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Raising Him: Testaments of Five Black Single Mothers and How They Perceive Their Experiences of Raising Theirs Son(s) in Contemporary Urban America

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DePaul University
College of Education

RAISING HIM:
TESTAMENTS OF FIVE BLACK SINGLE MOTHERS AND HOW THEY
PERCEIVE THEIR EXPERIENCES OF RAISING THEIR SON(S) IN
CONTEMPORARY URBAN AMERICA

A Dissertation in Education
with a concentration in Educational Leadership
by

Collage C. Warner

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the requirements
for the Degree of

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Certification of Authorship I certify that I am the sole author of this dissertation. Any assistance received in the preparation of this dissertation has been acknowledged and disclosed within it. Any sources utilized, including the use of data, ideas and words, those quoted directly or paraphrased, have been cited. I certify that I have prepared this dissertation according program guidelines as directed.

Author Signature Collage C. Warner Date 4/24/20

ABSTRACT

This research explores the life experiences of working class, Black single mothers who are raising their son(s) in contemporary urban America, a space that can present challenges for the Black male child such as; poverty, poor educational systems, lack of jobs, homicide, crime, gang activity, addiction, and just about every source imaginable that can lead to socio-economic insufficiency. The study will focus on five Black single mothers between the ages of 35-45 years of age who are raising son(s) between the ages of 10-18 years of age. The purpose of the study is to explore the meaning of single motherhood by the women themselves and how they navigate and negotiate everyday life while raising their sons.

Motherwork was used as the methodology for this research.

Motherwork provides the framework of understanding the phenomena and oppressive factors related to Black single mothers, in particular those who are rearing son(s). This study pays particular attention to (a) the meaning of motherhood, (b) the impact that being a single Black mother has taken on their lives, (c) the challenge of raising a Black male child in contemporary urban America and, (d) how these mothers respond to the challenges of rearing their sons on their own. The research was designed to give single Black mothers who are raising male children a platform to share their stories, which may otherwise go untold. In order to gain a deeper understanding of how Black moms navigate and negotiate everyday life with their sons, I believe it is imperative to gain personal accounts of their lived experiences and also understand the barriers, challenges, and cultural as well as societal factors that impact them on a daily basis. Through their

personal stories, we can gain a holistic perspective on a Black family structure that is unique; yet often devalued, misunderstood, and often times negatively portrayed.

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Dedication

This dissertation would have not at all been possible without the power, strength and courage given to me by my heavenly father Jesus Christ. Thank you Lord for this product and it is my prayer that it glorifies you. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my magnificent son, Miles. You are truly an extraordinary person. God knew exactly what he was doing when he blessed me with you. You are a resilient child filled with hope and joy. Thank you for being a part of this journey with me. I know at times it has been challenging but I hope that my work inspires you to do grater works on this earth. Continue to master your craft, gifts and talents that God has given you. Be the absolute best you can be and stay focused, dedicated and passionate about your dreams. I look forward to everything that God has in store for you. There are no words known to man that describes how much your momma loves you... Go get em'slugger!

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The experience of being a Black single mother is not a scripted reality show. It is a real-life experience that only a mother can know and understand. Though our experiences of motherhood are different for various categories of Black women, given the context of our social/cultural backgrounds, educational attainment, and socio-economic status, only she can relate to what it means to birth and raise a Black male child. I think about the Black mothers whom I know personally, who are entangled in the day-to-day complexities of navigating life as Black women, and rearing their sons in the face of multiple social complexities; figuring out ways to constantly empower and encourage their sons to walk confidently in this world, but also arm them with the reality that in America Black boys are often times considered threats or thugs rather than students, sons, fathers, brothers, or even humans. As a Black mother it is excruciating to know that we are still living in a country where there is no equality and justice for our sons, and to recognize that they are often considered less than human and even disposable. Disposable, like the lives of Michael Brown, Stephon Clark, Freddie Gray, Trayvon Martin, LaQuan McDonald, Tamir Rice George, Stinney Jr., Emmett Till, and far too many others. As I dive into this research, I am seeking ways in which Black mothers find the courage and strength to navigate the social, emotional, and physical challenges of life so they are able to protect their son(s) from the very perils that have entangled so many Black males in this country.

My belief is that there is hope! There are numerous Black single mothers who have persevered through the challenges of life and have raised Black males who have grown to be well rounded individuals, productive citizens, active leaders, and educated in and out of academia such as; Shawn “Jay Z” Carter, Sean “Puffy” Combs, Kevin Hart, LeBron James, Shaquille O’Neal, Mekhi Phifer, and many more. As I turn toward the phenomenon, I hope to help empower Black single mothers by bringing their voices to the forefront of educational discourse by sharing their stories of love, joy, hope, victories, challenges, pain, and fears while raising their sons.

Black Motherhood

Historically, researchers, mostly Black and White social science male scholars (Copeland, 1977; Grier & Cobbs, 1968; Karon, 1958; Moynihan, 1965; Pettigrew, 1964; Rainwater & Yancey, 1967) have excluded Black women from studies of "normal" motherhood, focusing instead on Black motherhood as "deviant," as evidenced by the multitude of studies on Black teenage or single mothers (Jackson, 1991; Jarrett, 1994; Kalmus, 1992; Miller, 1993; Richardson, 1993; Smith, Johnson, & Findlay, 1994; Wasserman, Rauh, Brunelli, Garcia-Castro, & Necos, 1990).

Over the past 20 years, there have been limited studies that have focused on single Black mothers, whose sons have proved their resiliency by becoming productive members of society in which they have had to overcome and are still persevering through the many obstacles that have been set before them. Unfortunately, a great deal of research

on Black single mothers focuses on the negative effects they have on their son(s). African-American mothers have received blame for the problematic behaviors and characteristics of their sons (Bush, 2000b; Hill, 1998; Randolph, 1995). Black mothers in particular have historically had to struggle to be allowed to mother (Collins, 1994, 2000; Roberts, 1999). Today, poor, Black single-mother households continue to be the target of scrutiny and blame from a host of different directions (Cohen, 2009; Kaplan, 1996; McGuffey, 2005). Single parent homes headed by African-American mothers are usually assumed to be broken and unstable and are said to produce uncontrollable, uneducable African-American males (Hill, 1998). Black boys are also considered to be “unwanted”, “problems”, “criminals”, “thugs” and surplus bodies (Yancy, Davidson, Hadley, 2016). African-American males born to single mothers has shown that single parenting, and growing up as an African-American male are two potential risk factors that tend to contribute to the plight of black boys and have adverse impacts on them (Hymowitz, 2005; Cicchetti & Garmezy, 1994).

Billingsley (1992), states too many discussions of Black families focus exclusively on single-parent families, on the underclass, or on children in trouble as if these phenomena were characteristic of Black families. Inadvertently, these discussions contribute to stereotypical thinking that sets these families apart from other American families (Billingsley 1992,). Such studies on Black families have not focused on Black mothers as principle subjects. A number of studies on Black motherhood were conducted to gain insight about Black boys (Bank, Forgatch, Patterson, & Fetrow, 1993), child development outcomes (Downey & Powell, 1993), the feminization of poverty (Starrels,

Bould, & Nicholas, 1994), generational adolescent pregnancy, multi- generational families, and the quality of mothering and grandmothering in young female-headed Black families (Chase-Lansdale, Brooks-Gunn, Zamsky, 1994; Jackson, 1991; Jarrett, 1994; Jayakody, Chatters, & Taylor, 1993).

