, to be responsible. That helped me believe in myself; that I was capable.

Howard recalled the "plethora of extracurricular activities" he participated in and the support he received from his mother. He explained how she would always encourage him to do his best at whatever he chose to do. He shared how delighted he would be to see the smile on his mother's face when he had accomplished so deed, no matter how insignificant it may have seen to him. He shared an early memory of field day activities in elementary school where everyone participated and all earned participation ribbons:

"When I got home, mom was so excited and proud of me. Her ability to appreciate the small things in life is a great motivator, builds one's self- confidence and increases your desire to strive for the best that you can possibly be."

Neville *recognized* at an early age that he had to assume some responsibility for his younger brother and cousin. He spoke of the need to immerse himself in that role because of his mother's strength and endurance, and not wanting to fail her. He spoke of an inner drive that pushed him. Having a strong sense of self, and self –determination, added responsibility made him a more confident person. He recalled working at age 13 to

help mom, to "just help take some of that pressure off", adding that mom's appreciation help boost his self-confidence.

Lincoln *recalled* that as a "latch-key kid" he developed a greater sense of responsibility. Being able to demonstrate to his mother that he could be responsible gave him a greater sense of self-confidence, to belief in himself. He stated that his cooperation at home was recognized and appreciated by mom and this fueled his motivation to always be willing to help not just his mom, but to help others as well; the latter lesson he explains, mom also taught him.

Jackson: My mother was continually pushing me to live up to my potential. She taught me to set goals and if needed to re-adjust those goals; that hard work required a lot of effort and responsibility; that everything must be earned. You must have confidence in yourself if you are determined to achieve your goals and she helped me build that self-confidence. I learned to read at a young age and soon realized that I enjoyed learning. That allowed me to perform well in school and so for me, I didn't need to put a lot of effort into achieving. I felt confident about my own abilities and wanting mom to feel good about my performance, constantly strived to live up to my potential.

High Expectations

All eight participants spoke of their mother's firm discipline, consistent pushing, and her unwillingness to discuss alternative options when it pertained to certain issues such as demonstrating good morals, exercising responsibility, and education. Each described how they were held to high standards to ensure that they achieved the primary goal set by their mothers – to obtain a good education which meant going to college.

They all shared that their mothers believed that a solid education would allow them to

procure employment, enabling them to be self-sufficient. All participants spoke of being

pushed by their mothers. They recalled being told that they would be challenged because

of their racial identity and would need to perform at a higher level than their non-Black

counterparts. They all shared that there was open communication between mother and

son; expectations were explicitly stated on a consistent basis. All shared that they

continue to enjoy this open communication with their mothers.

Brian shared that his mother's drive and determination taught him what it meant to

be productive:

My mother was a hard worker, a very hard worker. She taught me what it meant to

have strong work ethics. There are core principles that you need to follow but you have to

be taught. I know every core principle of my life my mother has taught me. And so I

wasn't impressionable and following the crowd, instead I did what I was taught was right.

She taught me that education was the only way. There was no option but for me to go to

college. She made sure that I knew that and for me, there wasn't an option.

Anthony: So many times I wanted to give up, so many obstacles, but my mother

put so many expectations on me that I could not let her down. She set the ceiling so high,

ever time I felt like giving up, I thought of my mother. Being an only child, I was very

independent; I knew what I needed to do because of the firm structure my mother had

established. I eventually created my own structure; I knew right from wrong, no-one had

to tell me to do homework, I knew to do it. So mom could relax the structure with a layer

of flexibility when she realized I could be expected to behave in a manner consistent with her teaching.

Chris: I was expected to help my mother out and so I shared the responsibility of watching over my younger sisters. Mom really didn't need the distraction of me being a bad child because she had two other kids to worry about, so I did what I was told to do. I didn't want to disappoint my mom. She taught me about making choices and setting goals – she would tell me to make sure to do well in school, that I would find something I like, and whatever interested me, that's what I follow. It was make sure you achieve what you need to achieve to complete your goals. She would stress that to accomplish my goals I need to make sure to get an education.

Simon: Spare the rod and spoil the child was the mentality in my household growing up so you learn quickly what is expected of you. I got spanked a few times and it did me a lot of good because I never went back to what I did. I believe in disciplining your children. My mom would always have a conversation with me afterwards to make sure I understood what mistakes I had made and to for me to consider what my alternatives were. I've had to show her that even though I've made mistakes, I'm going to learn from each one. That's what life is really about. Being the eldest of four, my uncles always told me that I had to be the man of the house and try to help my mom in whatever way. That helped shape me. I was able to give my mom moral support and just be there for her, making life a little easier like making sure the house was clean. I played the big brother role, learning as I go along, trying to do the best to set a good example.

Howard: Mom was very strict but looking back, there was no resistance to my mom's plan of attack. Her primary focus was academics. She came from a well-educated family whose belief is that education holds the key to success. That was introduced from an early age. My love for reading, instilled by my mother, has greatly impacted my ability to perform well in school. I am a strong advocate for introducing children to reading at a young age, to develop a joy for learning and more importantly, to help them think creatively and critically. I was always being told to push myself, do more, strive for more.

Neville: No was never a response that you gave when asked to do something. You learn what behaviors are appropriate and what behaviors are not. I also learned at an early age, responsibility. Shortly after we left New York, my younger cousin came to live with us while her parents prepared to join us. I helped out with little things like getting her toys, packing them away, setting the table. And so by the time my brother was born, I had already assumed a leadership role and was able to further assist my mom around the house. When you recognize at an early age what your mother has done in order to provide you with those opportunities and she's made significant choices that have literally taken herself off track for her personal goals to really invest in you, you have that extra drive. I struggled with that responsibility at times, but I knew I needed to set the tone and the example for my younger brother and cousins. Education was always important; it was always clear that the pursuit of an education would be a priority in our household.

Lincoln spoke of his mother's desire to see her children succeed and pursue a better quality of life. He described how his mother held two jobs and worked hard to make sure both he and his sister could obtain a college education. They learned to be

responsible at an early age as he recalled being "latch-key kids" and having to be self-sufficient while their mother worked. Realizing the reason for her sacrifices, he explained, made it easier to fulfill his obligations in the home, and in school where he was expected to do well.