Black mothers, in the absence of their sons' fathers, become necessary images for Black boys given the tropes and misrepresentations of society around Black males and family structures (Griffin & Allen, 2006). According to Davis (2006), in most instances Black moms have a love for their sons that is unlike any other and have a profound influence on the family, as well as social and educational development of African- American males. Hines and Boyd-Franklin (1996), states that mothers are a dominant influence in the lives of African-American males because mothers are usually in the home as the males are growing up and tend to be the strength of the family.

Since slavery Black women have emerged out of a history of oppression. Through their treacherous journey of the middle passage they have brought with them many diverse characteristics of their African mothers...such as, the ability to raise their sons and daughters, the sense of independence, strength, resiliency, and various skill sets (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). From slavery on, Black women have fallen outside the scope of the American ideal of womanhood. Under slavery, Black women were also denied their rights of motherhood. Slave mothers had no legal rights to their children. The slave masters owned both mother and child, often times selling the child off to other slave owners. This devaluation of Black motherhood has been

reinforced by stereotypes that blame Black mothers for the problems in the black family more specifically the black male child (Crenshaw, at el).

Defining Black motherhood has been key to opposing patriarchy and racism, two interrelated systems of domination (Roberts, 1993) that shape and influence meanings of womanhood and motherhood, resulting in brutal social and policy implications for Black women. Hence, Black feminist knowledge production on Black motherhood has been transformative. In her work on the importance of a home place, (hooks, 1989) views Black women's homes as sites of resistance that are central to a Black family's sense of well-being and sense of protection from White power structures. Hence, in hook's analysis, nurturing becomes a revolutionary force that is especially valuable for Black women living in White supremacist societies. Collins (1990) defines Black motherhood as a dynamic and dialectical institution that consists of a series of constantly renegotiated relationships between Black women, their children, the larger Black community, and each other. Through their analyses, Black feminist scholars have challenged oppressive definitions of motherhood. Moreover, they have confronted research and policies that perpetuate the "historical devaluation of Black motherhood" (Roberts, 1997, p. 939).

Collins argues, "Motherhood can serve as a site where Black women express and learn the power of self-definition, the importance of valuing, and respecting ourselves, the necessity of self-reliance and independence, and a belief in Black women's empowerment" (Collins, 1990, p. 118). Documenting Black women's lived experiences as mothers is "a

critical aspect of the meaning of motherhood that influences both the dominant society's construction and the feminist reconstruction of mothers" (Ladner, 1972, p. 213).

Purpose and Significance of Study

The purpose of the study is to explore the lived experiences and the meaning of single motherhood as told by Black women themselves, recognizing how they navigate and negotiate everyday life while raising one or more son(s) in contemporary urban America. In addition, the study is intended to (a) contribute to the literature on the meaning and the lived experiences of Black motherhood, (b) contribute to the identification of the unique challenges that Black single mothers rearing one or more sons face, (c) contributes to the discourse on how oppressive factors in race, class, and gender have, in the past, and continue to impact Black single mothers.

This study is significant because learning about single motherhood and the experiences these women have while raising Black boys is an important step in addressing the gap in the study of Black families in the United States. In addition, documenting Black women's lived experiences as mothers is "a critical aspect of the meaning of motherhood that influences both the dominant society's construction and the feminist reconstruction of mothers" (Ladner, 1972, p. 213). Motherwork will be used as the methodology for this study with the intent of helping to provide a deeper understanding and appreciation of the social and economic circumstances relating to Black single mothers. In addition, Motherwork will be used as the theoretical lens to analyze the roles of race, class, and gender in the lives of these mothers. Collins (1994)

explains Motherwork as the idea that race, class, and gender are interlocking aspects of Black women's identity, meaning-making, and mothering. In addition, Motherwork concerns itself with the past and present day societal struggles of mothers.

Guiding Questions

The research questions and methodology of this study were designed not only to explore the challenges that Black single mothers experience while raising sons but also to highlight the strengths and resiliency of Black mothers. Lastly, this study provides an increased awareness of the Black single mothers, and how they on a larger scale meet and often times exceed the challenge of raising their male children. For this study, the three research questions that guided this research were:

1. Describe your experience as a Black woman in contemporary urban America?
2. Describe the impact that being a single mother has taken on your life?
3. What do you perceive as some of your greatest challenges in raising a male child in contemporary urban America?
 - a) As a single mother how do you respond to these challenges?
 - b) What support systems, if any, do you call upon as you raise your son(s)?

Definition of Terms

Black male: A male person of African descent who was born and reared in the United States.

Black (used synonymously with African American): Refers to people having origins in any of the Black race groups of Africa. It includes people who reported Black, African Am., or Negro or wrote in entries such as African American, Afro American, Nigerian, or Haitian (United States Census, 2000).

Black Single-mother: A female person of African descent who is the head of her household and raising her son and there is no other adult living in the household. **Classism:** A biased or discriminatory attitude based on distinctions made between social or economic classes.

Family support system: People such as birth parents, grandparents, blood relatives, non-blood friends, daycare providers, teachers, peers, mentors, and coaches as well as church groups, community members and other institutions.

Institutional racism: A form of racism expressed in the practice of social and political institutions. Institutional racism is also racism by individuals or informal social groups, governed by behavioral norms that support racist thinking and foment active racism. Also known as systemic racism

Motherhood: Although there is no single meaning or given experience of motherhood (McMahon, 1995), women's roles as mothers are idealized in our culture as all-loving, kind, gentle, and selfless (Andersen, 1994)

Motherwork: The idea that race, class, and gender are interlocking aspects of Black women's identity, meaning-making, and mothering (Collins, 1994).

Racism: The belief in the superiority of one race over another, which often results in discrimination and prejudice towards people based on their race or ethnicity.

White supremacy: Is a racist ideology based upon the belief that white people are superior in many ways to people of other races and that therefore, white people should be dominant over other races.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Historical Attack on the Black Mother

Historically, Black women have been depicted by their maternal role, a role that has been imposed on women as their sole source of identity by society (O'Reilly, 2004).

Motherhood is a theme that emerges throughout the fictitious works of Toni Morrison. She along with other scholars of black lives discusses the concept of motherhood as being central to African American womanhood (Collins, 2000). Morrison reflects on motherhood, building on the life experiences of Black women and various perspectives of motherhood. Morrison develops a view of Black motherhood that is, in terms of both maternal identity roles, radically different than the motherhood practiced and prescribed in the dominant culture (O'Reilly, 2004). Morrison defines and positions maternal identity as a site of power for Black women (O'Reilly, 2004). From this position of power Black mothers engage in a maternal practice that has its explicit goal the empowerment of children (O'Reilly, 2004). In the novel *Beloved*, Morrison paints a dark picture of the inhumane affects of slavery and examines the mental and physical outcomes slavery had on mothers. The story is important for it speaks to the adversities, pain, fears, love, and sacrifices that slave mothers believed they had to make for the welfare of their children.

“Mother families” and households managed solely by African-American mothers have been an integral part of American society since the days of the British colonization of North America and have been the nexus of race, gender, and class within the United States (Moehling, 2007). Black mothers possess a unique history bounded by oppressive factors emerging in slavery and existent in the 21st century. These mothers can be best understood through a depiction of the historical circumstances that thrust them into a unique position pertaining to race in the United States. Research has established that the Africans enslaved in the United States, came from the western part of the African continent where there had been a long history of culture contact and widespread similarities in certain institutions (Herskovits, 1958; Sudarkasa, 1988/2001). This is an important and relevant piece to understanding Black motherhood because as sociologist Billingsley (1992) stated, “One cannot understand contemporary patterns of Black family life without placing them in the broad historical, societal, and cultural context”.