Jackson: My grandparents who were, according to my mother, quite poor, managed to put all eight of their children through college. Most of my aunts and uncles, and my mother are pharmacists. There was never a doubt that I was expected to go to college, an expectation I quite easily embraced. I was a latch-key kid so I learned responsibility at a very young age. My mom and I would talk a lot and she would always say that I need to work with her, to be good; that was made clear, and so that became my focus. It was easy to please; I just did what I was supposed to do.

Support Systems

Seven of the participants spoke of the tremendous help that was extended to their mothers from family members, in particular their grandmothers. They spoke very fondly of their grandmothers who they believed also provided much guidance and helped to shape their concept of self and the realities of life. They believed that this support system helped to alleviate some of the stressors their mothers experienced as a single-parent. Two participants described themselves as "latch-key kids", however while one acknowledged that there was support from his mother's family and from their church community, the other participant shared that his mother lacked the support needed. All spoke of the strong faith in God which was their ultimate support system, one instilled in

them by their mother. They credited their church family with imparting sound principles that also contributed to their understanding and family values.

Brian spoke of support from his grandmother, other family members, his church community and the father of one of his close friends:

Brian: My grandmother was a big presence in my life, along with my uncles, and my friend's parents in the neighborhood who looked out for me. My friend's father definitely looked out for me, took me to basketball practice, basketball games, took me to Dodger's games, and you know, treated me like I was one of his own. Everything I needed I've gotten from my mother and the other supporting people around me, my grandmother, my uncles, my church, and my friend's parents.

Anthony spoke of the support that came primarily from his mother's church family and from a close friend. He reported that during his school years, his mother's family resided in Trinidad, and although one uncle did live close-by, he had relocated during his middle school years. He credits his achievements to not only his mother but to the people who she surrounded him with.

Chris shared that his grandmother would provide supervision while his mother was at work and was very instrumental in teaching him socially acceptable behaviors.

Chris: We had help or I should say mom had help from her side of the family as in my grandmother. When she was at work, we would stay with my grandmother. If my mom wasn't home, we were with my grandmother. Our grandmother was there to make sure we were not roaming the streets and you had somebody to come home to. My grandmother played a big role in manners because when you come home from school, you

had to do X, Y, and Z and then my mom would come home and make sure we had

followed our grandmother's directives, to be polite, say thank you, please and so forth.

Simon: My grandma was a good support system. My grandmother watched me a

lot, even when my parents divorced and split up; we stayed at her house for a couple of

years. She was a big disciplinarian, old school, so the rod was never spared at any

moment. She raised five children by herself when she moved her as my grandfather

stayed behind to run his shoe factory and she did a great job at it; it all just trickled down

to my mother. My uncles were also a big part of my life. I'd say they did a pretty good

job filling that male gap.

Howard: My mother's family was very supportive. For as far back as I can

remember my grandmother has been an important part of our lives. My grandfather

traveled back and forth as he had maintained his business in Jamaica so he was not always

around. I can't remember my grandmother missing any events I participated in – whether

it was school events such as band concerts, plays, to athletic events, she made it a priority

to be actively involved and that speaks to the closeness our family enjoyed. We have an

extremely close relationship and I know my mother is the person she is because of my

grandparents. My aunts and uncle were also very supportive as were our extended family

members and my mother's closest friends. I know it was very difficult for my mom,

especially economically, and while they could not assist in that way, their love and

support helped ease some of the physical and emotional stress she often experienced.

Neville: I grew up in a bit of an extended family so cousins, aunts, uncles and my

grandmother played significant roles in my immediate nucleus. I grew up in an extremely

giving and caring environment and so there was always that feeling that everyone did their part to kick in. There was always a general excitement, a welcome feeling to see everybody around you.

Lincoln identified additional support as one of the greatest needs of a single parent. He recalled not having family members close-by, and noted that "As much as mom was involved in church, that someone would have been that support but I don't recall any of them reaching out to help her." He did speak very highly of his high school coach who he stated provided much guidance during those school years. He also reported including his coach in the dedication section of his dissertation.

Jackson: I was blessed to have a strong support system. My mother comes from a large family so there was support from her many siblings. We enjoy a very close family relationship and so I feel as if everyone helped to raise me in some way. I consider my self blessed because of the love that surrounded me growing up and still endures today. My church family's involvement has also played an integral part in my life. The church is a pillar of the community, provides a good, strong influence. Our Sunday School teachers pushed us to stay on track, and our accomplishments were always greeted with a lot of pride and recognition.

Textural Description

The thick descriptive narratives presented by the eight African American males in this study embodied the themes identified above which provides the "textures of the experiences" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122). According to Moustakas (1994) a textural description explains what occurred during an experience. The consensus among all the

participants was that growing up in single-parent household was "normal." According to each participant, normalcy pertained to having their family members in the home with them. These they identified as a parent, which in all cases was their mother, and siblings, if any. The single-parent household was a comfortable and familiar place for them, and a stable household.

The participants spoke of their mother's determination to provide for them physically and mentally; making sure that basic necessities were always available, making sure arrangements for their supervision were made in her absence. The two participants who described themselves as latch-key kids shared that their mothers would telephone periodically, to "check in" to ensure they were well and that they had completed any homework or assigned chores. All participants experienced defined roles and boundaries within their respective households. While their roles remained constant, the boundaries became less rigid as they were able to demonstrate to their mothers that they were capable of meeting her identified expectations.

Everyone had responsibilities that were fulfilled in accordance with the rules set by their mothers. No-one expressed any displeasure with the expectations and responsibilities as they admitted that "no was not an option". There was an inner desire to please mom and not "disappoint" her. This was manifested in their behaviors and communication as their way of reciprocating for the "sacrifices" she had made for them. They all stated this was their way of "giving back" to their mothers. Involvement in extracurricular activities, assigned time for homework and completing chores provided a

structured routine that they believed helped hone their skills in time management, cooperation, and communication.