The origin of racism and discrimination of Black mothers in the United States began with slave the trade. Slavery was the wellspring from which African-American mother’s inferior treatment originated (Boyd-Franklin, 1989). The European countries found slavery to be a great economic enterprise with African slavery extending over a period of four centuries. Billingsley (1968) reported that the transportation of slaves from Africa to the New World disrupted the cultural life of the Africans due to the family being the primary unit of social organization, these disruptions; social, psychological, cultural, and historical, had a profound impact on the Black family.

The essence of Black women's experience during slavery was the brutal denial of autonomy over reproduction, female slaves were commercially valuable to their masters not only for their labor but also for their capacity to produce more slaves (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, Thomas, 1995). From slavery on, black women have fallen outside of the scope of the American ideal of womanhood, by slave owners forcing slave women to perform strenuous labor, which contravened the Victorian female roles prevalent in the dominant white society (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Angela Davis has observed: "Judged by the evolving nineteenth-century ideology of femininity, which emphasized women's roles as nurturing mothers and gentle companions and housekeepers for their husbands, Black women were practically anomalies." Black women's historical deviation from traditional female roles has engendered a mythology that denies their womanhood (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Under slavery Black women were also systematically denied the rights of motherhood by slave mothers having no legal claim to their children and slave masters alienated slave women from their children by selling them to other slave owners and by controlling childbearing (Crenshaw et al., 1995).

Staples & Boulin Johnson (2005), stated, the slave woman was the center of the family. Instead of having any particular privileges under the slave system, Black women were, in reality, burdened with dual role of laborer and mother (Staples & Boulin Johnson, 2005.) Not only was the slave woman mother to their own children, but very often she was given the role of raising the children of the white slave master (Schweitzer, 1997). "The maternal and asexual house slave selflessly nursed and nurtured the children of white folks, at the expense of her own children and was also expected to induct them into

their social class and racial privilege" (Schweitzer, 1997, p. 3). This type of mothering is now recognized as a form of "coerced mothering", a means of survival for some Black women during slavery (Schweitzer, 1997, p. 3). According to Collins (1990), this is the origin of her two-pronged burden, which has been mislabeled a "matriarchy."

It was daily that the male slave experienced serious assaults on his manhood. The most serious assault, Martin and Martin (1985) reveal, was his inability to protect his wife from the sexual advances of White men and the physical abuse of his master. The woman, therefore, could not expect protection from her husband. Williams (1991) writes that most times it was the woman who bore the responsibility to protect and take care of her family. The only recognized role of the male slave was that of producing offspring, since he was the sex partner of a woman (Schaefer, 2000). In fact, Schaefer describes, slave men were often identified as though they were the woman's possession. For example, he was called "Nancy's Tom" and that the Southern law consistently ruled that the "father of a slave is unknown to our law" (p. 209). Billingsley (1968) laments, "The powerlessness of the Negro man to protect his family for two and a half centuries under slavery has had crippling consequences for the relations of Negro men and women to this very day" (p. 61).

The Civil War had a devastating impact on the slave family and the free family as well, since Black life was greatly disrupted (Martin & Martin, 1985). It is recorded that there was a higher level of female-headed families among free Black families at that time in the southern cities due to the disproportionate number of mulatto children fathered by White men (Hill, 1998). Allen and Connor (1997) note that during the years after the

Civil War most African American couples of long standing sought to legalize their informal marriages and “two-parent households represented the norm”(p. 55).

The Great Depression began in the United States in 1929 and lasted for ten years.

During this period there was widespread male unemployment, and homelessness, and suicide were commonplace (Allen & Connor, 1997). Black unemployment was twice that of Whites yet their family relationships did not appear to be worse than any other ethnic group (Allen & Connor, 1997). Allen & Connor continue, higher rates of marriage and two parent households among Blacks did not decline until the post-World War II period. After World War II, Black veterans returned to the North to find a number of depressing situations: shortage of housing, discrimination in housing, inadequate education, lack of employment opportunities, and lack of political clout (Allen & Connor, 1997). These factors all combined resulted in Blacks men being disenfranchised and unable to establish and support their families (Allen & Connor, 1997).

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, together with a growing economy, brought educational and employment opportunities for Black people. Allen and Connor (1997) contend that both the flight of the Black middle class and the simultaneous decline of blue-collar employment have been critical in the erosion of both the Black community and its quality of family life as well. In addition, financial distress and conflicted relationships caused increased marital disruptions in the Black family from the middle 1960s through the end of the 1980s. Billingsley (1992) laments: “It is perhaps ironic that the traditional family system that slavery could not destroy during 200 years may be

dismantled in a few short years by the modern industrial transition” (p.135).

Political Attack on the Black Mother

Moynihan 1965, senator from New York, published a study called *The Negro Family: A Case for National Action*. In it Moynihan claimed that certain weaknesses he identified within African American families caused the difficulties black people experienced in the larger society in education, employment, and politics (Billingsley, 1992). According to, Staples & Boulin Johnson, (1993), Moynihan charged the Black family with being a major cause of racial inequality in American society. His theory assumed that Black culture is nothing more than a pathological version of white- American culture. “The white family,” he argued, “has achieved a high degree of stability and is maintaining that stability.” Black people do not do well because of a weak family structure (Staples & Boulin Johnson, 1993). “At the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of Negro society,” Moynihan wrote, “is the deterioration of the Negro family.

Furthermore, the scapegoating of Black mothers has manifested itself more recently in the myth of the Black matriarch, the domineering female head of the Black family.

White sociologists have held Black matriarchs responsible for the disintegration of the Black family and the consequent failure of Black people to achieve success in America (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Moynihan concluded that patterns of family formation, emerging from slavery, destroyed the capacity of Blacks to sustain two-parent families (Mincy, 2000).

Moynihan (1965), indicated the number of single parent households in the African American community headed by women contributed to the woes that existed (and continue to exist) in our communities. Some of these “woes” refer to high rates of crime, drug use, incarceration rates, and low academic performance among school-aged African American students, specifically males. According to Dickerson (1995), Moynihan, controversial report officially labeled the African American female-headed family inferior, nonproductive, pathological, and dysfunctional. Moynihan’s report created a stereotype that still today affects how single Black mothers are studied. For example, many of the earlier studies examining Black motherhood have concluded that Black mothers whom head their own households cannot possibly value themselves (Myers, 1980). The assumption of this view is that the only stable family structure is the patriarchal family with both parents present (Myers, 1980).

Moynihan (1965), linked many social problems on the Black family and argued that the Black community was plagued by the following pathology: matriarchy, ineffective, and economically dependent males; and children who tended toward delinquency, poor academic performance, and unwed motherhood. Roschelle (1997) emphasizes that the main thesis of this pathological approach or culture of poverty perspective is that poor people have aspirations, psychological characteristics, and values that hinder their achievement, producing behavioral deficiencies that keep them impoverished. These deficiencies then are passed on to their children through socialization (Roschelle, 1997). Consequently, all of the social problems experienced in the Black ghettos were blamed totally on the breakdown in the family, and the Black

mother (Roschelle, 1997). Moynihan (1965) rejected racism as playing a role in the perpetuation of poverty, and recommended that Black women, who wielded too much control of their families, relinquish it and restructure the family according to a patriarchal model that is White, and middle-class.

The first significant work that considers Black families non-pathological and delineated their strengths was that of Billingsley (1968). Billingsley challenged the Moynihan report for its depiction of the Black family as pathological but continued to accept many normative values of White middle-class family life (Staples & Boulin Johnson, 1993). Another landmark study was conducted by Hill (1972). Hill was the first scholar to systematically define and examine strengths of the Black family. Hill used quantitative data to support his propositions about the positive values in the African American family life (Staples & Boulin Johnson, 1993). A number of scholars thought to understand the sociocultural, historical, economic, and political contexts of African American family life (Dickerson, 1995; Giddings, 1992). Rather than interpreting the strengths of women as dysfunctional, recent scholars saw the strengths of Black women as indispensable to their families' health and survival (Giddings, p. 11). This new and challenging perspective is not meant to mask the very real problems of Black family life, but is intended to offer more effective solutions to remedy them (Giddings, p. 11).