Structural Description

Moustakas (1994) explains that the aim of the structural description is to "arrive at a structural description of an experience….the "how" that speaks to conditions that illuminate the "what" of an experience. How did the experience of the phenomenon come to be what it is?" (p. 97-98). The experiences of the eight participants were described around the structures of space and human relationship. In describing how they experienced being raised in a single-parent household, all eight participants shared that they felt safe within their homes. They regarded their mothers as their protector, invoking within them, a sense of peace, of being complete. Their mothers' presence in the home gave them a sense of belonging. They each reported knowing their respective roles in the household and being accepting of having one parent.

Each of the participants spoke of their close relationship with their mothers. They believed their relationship was based on mutual respect, trust, and love. The love they all felt for their mothers was evident in the tone of voice used when referencing her. As they reflected on what was the inspiration for their mothers' commitment to the family, they came to the realization that their mothers were displaying unconditional love. This selfless act helped them recognize the extent to which they were valued by their mothers. In their earnest attempt to reciprocate that love, each of them made their own commitment to make their mothers proud. They believed that their mothers' firm approach to discipline, implementation of rules, boundaries and expectations, were visible signs of the

immense love she had for her children. Acknowledging her love through obedience was a visible demonstration of their willingness to cooperate.

All the participants spoke of the need to engage in appropriate behavior in and outside of the home. They experienced an inner sense of "rightness" in compliance of this expectation, and were able to display these behaviors in various settings thereby avoiding any punitive consequences. This display of proper behavior fostered positive interpersonal relationships. They described having a close relationship with extended family members and enjoying a circle of friends throughout their childhood, some of whom they continue to maintain a relationship with.

Composite Description

The composite description, an integration of the textural and structural description, provides an understanding of how eight African American males experienced being raised in a single-parent household. The single-parent household represented a normal family for these African American males, with their mother being the head of the household. Most became aware of the difference in family structure during early school years when other students either at school, or in the neighborhood, would be present with both their mother and father. They were all accepting of their family structure as that was what they knew from a very early age. The close relationship they enjoyed with their mothers provided a sense of security. Their mothers created a home that was a warm and nurturing environment, one that offered a sense of stability, where everyone felt comfortable, felt their needs were being met, and knew their roles and their responsibilities. This provided them with a *sense of security*.

Their *mothers' influence* through her words and actions served to illuminate the factors that would pave the way to their success. Mothers were described as hard-working, determined no matter the challenges, persistent yet patient, selfless, making sacrifices for their families, supportive and loving, a disciplinarian. Because of mom's sacrifices, there was an inner desire to succeed. Recognizing their mothers' commitment to them helped them realize the extent to which they were valued and that gave them a *sense of self-worth*. Mothers served as positive role model, instilling in her children a strong sense of self-worth, offering words of encouragement such as "you can do it"; positive reinforcements, constantly pushing her sons to excel in whatever he chose to do. The participants believed this built self-esteem, self-confidence and self-discipline. Although mothers engaged in disciplinary actions, there was open communication which allowed the participants to understand what was appropriate about their actions and the rationale for the subsequent consequences. This communication evolved over time with sons being given more opportunities to voice their opinions.

There were *expectations* that needed to be met; sons were expected to be respectful, to adhere to their mother's rules as one participant emphasized, "what mom says goes", and not wanting to disappoint their mother, would do what was right. Everyone had assigned tasks thereby developing a sense of responsibility. Some were expected to assist with younger siblings. Four of the participants described the bar as being "set so high"; two remarked that at times it was difficult, but watching their mother persevere, only implied that they too could do the same. They were expected to go to

school and to perform well. Education was stressed in all the households and perceived

as an essential avenue that would lead to success. Mothers expected their sons to go to

college even though not all mothers had earned a college degree, and sons were expected

to become gainfully employed. Mothers played an active role in their sons' education

and while they were not able to make all school-related functions/meetings, for the most

past, remained actively engaged in their sons' academic journey. One participant shared

that he and his mother had completed their doctoral studies together. Their mothers

encouraged involvement in extracurricular activities which certainly limited idle time but

also taught sons how to effectively manage their time, provided them with a structured

routine, increased socialization and the opportunity to live up to their full potential,

develop talents, identify strengths and weaknesses, and develop strong work ethics.

There were well- defined roles and boundaries. The love, guidance and support

from the mothers provided the building blocks for character development. Through her

words and actions, mothers exhibited strong morals and values which sons were expected

to demonstrate as well. Mothers were also described as having an inner strength – "I

don't really know how she did it" - was a common statement expressed. Mothers were

accepting of their single-parent status, never complained or made sons feel as if they

were a burden.

Despite the numerous challenges mothers faced, they seem to be able to function

well, employing a number of coping mechanisms. Some of these strategies, an

acceptance of who you are, where you are at the present time, knowing that you must

have a sense of where you want to go from here, living within one's means, were

strategies some sons have adopted in addition to others they have utilized based on

individual experiences. Some mothers struggled financially as observed by sons,

however, everyone admitted that their needs were met and that was important. This

lesson taught them to appreciate what they had, to value what was important, each other.

For most, there was a support system outside the home. One participant stated,

"mom was surrounded by a supporting cast". Mom had a support system, to include

extended family members - grandparents, aunts and uncles – in most instances, played a

pivotal role in helping the mothers ease their burden. Two described themselves as

'latchkey kids'. One spoke of the involvement of extended family members; the other

commented that having a support system would have been welcomed. Grandfathers and

uncles served as positive Black male role models. For most, grandmothers were also

instrumental in helping to shape their development. Others, such as teachers, coaches,

neighbors, friends' fathers, played a role as well offering, guidance and support along the

way. Another support came from the mothers' belief in God. All spoke of being raised

in the church and the impact that had on their respective lives. They believed their

mother's ability to cope with life's stressors came primarily from her faith.

Summary

Eight African American males were interviewed to gain an understanding of their

experience of being raised in a single-parent household, and the factors that enabled them

to become successful. All participants had completed high school, six had earned a

college degree; two had also received advanced degrees. None of the participants had been involved in the criminal justice system.

Analysis of their individual narratives describing their lived experiences revealed the following: (1) *mother's influence*, (2) *sense of security*, (3) *sense of self-worth*, (4) *high expectations*, and (5) *support systems*. All participants identified their mother's influence as the primary reason they had achieved success academically and professionally. Contrary to the reviewed literature, the single-parent household was portrayed as a safe, stable, and loving environment, one in which the African American males could achieve self-sufficiency.

This chapter presented an overview of the identified themes as they were revealed through the participants' interviews. Participants' direct quotes were included to illustrate their description of being raised in a single-parent household. Chapter V will provide a discussion of the findings that were presented in this chapter. The results will also be discussed in regard to family systems theory. Limitations of the study, implications for practice and research, and recommendations will also be presented.

Chapter V: Discussion And Implications Of The Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how African American males experience being raised in a single parent household and to identify what factors have enabled them to be successful. A qualitative phenomenological approach was utilized to procure thick, detailed descriptions gleaned from participant's narratives. Chapter IV presented the findings of the in-depth interviews that were conducted with African American males raised in a single-parent household who are successful. Chapter V provides a discussion of the findings, contributions to the field, limitations of the study, future direction for research and implications for practice

A vast body of literature revealed that single-parent household was a precursor for delinquency (Bilchik, 1999; Carlson & Corcoran, 2001). Furthermore, the consequences for African American males from these households were considered dismal, obscuring any chances of them being successful (Davis, 2003). The foci of the literature reviewed was on the weaknesses of the single-parent household and the disparity of educational and employment opportunities that diminish the chances for African American males to become productive members of society.

Chapter II offered an overview of the issues that have negatively impacted the African American male; being reared in a single parent household was viewed as the primary precipitating factor. The belief held by many social scientists is that African American males from single-parent households are at a disadvantage as they are more apt to perform poorly in school leading to high drop-out rates (Barton, 2004). Researchers further conclude that poor academic performance also heightens the risk for involvement

in the criminal justice system as the unstructured time permits them to engage in irresponsible behaviors that ultimately leads to incarceration, or in some cases, death (Johnson, 2010).

The purpose of this study was to fill the gap in the literature by shifting public discourse to the successful products of a single-parent household and the strengths inherent in such a family structure. A qualitative phenomenological approach was utilized to gain a rich, detailed description of the lived experiences of eight African American males. Family systems theory provided the framework to understand the factors that allowed the single-parent household to function well, thereby creating a pathway to success for the children involved.

Discussion of Findings

This research study was designed to gain an understanding of how African American males experienced being raised in a single-parent household and the factors that contributed to their success. Through an intensive analysis of the data, five themes were generated.

The themes gleaned from the participants' stories, as discussed in chapter IV include:

(1) *mother's influence*

(2) *a sense of security*

(3) *a sense of self-worth*

(4) *high expectations*

(5) *support systems*

The following questions were formulated to guide and frame the interviews:

Research Question 1: How do African American males experience being raised in a single-parent household?

The family structure did not play a significant role in how these African American males perceived their household. The single-parent household was a stable, safe and comfortable space. They did not consider themselves living outside of the cultural norm; this was their reality. The single parent, their mothers, created a warm, loving and nurturing environment in which the children's needs were a priority. The relationship between mothers and sons was one of mutual affection, respect, and trust. All eight participants described a close relationship with their mothers who greatly influenced them to follow the path she had created for them. One participant shared, "she was my mother, my father, my best friend." This was consistent with the literature which asserted that a strong parent-son relationship and emotional support contributes to the adolescent's psychological well-being (Harris, 1995; Paschall, Ringwalt & Flewelling, 2003).

None of the participants expressed a need to object to the *high expectations* set for them as they realized the importance of being responsible. Having responsibilities helped foster a sense of independence, self-confidence, and cooperation. The acknowledgment of a task well done boosted their self-esteem and gradually as they got older, they recognized the pride they felt at their accomplishments. Appropriate behaviors and accomplishments were rewarded. They spoke about feeling appreciated, being valued, having a *sense of*

self-worth. They learned that the intrinsic reward was exceedingly more rewarding than the extrinsic.

They expressed their admiration for their mother who they perceived as a "strong Black woman" who consistently made sacrifices for her children, worked effortlessly to provide for her family, and whose determination and perseverance helped pave the way for their success in life. The strong bond between mother and sons solidified their long-term relationship which each other, which participants described as currently one of mutual respect and deep affection.

Each participant felt a *sense of security* growing up in a single-parent household. Although some acknowledged that financially their mothers struggled, they all shared that their needs were always met. One spoke at length about his mother's difficult circumstances maintaining two jobs but despite the hardship, always made his needs her top priority. The single parent was realistic about setting limits, a skill the sons also learned. Much emphasis was placed on values, education, and religion. All were expected to go to college, and they did. Seven of the eight participants discussed the involvement of their grandparents, indicating that they had a close relationship with them as well. Grandparents played a significant role in all of the participants' lives, although all spoke primarily about their grandmother being more involved, providing supervision often. All the participants could recall family members attending school activities and other special events.

One participant recalled his grandmother being "much stricter than mom." They believe having that support system allowed their mother some respite. One participant

shared that his mother had no assistance as their family resided in another state. He

identified having a support system as essential for single parents.

Research Question 2: What factors contributed to their ability to cope in a single-

parent household?

All of the participants believed their mother's ability to cope with all the demands

of a single parent inspired them to be as accepting. They recalled that their mothers would

try to project a positive attitude; rarely would they notice her looking sad or anxious. One

participant shared that his mother always had a smile on her face, bringing a smile to those

around her. They all shared that their personality had been shaped by their mother's

attitudes, values, and behaviors. A strong belief in God also provided comfort; they

identified their faith as a major coping mechanism, a lesson learned from their mother.

All of the participants had been regular church-goers from a very young age and have

remained active through adulthood. Only one admitted that he was not currently attending

church. The participants spoke of their mother's realistic approach to life which also

allowed them to handle situations more effectively. The ability to adopt a positive outlook

on life despite the challenges proves to be an effective coping strategy.

Research Question 3: What factors have allowed you to become successful?

All eight participants identified their *mother's influence* as the primary factor that

propelled them to "do the best I can" as stated by one of the participants. Each participant

attributed their success to their mother's hard work and perseverance, the emphasis on

education and the high expectations the mothers had for their sons. All eight expressed a

strong desire to appease their mothers, to not "disappoint her" as evidenced in the following statement:

Brian

Growing up what drove me is not to disappoint my mother, I've always wanted to do good for myself and to make myself proud but I seek satisfaction knowing that I was doing the right thing to make my mother proud..and that definitely was a big deterrent for me going the opposite way there was never an option for me going the opposite way because my mom **ONLY[emphatic]** presented one **OPTION[emphatic]** – do well in school, go to college, begin a career, just be able to take care of yourself.