African American mothers continue to turn to these strengths to navigate and survive, despite the effects of the intersection of race, class, and gender within the broader U.S. social structure and its ingrained stratification system (Dickerson, 1995). With the persistent attack of racism, sexism, and class inequity, Black mothers have to find new

ways of navigating and negotiating everyday life with their children. Their standpoint is exemplified by the self-reliant strategies that emphasize resiliency, innovation, and survival (Dickerson, 1995).

Absent Fathers

Unique historical forces such as forced immigration and the institution of slavery have acted to separate or exclude African American men from family life (Allen & Connor, 1997). Anderson and Boyd-Franklin (1985) argue that the era of slavery during which families were abruptly torn apart brought about profound changes in the Black family structure and care taking that have influenced current parenting. Migration out of the South for Blacks occurred hundreds of years after the emancipation and as Blacks migrated from the South to the North, many Black men were separated from their families to go in search of employment. Many families did not join their husbands and fathers until years later, while some never did join them at all (Billingsley, 1968). This migration represents the impact of another separation of the Black family.

According to recent data, 57.6% of Black children are living in absent-father households (National Center for Fathering, 2016). The phenomenon of absent fathers is a social issue that appears to be escalating, especially in Black households across the United States (Baskerville, 2004). Two major demographic trends contributed to the rise in father absence: the increase in divorce and the increase in unwed childbearing. The divorce rate more than doubled between 1965 and 1980 (Horn & Sylvester, 2002) and

out-of-wedlock childbearing dramatically increased since the latter part of the 20TH century and has overtaken divorce as the primary cause of father absence. High rates of joblessness in the Black community, Wilson (1996) notes, trigger other problems from crime to drug trafficking to family disorganization and breakups.

Black Mothers and Their Sons

Black mothers, in the absence of their sons' fathers, become necessary images for Black boys given the tropes and misrepresentations of society around Black males and family structures (Griffin & Allen, 2006). According to Davis (2006), in most instances Black moms have a profound influence on the family, social and educational development of African-American males. Hines & Boyd-Franklin (1996), state that mothers are a dominant influence in the lives of African-American males because mothers are usually in the home as they are growing up and tend to be the strength of the family.

With the increasingly Black female single-parent family condition (Smith & Smith, 1986), Black mothers are left with the challenge of teaching their sons how to become men. While the literature on this topic is scarce, Lawson Bush (2000), has attempted to show how Black mothers accomplish this goal. One way in which they do this is by telling their sons stories of how their ancestors dealt with their hardships (King & Mitchell, 1990). Another technique is by instilling guilt within their sons by explaining to them how behaviors that are not consistent with good morals and principles upset and

disappoint them (King & Mitchell, 1990). Some researchers have found that parents support and validate their African American sons much more so than daughters, and this is done possibly to protect them from the threats of discrimination in the real world (Smetana, Abernethy, & Harris, 2000).

The findings of Gantt and Grief (2009), reveal that inherent in their day-to-day experiences, African American single mothers make use of a number of parenting strategies to assist them in raising their sons. These strategies aim to meet one of two primary goals. The first goal is to protect. Several strategies are implemented to protect their sons and include, shielding them from negative influences, avoiding harm, praying, educating, and interpreting (Gantt & Grief, 2009). The second goal is to promote growth in their sons. The following strategies are used to facilitate this goal and include providing social support and connection to fathers, providing resources, setting expectations, instilling a positive African American identity, and promoting responsibility (Gantt & Grief, 2009).

Emotional Challenges of Black Single Mothers

According to Elliot and Reid (2016), raising kids is hard, but raising children who face daily assaults on their very being is especially challenging. In a study tracking a nationally representative group of mothers of children from kindergarten to third grade, researchers Nomaguchi and House (2011), found that only Black mothers experienced heightened levels of parenting stress as their children grew older, and mothers' concerns about their safety and survival increased. White supremacy not only makes mothering

challenging, but also makes all parenting of Black boys more difficult (Lawson, Bush 2004). Black males are especially targeted for destruction (Akbar, 1984; Kunjufu, 1984; Madhubuti, 1990). Black mothers are constantly attempting to protect their children from the dangers of institutionalized racism as their sons are routinely framed as aggressive and threatening (Collins, 2004; Ferguson, 2000; Russell-Brown, 1998). Studies show that on top of the everyday work of parenting, Black mothers actively work to protect their children from racism and to empower their children to survive and thrive in a racist society (Collins, 2005; Lareau, 2003; Suizzo, Robinson, & Pahlke, 2008). In addition, the literature on single African-American mothers, preparing their young sons to function in U.S. society, necessitates a special consideration of the unique social position of African-Americans in this country, in addition to the socialization that all parents undertake (Caughy, Nickerson, O'Campo, & Randolph, 2002).

A number of scholars (Anderson, 1993; Bell-Scott, Guy-Sheftall, Royster, Sims-Wood, DeCosta-Willis & Fultz, 1991; Billingsley, 1992; Collins, 1990; Dickerson, 1995; Herskovits, 1958\1990; Williams, 1991) have emerged in the last two decades offering a different perspective on Black motherhood, challenging the negative perceptions that have dominated the literature up to now. According to Burgess (1995), the works of these researchers encompass African-American women's feminist thought, Afro-centrism, and relevant ingredients contributing to theory-building in the examination of Black motherhood. Where a previous generation of deficit model theorists supported the Moynihan report (1965), and used such words as deviate, weak, unstable, and

pathological to characterize Black families, new scholars see resourcefulness and resilience in the Black family (Giddings, 1992).

A single mother's responsibilities can create emotional difficulties, including low self-efficacy or depression (Jackson & Scheines, 2005), embarrassment (Haleman, 2004), and a host of other issues (Kotchick, Dorsey, & Heller, 2005). According to Jackson and Scheines (2005), single mothers who are employed tend to experience fewer emotional difficulties than those who are unemployed, which is directly associated with a sense of high self-efficacy. In addition, Jackson and Scheines (2005) found a correlation between single mothers who displayed depressive symptoms and their relationship with the child's father, which, in turn, had an indirect effect on the amount of time that fathers spent with their children. The absence of fathers negatively affects their children and the single mothers, who must nurture the children alone (Jackson; Scheines 2005).

Higher Education and Black single mothers

Single Mothers are the fastest growing student demographic in the United States (Advisory Committee, 2012; Freeman, 2015; Threlfall, 2015). The US Department of Education (2014) projects a 15% increase in female enrollment into institutions of higher education by 2024, much of which the National Center for Education Statistics claims will be comprised of single parent student mothers (National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 2015) seeking entrance into higher education degree conferring programs for the first time (Threlfall, 2015). Furthermore, about 20% of undergraduate women are estimated to be single mothers, absent financial, emotional, or physical support of

partners or co-parents and 43% of the total student parent population, are single mothers (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2014).

According to Halem (2004), Higher education has been determined to be the main key in reducing poverty and creating more successful outcomes for single mothers and their children. In addition, research indicates that single mothers view education as a mechanism for moving away from poverty to middle-class status (Halem, 2004).