Simon

She did sacrifice a lot of things through her life to show that she did love us. I always felt that I had a mom that really loved me and I understand that. I'm always going to look out for you, even if I personally might not get all the benefits out of it…I could never let her down, disappoint her.

Jackson:

Mom was not a task master, but she made it clear that I had a lot of potential and therefore I can always do better, that I could achieve the best. I wanted her to feel good about my performance and so I worked hard to do just that, live up to my potential.

It should be noted that although all participants believed they were successful as defined by this study, all declared that they were still "in the process of succeeding". While some participants acknowledged that they had not achieved all the goals they had set for themselves, others stated that goals are constantly being identified, re-evaluated

and modified. All contend that success comes from the satisfaction of attaining those goals, and so one is always in the process of succeeding.

Family Systems Theory and Single Parenting

The vast body of literature that has investigated single-parenting have focused on its weaknesses, often times citing the home as "broken", "disrupted", and "pathological" leading scholars to argue that children from single-parent households suffer profound consequences (Bilchik, 1999). McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) posit that family structure has a larger effect on the behavior of young Black males than on young men from other racial and ethnic groups. The goal of this study was to gain an understanding of how African American males experience being raised in a single-parent household, and to identify the factors that allowed them to become successful. They were able to demonstrate successful social adjustment and achievement in their personal and professional lives despite being raised in a single parent household.

The findings of this study not only illuminated the success of these African American males, it also identified the strengths of single-parenting. According to Mosley-Howard and Evans (2000), family systems theory is "a valuable lens from which to examine the experiences of some African American families today" (p. 429). Key concepts in family systems theory are the interactions among family members, each member influencing the other, family roles, boundaries, rules, changes within the family, and connections (Bowen, 1978; Minuchin, 1974).

All the participants spoke of the close relationship they had with their mothers. The relationship formed the basis for their connectedness and allowed for mutual respect

and trust to emerge. They all spoke of knowing from an early age, everyone's roles; those were clearly established. According to systems theory, "normal families are thought to be organized hierarchically, according to generations, with parents and children having different amounts of authority" (Nichols, 1984, p.436). Systems theory is more interested in the actual interactions among family members. Boundaries serve as invisible barriers that surround family members and regulate the amount of contact with each other. All eight participants described their single-parent household as stable, with clear boundaries and expectations. Everyone knew what their respective roles and responsibilities were, and everyone fulfilled those obligations.

The ability of each family member to work independently, and cooperatively, enabled the family system to function. As a result, the family members were more equipped to handle any changes within the system and make any necessary adjustments. All of the participants spoke of boundaries becoming less rigid as they grew older. They had earned their mother's trust and were rewarded with added responsibilities and more flexible boundaries. This allowed them to become independent but still maintain a sense of belongingness; what family system refers to as dual identity (Nichols, 1984). This further demonstrates each member's ability to modify and adapt, not only to changes within the family system, but also in the external environment.

Family systems theory provided a framework to explain what allowed the single-parent household to function well. The implementation of well-defined roles, clear boundaries, and the ability of each family member to adapt and adjust to changes,

elucidates the strengths of the single-parent household as experienced by the African

American males who participated in this study.

Limitations of the Study

The population was purposefully selected to gain insight into how African

American males experience being raised in a single-parent household. This study was

limited to participants who met predetermined criteria to include:

(1) African American male

(2) 18 years of age and older

(3) raised in a single parent household

(4) completion of high school(GED) or higher

(5) employed, or history of employment

(6) no criminal record

Their stories provided relevant information regarding the experience of African

American males who were raised in a single-parent household and have attained success,

academically and professionally. This study was not intended to be generalizable to the

population at large.

Implications and Recommendations

This study was limited to African American males who were raised in single

parent households and who were able to attain success despite the odds against them.

My goal was to gain an understanding of how they experienced being raised in a

single parent household, and what factors allowed them to be successful. The findings of

the study not only illuminated the experience of being raised in a single-parent

household, but also the strengths of that household. All eight participants identified their mother as the single parent.

Projecting a more positive image of the single-parent household may distill some of the negative attention targeted at single parents and the children involved. As the number of single parent households continue to increase, resources need to be implemented that will allow the single parent and the child to be successful. The themes illustrated what the essential ingredients for a successful single-parent household entails. The following recommendations which incorporate these themes are offered in an attempt to build on existing models that promote success.

Recommendations:

1. The eight successful African American male participants highlighted the strengths of their single parent household.

It is my recommendation that parenting classes, to support the parent's current efforts, need to be promoted for single parents. There is a dire need to recognize the single parent, even those who may not be able to impart to their children the tools needed to be successful. If we are to effect change, then we need to focus less on the single parent's weaknesses and rather acknowledge their efforts and offer assistance to help them improve their role as a parent. Parents who currently participate in parenting classes are usually court-ordered. I believe however, that all single parents can benefit from these classes which should not be limited to only those single parents who are struggling because they lack the skills needed to parent effectively. Schools need to identify the single-parent households within the predominantly African American school districts and

make a vigorous attempt to encourage parents to attend classes to assist, or reinforce, the necessary structure at home, to include clear roles, boundaries, rules, structured routines, and positive reinforcements. The single parent should be reminded of how influential her words and actions can be in shaping the child's moral and social development. The message should be one of creating a partnership with the single-parent to prevent the onset of behaviors that could potentially lead to poor academic performance. This practice will hopefully increase the single parent's participation which is crucial to the success of the child (Clarke, 1983; Ghazarian, 2012; Halle, Kurtz-Costes & Mahoney, 1997).

2. The participants indicated a strong emphasis on values and recognition for their attempts which fostered a sense of self-worth. This was an important concept that I did not encounter in the literature. The participants were much more inclined to complete tasks when their actions were acknowledged and rewarded, triggering repeat performances.