Findings suggest these parenting adult students negotiate multiple contexts in their daily lives (Freeman, 2015; Polakow, 1993) and are affected by broad patterns of disparity in support and opportunity (Shartzar, Long, & Benatar, 2015). Tehan (2008) argued single parent students are a special population who require different avenues of advisement than traditional students due to unique responsibilities and role strain. Stressors which would present ordinary challenges to traditional college students can present extraordinary difficulty for single parents who must schedule child care, care for sick children, and prioritize work/financial support with allocation of time for study in order to ensure academic success (Freeman, 2015). However, there are a number of single parent women in higher education who have mentioned the benefits of increased respect they received from family members, positive changes in their personal development, increased self-esteem with regard to interpersonal relationships, and notable aspirations to instill values for education in their children (Adair 2007; Halem, 2004; Kates, 1996). While the additional responsibility can serve as a stressor to this student population, women have noted that their children have also served as a major support throughout their participation in educational programs (Calicchia & Graham, 2006).

The Role of Spirituality/ Religion in the Lives of a Number of Black Single Mothers

Religion has played an important role in the lives of many single Black mothers. It has helped them to cope with stressful life situations and has served as the foundation for personal growth, happiness, and parenting values (Brodsky, 2000; Wilson, 2014; Lewis, 2010).

Churches and other organizations sometimes provide parental support, surrogate fathers, assistance with daily needs for childcare, health care, and transportation (Billingsley, 1992; Johnson, 2008). Church settings and the people associated with them, provide support for single mothers in several ways. Not only do they provide community concerts and recitals, they also provide food, clothing, and positive relationships for single mothers (Brodsky, 2000). For the majority of Black families, spirituality and church communities are considered to be kinship or extended families (Brodsky, 2000; Ledford, 2010). Brodsky (2000) also maintained that personal and parenting values are affected by religious beliefs. For example, religion provides a means for single mothers to cope with the everyday stressors of racial discrimination and also plays a pivotal role in the lives of single mothers who later become successful and resilient individuals (Brodsky, 2000; Ledford, 2010).

The Role of Extended Family

An emerging body of research states that African-American single mothers employ co-parenting which is defined as the process by which these mothers and another adult share childrearing responsibilities (Belsky, Putnam, & Crinic, 1996; Coiro & Emery, 1998; Shook, Jones, Forehand, Dorsey, & Brody, 2010). Co-parenting may

occur between the child's biological father, extended family members, or fictive kin such as close friends and neighbors (Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Coley, 2001; Davis, Rhodes, & Hamilton-Leaks, 1997; Gee & Rhodes, 2003; Jarrett & Burton, 1999; Shook, Jones, Forehand, Dorsey, & Brody, 2010). African-American grandparents are also very active in helping to rear their grandchildren (Dickerson, 1995). Aunts, uncles, and cousins of Black males from single parent homes also may contribute to the upbringing of these boys by participating in the day-to-day activities.

The support of an extended family and loved ones is crucial to a single Black mother's success (Brodsky, 2000; Cherlin, 2006; Green, Furrer, & McAllister, 2007; Holland, 2009; Johnson-Garner & Meyers, 2003; Jones, D. J., Zalot, A. Z., Foster, S. E., Sterrett, E., & Chester, C. (2007); Kotchick B. A., Dorsey, S., & Heller, L. (2005); Woody & Woody, (2007). The extended family and support system consist of a larger family that plays a key role in the well-being and care of the single mother and her children (Jones et al., 2007). In the Black family, for example, it is widely acknowledged and understood that the extended family goes far beyond biological relatives; rather, support consists of neighbors, friends, distant relatives, and those individuals whom the family can trust (Jones et al., 2007). Single mothers depend on this support to assist them emotionally and in other aspects of single parenthood (Green et al., 2007). According to Kotchick et al. (2005), single Black mothers who have little or no support from loved ones experience greater depression and emotional difficulties.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction and Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning of single motherhood by Black mothers and to gain their personal accounts on how they navigate and negotiate everyday life while raising their son(s) in contemporary urban America. The research was designed to give Black mothers who are raising their son(s) a platform to share their stories. Also, a primary goal for conducting this research was to gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences; by understanding the barriers, challenges, cultural and societal factors that impact them and their sons on a daily basis. Motherwork will be used as the methodology to help the researcher provide a deeper understanding and appreciation of the social and economic circumstances relating to Black single mothers who are raising son(s).

McMahon (1995) suggests that one's experience with mothering can vary based on ethnicity. According to Collins (1994), Black mothers, unlike White mothers, must negotiate racist social contexts while fighting for the physical survival of their children; struggling to balance child-rearing with work completed outside the home; while reconciling their maternal instinct with the powerless position they hold in a White society. Some Black feminists indicate Black women draw on a set of shared values and a common heritage to create their mothering role (Collins, 1990; Dove, 1998; Ladner,

1998). The mother's balance between the cultural resistance explained above and the empowering of their children encompasses Motherwork (Collins, 1994). Cooper (2007) gives three mechanisms of Motherwork, which include; (a) ensuring the child's physical and emotional survival; (b) empowering the child's life outcomes; and (c) nurturing the child's racial identity in a positive manner. Cooper (2007) describes "Motherwork":

The Motherwork of women of color is anchored in specific, racialized concepts of survival, power and identity. These mothers' quest to acquire each of these things is linked to their experience with oppression and their desire to ensure that their children can prosper in a racist society. (p. 494)

In addition, Motherwork challenges society to look at the oppressive factors related to Black mothers and how race, society, and other dominate power structures of America directly impact Black single mothers and their sons (Cooper, 2007). Lastly, Motherwork allows the researcher to conduct a study, which examines Black mothers in a way that addresses the complexity of the intersection of race, class, and gender variables in relation to the experience of being a Black single mother. Motherwork is used rather than other methods because it provides the lens to analyze and address the historical and present day devaluation of black women as mothers.

Guiding Questions

1. Describe your experience as a Black woman in contemporary urban America?
2. Describe the impact that being a single mother has taken on your life?
3. What do you perceive as some of your greatest challenges in raising a male child in contemporary urban America?
 - a) As a single mother how do you respond to these challenges?
 - b) What support systems, if any, do you call upon as you raise your son(s)?

Purposeful Sample

The sample selection of participants in this study represented a purposeful rather than a random sample. Merriam (1988) states that “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that one wants to discover and gain insight; therefore, one needs to select a sample from participants that will provide the most valuable learning experience.

Purposeful sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). This involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In addition to knowledge and experience, Bernard (2002) and Spradley (1979) note the importance of availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner. In addition, qualitative research relies

heavily on the researcher, a human, as the primary instrument. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), Contextual inquiry demands a human instrument, one fully adaptive to the indeterminate situation that will be encountered. The human instrument builds upon his or her tacit knowledge as much as, if not more than, upon propositional knowledge and uses methods that are appropriated to humanly implemented inquiry: interviews, observations, document analysis, unobtrusive clues, and the like. (p.187)

As researcher, I am the primary instrument in this study. However, the interviews from the participants served as the primary source of interpretations based on their experiences as Black single mothers who are raising their Black sons on their own. I used guiding questions for the interview process.

A purposeful sampling of five Black single mothers raising young sons was the strategy used to capture their voices and to interpret how they navigate and negotiate everyday life as women and single mothers of male children. Single Black mothers were defined as a female person of African descent who is the head of her household and raising her son and there is no other adult living in the home.

After receiving approval to conduct research from the Internal Review Board at my university, an email was sent to participants asking them to participate in this research (See Appendix B). The first five participants that replied and met the selection criteria were sent an acceptance to participate e-mail . The participants were then asked to sign the consent form (see Appendix C) and interviews were conducted at a public library of their choice.

Instrumentation and Data Analysis

The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with each participant. The data was collected via audio recorder and each interview was recorded individually. Once all of the interviews were conducted and recorded, the researcher then transcribed the audio recordings. Using purposeful sampling to organize and analyze the data, the researcher took the data that was yielded from the interviews and coded the transcriptions based on similarities and differences. In order to minimize the imposition I asked interview questions that were open-ended in nature.

Research Setting

An urban city in the Mid-West was chosen as the site for this study. The research was announced through a network of single mothers that the researcher is affiliated with as a networking strategy to find participants living in the nearby area that will agree to be a part of the study. When the participants are selected, they will receive a consent form. Interviews will not commence until the forms are completed, signed, and discussed.

When the required forms are received, a date and time will be set for the interviews. The interview will take place in person at a public library. Before the interview begins, an interview protocol will be read to the participants, and they will be informed about the research and the reasons for conducting it. The researcher will inform the participants that they and their son(s) will remain anonymous and pseudonyms will be used to protect their identity. Each of the interviews will last between forty-five minutes to one hour.

Data Collection

One face-to-face interview will be used to collect data from participants. The format used during the interview will be a semi-structured, in-depth interview format. Semi-structured refers to a research approach whereby the researcher asks questions about a given topic but allows the data-gathering conversation itself to determine how the information is obtained (Reinharz, 1992). The semi-structured interview is guided by a set of basic questions and issues to be explored, but neither the exact wording nor the order of questions is predetermined (Merriam, 1988). The questions used in this study focused on areas including but not limited to: women's sense of self; societal structures and how they influence race, class, and gender in the lives of Black single mothers; the experiences of rearing a son(s) in America as a single mother.

Interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed by the interviewer. The researcher will review the transcribed notes while listening to the audiotapes to check for accuracy, to ensure the quality of transcription, and gain thick-rich descriptions.

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), the interview is often selected as the primary method for data collection because it has the potential to elicit rich, thick description.

Further, this method offers researchers an opportunity to clarify statements and probe for additional information. For this study, the participants were chosen based on the following selection criteria; (1) Black single mother (non-married) who is the head of her household; (2) is between the ages of 35-45; (3) has at least one male child living in the home between the ages of 10-18; (4) currently employed; (5) lives in Chicago; and (6) willing to participate in the study and be audio-recorded.

Limitations of the Study

Due to the fact that the number of participants selected for the study was five, the data may not be statistically significant. Also, there was a dearth of the literature on the positive outcomes of Black mothers raising their sons in contemporary urban America. Lastly, the personal biases of the researcher serve as a limitation. Due to the researcher herself being a Black single mother raising her son in contemporary urban America some biases regarding how these experiences are perceived may have influenced the researcher's perspective.

Chapter IV

Findings

Introduction

This data analyzes Black single mothers who are raising their Black sons in urban communities. The mothers featured here voice their interpretations of a) what being a Black woman in contemporary Urban America means to them; b) what they perceive as some of their challenges in raising their male son(s); c) how they respond to these challenges; and d) what support systems they call upon to help them in raising their sons. The interview questions were semi-structured and open-ended (Appendix A). All of my participants are Black single mothers of only Black son(s).

The data will be organized in the following ways: 1) Introduction of each participant; 2) a presentation of themes supported by the interviews; and 3) responses to the research questions. The three questions that guided this study were

1. Describe your experience as a Black woman in contemporary urban America?
2. Describe the impact that being a single mother has taken on your life?
3. What do you perceive as some of your greatest challenges in raising a male child in contemporary urban America?
 - a) As a single mother how do you respond to these challenges?
 - b) What support systems, if any, do you call upon as you raise your son(s)?

London's Story (Lance & Noah)

"It took me a long time to start telling people no." (London 5/5/2019)

London is a 39-year-old Black single mother who has two sons Lance 17 and Noah 11. She was born, raised and still resides in the city. London and her 3 siblings were raised by both of their parents. London was the first single mother to respond to my recruitment email. London and I met at the local library. I had a small room reserved on the top floor of the library on the day of her interview. London greeted me with a great big hug, and told me how elated she was to have an opportunity to share her story.

London gave the impression during the first minutes of us meeting each other that she is a conversationalist. She exuded happiness as she spoke and seemed to be a free spirited woman.

London currently works and attends school full-time. She is in the last semester of her undergraduate studies and plans to complete her bachelors this upcoming spring. When she completes her degree she hopes to secure a better position within her employer, earn a higher salary and show her boys how important a college education is and the value of finishing something that you start. London's narrative reveals she is extremely focused on obtaining her personal goals that she has set for herself as well as taking care of Lance and Noah, whom she mentions are her "main priority".

"When Lance stated high school, I said to myself " I have to finish my program" My goal was to graduate college the same year he graduated high school, and I am on track to completing this spring. It meant a lot to me to complete because I need him, actually both of my boys to know that you finish things that you start in

life and secondly I always tell them as Black males in this country, you need a college education, it can open so many doors and I tell them to do it before they start trying to have a family like me, because it's harder because your priorities do shift. (London, 5/5/2019)

Being in America: London's Experience

London, described her experience as a Black woman in America as isolated, lonely, and in constant “super woman” mode. Since the age of twenty-one London feels her life has been non-stop. She has had to solely provide for her sons, work and has been in and out of school as well as having to constantly help her family. She mentions that her siblings and other family members heavily rely on her because she is the most responsible one. Asking for money and car-rides to certain places, she describes is normal with her family. She says not until recent, has she just start telling her family no.

“It took me a long time to start telling people no. They know that I’m a single mother, out here struggling trying to do things on my own” ... it’s super hard and because I’m the nice one, they all have just taking advantage of me over the years, but I had to stop, it was draining. I had to just focus on myself and my kids, focusing on my goals and things that me and my kids want to do. They should be helping me, but instead they just want to take, and enough was enough. They just wanted to take, take, take and never really give. Having to do everything for everybody and not having any one to really help or support me and my kids.” (London, 5/5/2019)

One of London's most recent accomplishments is that she is a new homeowner. She said she dreamed of having her own home. She mentioned how, now she and her boys can each have their own bedroom, even though she jokes about her oldest wanting to live in the basement.

"It's his own space, it's where he most comfortable, and I don't bother him until it's time for him to do his chores." (London, 5/5/2019).

Prior to purchasing her own home London, lived with her mom, and prior to that in a one-bedroom apartment with both of her children.

London describes both of her sons are very laid back and reserved. She says they are "really good boys". She says that her oldest, Lance, is extremely protective of her and tries to model and teach her youngest son to be the same way. She has over heard her Lance talking to her youngest, Noah, telling him things like "you know you are going to have to step up around the house because I'll be leaving soon and mom is going to need your help". London laughs as she mentions that she is happy to have had her eldest first. She is extremely proud of him, saying that he is responsible and very considerate of her. On the other hand she mentions her youngest, Noah, being a true baby.

"My youngest is truly a baby... and spoiled rotten and even has a sense of entitlement. But he truly looks up to his big brother and I adore their relationship, even as my big boy is becoming a man, he is also teaching my youngest to be a man in so many ways. I see the maturation process taking full effect in both of them... really, they are great boys and I'm blessed to have them." (London, 5/5/2019).

London mentions that in recent years Lance has become very attentive to her struggle as a single mother; the way she sacrifices and goes without just so that she can pay the bills, buy clothes, food and just provided for their basic necessities, and be able to get at least some of the things that they really want. London mentions that neither of her son's fathers are active in their lives, nor supports them financially, so the burden of providing literally everything that they need falls on her. Even though she did mention that her mom helps when she can, it's not often. Since Lance has been thirteen he has been attending a male mentoring program not far from where they live. She believes that this program has really helped her son mature. The men that run the program have been extremely influential in his life. In addition, Lance will be graduating from an all-boys high school this year and London is determined to get him to college outside of the city. She credits the male administrators and teachers in her son's high school for providing a safe space for young men to be themselves, be educated, and to develop as young men.