It is my recommendation that schools and community organizations need to promote value-driven programs which need to be introduced to children in Pre-K and incorporated in lesson plans throughout their academic journey. Children should not be labeled but celebrated in regard to their unique talents and passions; using those passions to engage them in opportunities that allow them to experience pride in their performances. Increase age-appropriate opportunities for cooperative learning where they can practice the importance of working together, communicating effectively and problem solving. They should be given an active role in creating rules that everyone can abide by. There is an

eminent need to help children understand the personal investment that is required for them to excel. We need to build a partnership with them as well, to help them recognize that they are also a valuable component of the team which should include parent, school personnel and student. Students are more likely to be actively involved in their learning when their input is invited; this helps build self-confidence, self-esteem, and can be a tremendous motivating factor (Freeman, 1997; Hubbard & Paschall, 1998; Mandara & Murray, 2000).

3. The participants spoke of the importance of extended support. One participant whose mother lacked the support, emphasized the need for the single parent to experience some alone time, respite. Having someone there also helps to maintain a stable home which offers a sense of security, a contributing factor of their success, as identified by the participants. The importance of a support system is consistent with the literature (Wilson, 1986; Woody & Woody, 2007)

It is my recommendation that additional resources need to be readily available to single parents to empower them to persevere and remain an integral part of their child's life. The church plays an important role in the African American community, and do reach out to their congregation, and the community at large. We need other organizations to be more proactive in providing support to the single parent. The support can help to alleviate some of the psychological stressors that the single parent endures (Green, Furier & McAllister, 2007).

Support can also include educational opportunities. With the emergence of father-headed households and the extant literature on the implications of absent-father homes, national attention has shifted to encouraging and supporting fathers. While I understand the need to involve fathers, there is a need to make a concerted effort on behalf of all single parents. Making education more accessible and affordable would eliminate the need for the single parents to work more than one job. This would not only contribute to more favorably economic conditions, but would also help to reduce psychological distress.

4. The participants' ability to cope was directly linked to their mother's influence, sense of stability, sense of security, high expectations, and support system. The family system was able to adjust to changes within the system and ultimately the system, the single-parent household was able to function well. The acknowledgement of the strengths of the single-parent household does not negate the fact that they are faced with challenges. All the participants shared the inclusion of a strong faith which was perceived by their mothers as a coping strategy. Their reliance on God precedes seeking professional help. The literature states that the African American single parent seldom seeks mental health services (Johnson, 2010).

It is my recommendation that professionals in the fields of social work, marriage and family therapy, and mental health counseling, recognize the relevance of these factors when working with the African American population. The study serves as a reminder for therapists, social workers and other professionals working with African American males

and their single parents, to be more aware of their own biases and to bracket these experiences to better meet the needs of the client. This speaks to the importance of providing strategies that are culturally sensitive, and not advocate a "one size fits all" approach. Families who are resistant to therapy may be encouraged to seek help from conflict resolution practitioners who can provide mediation and facilitation services, practices that tend to be less intrusive.

Contribution to the Field of Conflict Resolution

Johnson (2010) posits that African Americans seldom seek professional help to address their physical or mental health. He further added that an alarming number of African American single parent and African American males being raised by single parents, do suffer from psychological problems. The literature indicated multiple stressors that affect these individuals, ultimately impacting their ability to cope. Each participant was acutely aware of their mother's challenges as a single parent; however, each identified their mother's strong faith as a primary coping strategy. Their mother's influence, sense of security, sense of self-worth, high expectations and support systems contributed to their ability to effectively address conflicts.

The field of conflict analysis and resolution can provide an alternative to psychotherapy which may be more receptive to the African American community. The findings from this study can help promote a greater understanding of the African American male raised in a single-parent household, and more importantly, how a single-parent household functions, especially under adverse conditions. Augsburger (1992) contends that an effective conflict resolution practitioner must have some knowledge of

how a culture handles its conflict. The study also illuminated the effectiveness of

adopting a family systems approach to help African American families in conflict. Based

on this understanding, conflict resolution practitioners can become more culturally

sensitive and therefore better equipped to meet the needs and interests of this population.

Recommendations for Future Research

The study explored the lived experiences of African American males who were

raised in a single-parent household. Their stories illuminated factors that contributed to

their success in addition to the strengths of the single-parent household. Given the dearth

of scholarly work that has focused on the negative outcomes of single-parenting, and the

increased prevalence of this family structure, necessitates a shift in public discourse to

identify the strengths inherent in some single parent households. A plethora of studies

prevail that enlist the single parent as the participant however I was unable to locate any

that focused on the experience of single-parenting from the child's perspective. This

study gave voice to eight successful African American males who had been raised in a

single parent household, and are successful as defined by this study. Their voices have

provided valuable information for understanding appropriate practices for early childhood

through adolescence.

Future studies could explore the lived experiences of successful African American

females who were raised in a single-parent household to determine any similarities or

differences in how the phenomenon is experienced. While each of the participants briefly

mentioned their fathers, only five maintain minimal contact with him. Comparative

studies across gender could investigate the relationship between successful African American males, and females, and their absent parent.

Although the vast majority of single-parent households are headed by females, other family formations are becoming more common (Coleman & Ganong, 2004). Given the diverse family arrangements that persist, other studies could explore how single-parenting is experienced from the child's perspective, the relationship between African American sons and their single fathers, African American daughters and their mothers, and African American daughters and their fathers. As more grandparents gain custody of their grandchildren, more studies are warranted to better understand the impact of such placement on the minor. More research on these issues will help improve our understanding of the single-parent household.

Concluding Remarks

This study gave voice to African American males who had been raised in a single-parent household, and who had attained success as defined by this study. Each participant welcomed the opportunity to share their personal story and spoke with such candor. Although they were keenly aware of the challenges they face as African American males, each articulated the overwhelming desire to succeed, largely in part to their mother's influence. Their stories revealed a single-parent household that provided a sense of stability, a sense of self-worth, high expectations, and a support system. Their experience of being raised in such a household proved to be positive and nurturing.

 If as a society we can begin to accept the non-traditional family structure that continues to emerge, and to offer support and encouragement to those family members,

we may be able to more effectively combat such problems as juvenile delinquency.

Recognizing that it is not possible for all families to remain intact is the first step.

Secondly, focus needs to shift to what actually works; what each of us can do to

contribute to the ultimate success of families in need.