"I sent my son to an all boy high school because I knew there would be Black men there. That was important to me. Even though my son is a part of a male mentoring group, he would only meet with them twice a week, but I wanted Black men having an influence over his life every day, and they most certainly do. My son is graduating this year and right now he is sitting at a 3.9 G.P.A, hopefully he is able to maintain it. This school has truly given him a good foundation in addition to the foundation that he has learned from me and being raised in church, so I not going to worry about him at college, I know he is going to thrive." (London 5/5/2019)

London, says that her oldest wants to go down state to school, and she believes

that he probably will go on an academic scholarship because he has really good grades and a very high SAT score.

"I just want him to get out of the city, I don't care where he goes really, and I just want him out". He is really focused on his academics, has a little job, and most importantly he comes home and pretty much does what he is supposed to do. I don't too much worry about him, it's that little one that I'm going to watch"! (London 5/5/2019)

London's youngest son, Noah, she describes as a bit more of a challenge. She describes him as being an "OK" student, meaning that he is not really focused on school not really has an interest in it.

My youngest is in the 6th grade, he has been at the same school since he was in kindergarten, but I have recently, I guess within the last year or so have come to realize that he is just not feeling school at all. He has had some discipline issues with the teachers and the administrators over the years but I'm hoping that he will mellow out like his brother did. Lance and I had a rough patch with elementary school but he eventually mellowed out in high school. That's my hope, but I really don't know because they are two different kids and that younger one is something really different. Noah has always had problems with his female teachers and principal, he never gave the males teachers, the few that were in the building any problem. He does not like anyone yelling at him, especially

I guess it was his third grade year when he told me about his teacher and how she was mean and was always yelling at the kids. That was a problem for him because that was a benchmark year for school. I remember that he did not do well that year with his grades or testing and he ended up in summer school. But it's crazy because in summer school he had the 8th grade math teacher, who he really liked and when he tested at the end of the summer he tested past grade level. It was the same in thing in fourth grade with the teacher and 5th grade was just a tumultuous year all together with the girl issues, I mean I was at the school all the time dealing with issues with him and theses girls and even some of the boys that he had been friends with for years, he started having problems with them over these girls. So yeah, now he's in sixth and he changes classes and the same thing does not really care for his female teachers because he says that they all yell and are rude and don't really like to answer his questions and ignore him when he raises his hand, but it's no surprise to me that when I e-mail them about their behavior towards my son and see them at parent teacher meetings they are singing a different tune.

It's really unfortunate because my kid loves to learn, I have had him in all kinds of academic programs and even the tutor that he has now in math they have a great relationship. It's just sad situation with some of our teachers, it's like if you don't want to be there find another profession

because I really feel many of them are doing our children a disservice. Now we are in another bench mark year, he's in tutoring for math so hopefully he will test at grade level this year so he does not have to go to summer school. (London 5/5/2019)

London believes that Noah will be all right, she gives a lot of credit to her brother and her oldest son for holding him accountable and trying to keep him focused and on the right path. London also mentions that Noah is a great athlete and how football and reading are his passions.

Noah loves football. He has been playing since he was five years old. He has won several trophies and medals and has received a lot of recognition, to the point where there are high schools looking at him now. Noah also loves reading... he doesn't play video games really at all.

Maybe if we go to someone's house and the kid has a game system or something but that's about it. Noah will pick up a book in a heartbeat. He loves reading about football and history, any kind of history, so I definitely have to say that I'm grateful for that. (London 5/5/2019)

London's Challenge

London believes that being a single mother is the most challenging task of her life. She has no doubt that this challenge of raising two boys on her own is a test of her faith in GOD, which she mentions has strengthened her relationship with him. London made it clear that her sons are her number one priority. She went further to say teaching

morals, values, responsibility, survival skills, and a relationship with their creator is very important to her.

London describes one of her major responsibilities and obstacles is actually protecting and keeping them safe from the violence that plagues their community. London, lives across the street from a school. When she bought the house she was so happy it was across the street from a school because the boys had a park and had access to the basketball court, football field and a track. However, she quickly realized that the perfect neighborhood was not so perfect. London describes how there are shootings that often take place at the park, and how the police are constantly patrolling her neighborhood. They patrol so much to the point that she doesn't let either of her children go to the park anymore or walk the streets in her neighborhood because she does not want them to become the victims of mistaken identity by police or the target of a bullet that may have been intended for someone else. London describes how she is constantly talking to her boys, counseling them, so that they can make good decisions and to be aware of their surrounding at all times. One of her fears that she mentions is them doing something so small that it could really cost them their life or have major consequences like possibly them going to jail or even getting killed.

I'm so afraid, well I try not to fear.... so I'm just going to say I'm constantly thinking about all of what they have learned from me and other positive people in their life...Like if they forget something so critical that was told to them or I mean they make just one mistake like; jaywalking, walking down a street with a hoodie on, getting stopped by the wrong offer

on the wrong day, coming in to contact with one of their peers that value nothing and have nothing to lose, or... just coming home on the bus or sitting on the front porch....I mean it's just so much. It's like they have to be intentional about every single move they made, nobody should have to live like that. That's why we always pray before they go to school in the mornings and before we all go to bed as a family. You just never know, it's just so heavy the burden of having boys and raising them in this community, this country... so I'm just in constant prayer. (London5/5/2019)

London's Joy: The Blessings of Boys

Though there are many challenges that London faces as a single mother she did discuss some of the joys that she experiences with her boys ...

My boys are a blessing. I believe that if I was not equipped to take care of them and raise them God would not have blessed me with them. I recognize it a great responsibility and an even greater challenge. They are wonderful kids who make me very happy. Just to reflect on them growing up, I mean they are just a joy. To watch them go through each stage of their life, to watch them make mistakes and then learn from them, to watch them fall down and get back up, to watch how they interact with each other and how they honor me as their mother is a blessing. To watch them engage in the things that they love to do and how they do it with so

much passion brings me joy. They are beautiful Black boys who will one day I believe be great men. (London 5/5/2019)

In addition, the quality time she spends with her sons brings her joy. The car rides to and from school, the movie and bowling nights are times that London values with her son. She mentions as a single mother it is very important for her to keep an open and transparent relationship with her boys. She says that they have times when they have no consequence conversations, so they can tell her whatever, without the fear of consequences. She also describes that they are able to let her know if they feel like she has wronged them in any way or if they think she went off and could have handled the situation in a better way. London tries to create a space where her sons feel safe, because she is aware that there are not many safe spaces in the world for them to just speak freely and be themselves. Though she does mention she has established certain boundaries, simply because she is the adult and their mother

London's Support System

London has a lot of respect for her, brother who has really stepped up and helped to guide her sons and be there for them if they needed to talk about men stuff. In addition, her son's mentors, coaches and male teachers have had a huge influence in the life of her sons.

Black Boys need Black men, really they do. I know that there are a lot of single mothers out here that don't really value the presence of a Black man in their son's life, but I do. My dad is deceased, but he was a great

influence on my oldest. Unfortunately, he died before my baby was born. My bother has stepped all the way, he is a great father to his own children, and has been a great uncle/ father figure to mine. My sons' male teachers and coaches are outstanding in what they do, they are tuff on them, but those boys need that, and I appreciate them for being tuff and firm with them, I believe that they will definitely appreciate it in the long run. (London 5/5/2019)

London's Faith: Prayer + Meditation=Strength

London believes it is her faith in God is what has truly sustained her. She is a faithful churchgoer who is active in her local church. She discussed how important it has been for her to raise her sons in church. Prayer is the most important part of her life, she said that she would not be able to endure the challenges of life as a Black single mother that is raising Black boys.