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Appendix A: <u>Adult Consent Form</u>

Consent Form for Participation in the Research Study Entitled
Against All Odds: A Study Of Success Attainment Among African American Males
From Single-Parent Households

Funding Source: None
IRB protocol #: 05181223Exp.

Principal investigator   Co-investigator
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Pembroke Pines, Fl. 33024   School of Humanities and Social Sciences
(305)308-6145   3301 College Ave.
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For questions/concerns about your research rights, contact:
Human Research Oversight Board (Institutional Review Board or IRB)
Nova Southeastern University
(954) 262-5369/Toll Free: 866-499-0790
IRB@nsu.nova.edu

Site Information
Mutually-agreed upon location

What is the study about?
        You are invited to voluntarily participate in a research study. This study focuses
on African American males raised in a single-parent household who have been able to
achieve success academically and professionally. The purpose of this study is to
understand how African American males experience being raised in a single-parent
household in an effort to identify factors that have contributed to the successful outcome
of their lives.

Why are you asking me?
        You have been invited to participate because you are a successful African
American male who was raised in a single-parent household. Since the focus of this
study is to learn about the experiences African American males go through having been
raised in a single-parent household, we believe your role as a successful African
American male qualifies you to be in this study. We further believe that your story will
hopefully inspire other African American males to overcome the challenges they face,
and strive for success. There will be approximately 10 participants in this research study.

What will I be doing if I agree to be in the study?

You will be involved in a face-to-face semi-structured interview with the researcher Judy Roberts. The interview may last up to 120 minutes and will be conducted at a private and secure mutually agreed upon location. During the interview you will be asked a series of open-ended questions designed to give insight into your experience of being raised in a single-parent household and the factors that have contributed to your success as an African American male. There may be a follow-up call if there is a need for clarification. In addition, you will be invited to review the transcription from your interview for accuracy and authenticity. You may elect to receive a copy at the end of the interview. If you elect to receive a copy, the transcribed interview will be e-mailed to you. The review process will take you approximately two hours. You will be asked to return the reviewed transcript with any changes to researcher via email within 7 days of receipt. Your feedback, general inquiry, and recommendations will prove invaluable to the overall legitimacy of the research. We hope you will also accept our invitation to read the final report to ensure that an account of your experience has been accurately portrayed. A copy of the final report will be made available to you if you elected to receive a copy at the initial meeting. The review process will take approximately 90 minutes. You will be asked to return the reviewed report with any recommendations to researcher via email within 5 days of receipt.

Is there any audio or video recording?

The interviews, including questions and answers in this research project will be audio recorded with the use of an erasable digital voice recorder. The interview recordings will be transcribed by the researcher Judy Roberts. Mrs. Roberts will use earphones while transcribing the interviews to guard your privacy. The recordings and transcriptions of your interview data will be accessible to the researcher Judy Roberts, personnel from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Nova Southeastern University and the dissertation chair, Dr. Jason Campbell. The recording will be kept secure in Mrs. Roberts' home office in a locked cabinet. The recording will be retained for 36 months from the conclusion of the study at which time it will be erased. Transcriptions will be kept on Mrs. Roberts' password and firewall protected computer, accessible only by Mrs. Roberts. Transcriptions will be deleted 36 months after the completion of the study. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the recording as described in this paragraph.

What are the dangers to me?

Risks to you are minimal, meaning they are not thought to be greater than other risks you experience every day. Loss of confidentiality is a possible risk associated with this study. This research is not intended to cause any distress. You may, however, find that sharing your feelings about your life experience may make you anxious or bring back unpleasant memories. If that happens, researcher Judy Roberts will try to help you. If

those feelings persist, please feel free to request a short break, reschedule or discontinue the interview. At that time, if you feel counseling would be beneficial, a list of counseling agencies will be provided as well as private practitioners, if requested. Please note however, any costs associated with treatment will be your responsibility.

If you have any questions about the research, your research rights, or have a research-related injury, please contact Judy Roberts or Dr. Campbell at the numbers indicated above. You may also contact the IRB at the numbers indicated above with questions as to your research rights.

Are there any benefits for taking part in this research study?
There are no direct benefits.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?
There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information private and confidential?
Maintaining participants' confidentiality is highly important to this study. Therefore your actual name will not be disclosed during interviewing, transcribing or for any aspect of the final published research report or any derivative publications that could be linked to your identity. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the study and in the final report, with the exception of the consent form. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Please know that the NSU IRB and other regulatory agencies may review research records. In addition, since the Principal Investigator is a doctoral student of Nova Southeastern University, Dissertation Chair Dr. Jason Campbell may review research records.

What if I do not want to participate or I want to leave the study?
You have the right to choose not to participate or to leave this study at any time without penalty or negative consequences. If you choose to withdraw, any information collected about you **before** the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study and may be used as a part of the research.

Other Considerations:
If significant new information relating to the study becomes available, which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you by the investigators.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing below, you indicate that

- this study has been explained to you
- you have read this document or it has been read to you
- your questions about this research study have been answered
- you have been told that you may ask the researchers any study related questions in the future or contact them in the event of a research-related injury
- you have been told that you may ask Institutional Review Board (IRB) personnel questions about your study rights
- you are entitled to a copy of this form after you have read and signed it
- you voluntarily agree to participate in the study entitled *Against All Odds: A Study Of Success Attainment Among African American Males From Single-Parent Households*

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Participant's Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B: <u>Recruitment Letter Distributed to Adults Via Email or Handout</u>

Invitation to Participate in a Research Study Entitled   JUN 06 2013

Against All Odds: A Study Of Success Attainment Among African American Males
From Single-Parent Households

Hello everyone,

I hope this finds you well. My name is Judith Roberts and I am a doctoral student in Conflict Analysis and Resolution in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Nova Southeastern University. I am conducting a research study as part of my dissertation to better understand how African American males experience being raised in a single-parent household. Moreover I am interested in learning how you as an African American male have been able to achieve success despite the challenges faced as a result of this family formation coupled with the challenges outside the home.

To accomplish this purpose, my study will (1) gain an understanding of how African American males experience single-parenting, (2) learn what specific coping strategies were utilized by African American males in a single-parent household, and (3) identify factors that contributed to their resiliency; their ability to not only adjust to a single-parent household, but to what extent has societal constructs influenced their views, attitudes, beliefs and behavior.

For years, the literature has stated that social issues such as poor social relationships, cultural disconnection, low level parental support, low teacher expectations, the lure of negative community or neighborhood and negative media perceptions have presented challenges African American males have difficulty overcoming. These social issues not only form the foundation for many research studies but also raise much concern about the plight of the African American male. Furthermore, the dominant story surrounding single-parenting is that single-parenting is a precursor to delinquency, primarily among African American males. This often will lead to high school retention or dropout, crime, and/or incarceration. For many African American males, these social issues do shape their reality and overcoming such issues can prove to be an extremely daunting task. Yet mere are some African American males who have been able to navigate their way through some of these challenges and have been able to lead successful lives.

Having conducted an extensive review of the literature on African American males, there is a need for belter understanding of single-parenting and what works within such a household. We also need to learn about the life course experiences of the African American male with the hope of identifying factors that counteract potentially negative contextual influences of neighborhood, peers, school, and society. You are being asked to participate in this research study because you have been identified as an African American male who was raised in a single-parent household and have achieved success academically and professionally. It is my hope that your story and accomplishments will inspire others.

The purpose of this letter is to request your participation in this research study by allowing me to interview you about your experience of growing up in a single-parent household and the impact that may have had on your success. The interview may last up to 120 minutes and will be conducted at a mutually agreed upon day, time and private and secure location. The interview will be tape recorded with the use of an erasable digital voice recorder. During the interview you will be asked a series of open-ended questions designed to give insight into your experience of being raised in a single-parent household and the factors that have contributed to your success as an African-American male. There may be a follow-up call if there is a need for clarification. In addition, you will be invited to review the transcription from your interview for accuracy and authenticity. You may elect to receive a copy at the end of the interview.

If you elect to receive a copy, the transcribed interview will be e-mailed to you. The review process will take approximately two hours. You will be asked to return the reviewed transcript with any changes to researcher via email within 7 days of receipt. Your feedback, general inquiry, and recommendations will prove invaluable to the overall legitimacy of the research. We hope you will also accept our invitation to read the final report to ensure that an account of your experience has been accurately portrayed. A copy of the final report will be made available to you if you elected to receive a copy at the initial meeting. The review process will take approximately 90 minutes. You will be asked to return the reviewed report with any recommendations to researcher via email within 5 days of receipt.

Please be assured that all information provided by you will be treated in the strictest confidence and none of the participants will be individually identifiable in the resulting dissertation, subsequent reports, or publications. Please know, of course, that you will be entirely free to discontinue your participation at any time or to decline to answer particular questions during the interview. I sincerely hope that you will consider participating in this study. If you are willing to participate, please contact me at the telephone number below with your affirmation and any questions that you may have. At that time, we will schedule the interview. You will then have the opportunity to sign a voluntary consent form that fully explains your right to discontinue participation at any time with absolutely no repercussions.

I genuinely appreciate your time and consideration, and look forward to your favorable response.

With warm regards,
Judith Roberts, M.S., LMHC
Doctoral Candidate
Nova Southeastern University School of Humanities & Social Sciences
Department of Conflict Analysis and Resolution
3301 College Avenue
Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33314
CELL: 305.308.6145
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Appendix C: <u>Guiding Questions</u>

1. Please take a moment to recall your early childhood years. Who was your custodial parent?

2. How would you describe your relationship with your custodial parent? (Then? Now?)

3. Did you know your mom/dad (absent parent)? How would you describe your relationship with your mom/dad (absent parent)? (Then? Now?)

4. Do you have any siblings? How would you describe your relationship with your sibling(s)? (Then? Now?)

5. How would you <u>describe</u> the type of household you grew up in? Please tell me what your life was like growing up in such a household. (*main narrative)

6. What is <u>your</u> definition of success? Do you believe you are successful?

7. Please identify for me the factors (if not mentioned in main narrative) that have allowed you to be successful?

8. What coping strategies (if not mentioned in main narrative) have allowed you/your family to manage the stressors that life brings?

Appendix D: List of Counseling Providers

- National Mental Health Association
  Main Switchboard: (703) 684-7722
  Toll-free: (800) 969-6642
  http://www.nmha.org/

- Henderson Behavioral Health
  http://www.hendersonbehavioralhealth.org/#

- Samaritan Counseling Centers
  101 S.E. 3rd Avenue
  Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33301
  Broward: (954) 463-2273
  Dade: (305) 944-1153
  South Palm Beach: (561) 272-6322
  Toll Free: (866) 221-2268
  http://www.samaritansfl.org/

- The Psychological Services Center at Nova Southeastern University
  Maltz Psychology Building
  3301 College Avenue
  Ft. Lauderdale-Davie, FL 33314
  (954) NSU-CARE (678-2273).
  http://www.nova.edu/healthcare/psychology/

*Additional counseling agencies will be available based on participants'
residential location. At the participant's request, a list of private practitioners will also be
available.

Biographical Sketch

Education

M. S. Degree in Marriage & Family Therapy   June 1992
St. Thomas University, Miami, FL.

B.A. Degree in Psychology   May 1980
College of New Rochelle, NY.

Professional Experience

Private Practitioner   08/99 - Present
Judith L. Roberts, LMHC, PA

Faculty
University School of Nova Southeastern University   02/04 - Present

Program Coordinator   08/98 - 06/04
Davie Day Treatment Program
Center for Psychological Studies Community Mental Health Clinic
Nova Southeastern University

Assistant Director   05/02 - 03/03
Geriatric Institute Residential Treatment Facility
Center for Psychological Studies Community Mental Health Clinic
Nova Southeastern University

Clinic Supervisor/Treatment Specialist   01/94 - 08/98
Geriatric Institute Day Treatment Program
Center for Psychological Studies Community Mental Health Clinic
Nova Southeastern University

Professional License

Licensed Mental Health Counselor/Approved Supervisor   1999 - Present

Professional Affiliation

Florida Mental Health Counselors Association   02/11 - Present
Broward Chapter Secretary   2011-2012
Broward Chapter President-Elect   2012- 2013