My faith has sustained me. I go to church and all of that, but it's deeper than just going to church. It is a relationship with your creator, I pray, meditate especially when I'm doing my yoga. I have been through some things in my life that almost brought me to the point of giving up, there were some situations that I almost did not make it out alive and I am grateful to God for keeping me and for giving me the strength and courage to raise my boys. (London 5/5/2019)

Nia's Story (Nicholas)

"If it were not for God, I mean I just couldn't do it." (5/12/2019)

Nia is 37 years old. Her son Nicholas is 14. Nia was born, raised and still resides in the same community and home where she is now raising her son. She has no siblings and was raised by her mother and father who are now both deceased. Nia is currently working a full-time job as an intake representative at a local hospital. Nia started working on her bachelor's degree in physical therapy, however did not complete it. Ironically, both of her parents became ill at the same time and she stopped school to help care for them.

Nia was the second participant to respond to my recruitment email. On the day of our interview, we met at the library closest to her job where I had a conference room scheduled. Nia has black natural curly hair. She wore a studded blue jean jacket over a midriff tank top, with black leggings and Timberland boots. She gave a half smile and sat down, and immediately informing me that her son will be calling and texting during the interview. He was on the bus and train leaving from school and was to meet her at the library. She required him to check in periodically. I assured her that was perfectly fine and we could break as often as she needed. During our interview Nia gave the impression that she is quite reserved. She did not show much emotion at all during our interview.

Nia's Black Woman Experience

Nia says her life as a Black woman is like a “roller coaster ride.” She describes her day-to-day as a constant change and totally unpredictable, never knowing what each day will bring.

Sometimes I don't realize who I am or where I fit in in society or what I am even doing sometimes...what I have or don't have access too, it's a constant adventure, which is the way life is supposed to be right? (5/12/2019)

Nia describes her life prior to her mother and father getting sick as normal. With her mother and father assisting with her son, she did not have much pressure on her. She knew that her son was well taken care of, so that allowed her to focus on some of her goals, such as finishing school and buying a house for she and Nicholas. Nia also talked about how her parents were her right hand. They would help her with dropping off and picking up Nicholas from school, cooking for him, bathing him, assisting with homework, taking him to music lessons, and even disciplining him when needed. While Nia was working and going to school full time her parents practically assisted with all of the day- to-day care of Nicholas.

I was a year away from finishing my program when my parents got sick. They got sick back to back. As soon as I realized that they were no longer to help me, my whole world changed. I was now in a position that not only am I going to have to take care of my son, but my parents, my God how life can take a turn so quickly.

I mean I always knew they were valuable, but I guess I kind of took them for granted because they were always there. (Nia, 5/12/2019)

Nia acknowledges that her experiences as a Black woman could be worse but it could also be better. She mentioned that she is proud, to be a black woman. She began reflecting on the women in her family on whom she draws her strength from...

I come from strong women, proud women. Women who have persevered though some really difficult situations, thinking about that gives me strength when I get into some really bad situations or when I feel like I'm not going to make it another day. My mother was a nurse, my grandmother was a nurse, and my great grandmother was "the help", she was everything those white families needed her to be and more. My aunts, both my mom and my dad's sisters were, and the couple that are still alive, are strong women. All these women had to endure things that I can't imagine during their lives. I remember my grandmother telling me, horror stories about her childhood in the then segregated south. I also remember those stories that made me feel proud about being Black and being a girl. It's funny because Black women have come so far in terms of our legal rights, in business, in entertainment, in government yet I believe we are on the path of self-destruction because somewhere along the way we have lost our sense of pride and identity. We have let society identify who we are, certainly not all of us but many of us. I look at my friends,

and all they care about, in there 30's is social media, and who's following them, who's liking their pics and their status and all of this crap. Then there are all of these reality shows that have really tainted, and distorted who we really are as women, so other races think that we are all loud and ghetto and hyper sexual, I means it's ridiculous. And the sad part is I don't think it's going to get any better... (Nia, 5/12/2019)

Nia had a great childhood, though she did not have brothers or sisters she had a lot of cousins and a best friend of 29 years that has been like a sister to her. She shared that her father was her best friend as a little girl, and when she grew up and got married she wanted a husband just like her father.

He was always a gentleman. He treated me like a princess and my mother like a queen. My daddy was like my best friend when I was a little girl, I would tell him everything and he would let me get away with things that mother told me no too. I adored him, he taught me how to be a lady, how a lady should act, dress, I really miss him....He came home at night and never went missing for days. It's crazy because I had several girlfriends who did not have their dads at all, and then I had some friends who's fathers didn't come home at night or would just go missing for days at a time, or were abusive, I mean all kinds of stuff, but my dad was a standup guy, I would call him the "perfect gentlemen". Yeah, I'm sure he and my mom had their problems, but after 52 years of marriage you should expect

that, but he was always there for me and Nicholas. He past when Nicholas was twelve, OMG... that was his “Papa” who was the father figure in Nicholas’s life... (5/12/2019)

When Nia’s parents became ill, she had to teach Nicholas how to ride the bus to and from school. She had to be at work early and could not take him. Nia describes teaching her son how to ride the bus two weeks before his 7th grade year began as one of the hardest things that she has ever had to do. She wishes that she did not have to do it so early in his life.

I always thought that maybe my son would begin taking the bus maybe the start of his 9th or 10th grade year...that’s when I started but I wanted to and it was different back then. I never thought that I would have to teach him so early, there is so much that happens in theses streets, I was always that parent that tried to shelter him as long as I could, but I could not any longer. I had to teach him how to walk to the bus stop, how not to engage in conversation with anybody, always speak.....say hello or what’s up but never engage in conversation. I had to tell him that gangs may try to recruit you at some point, or ask you what set you from, but always smile, tell them you’re not affiliated be polite and keep moving.

I had to teach him how to get on the bus, and when to get off and how to always sit in the front of the bus. It was a fact that he had to grow up

quicker than I wanted.... I did not want him walking these streets at all. There was no school bus that would pick him up, like when I was a kid and he did not go to a neighborhood school. I was able to grab him most evening, thank God for after school programs, but when I could not he had to take the bus to my job. This experience alone made him more independent, strong and smart. (Nia, 5/12/2019)

Nia describes Nicholas as independent, strong, and smart. She defined their relationship as being extremely close, and when her parents past away that brought them even closer. She stated that Nicholas has always been a great student and an overall great kid. She mentioned there was a period when he turned eight that he really began inquiring about his father, who does not have any contact with him. During that period Nicholas began having some discipline, as well as academic, problems in school. Nia's parents suggested that he get some professional counseling, in hopes of helping him process some of his feelings and emotions. Nia Began to reflect:

Nicholas, I think he was in the 3rd grade he started to really have some what I believe were "daddy" issues. From the time he was like five he would ask about his dad and I would say I don't know where he is, and he would leave it alone. But when he turned eight OMG...did he want answers. He would constantly ask, where is he? Why don't you know where he is? I want to see him? Does he call? Does he know who I am? Does he hate me? Does he love me? And not only was I getting the

questions that I did not know how to answer, because, I really didn't know how to answer them... I didn't know where he was, but I know Nicholas stated acting out in school, like he was trying to get in trouble on purpose...it was a cry for attention. This was the year he did soccer and he started piano lessons and even I had him in this science program but he would see all these dads, not granddads bringing their kids to practice. So I guess when he started being aware that other kids outside of school had their dads he was demanding answers... and I understood. (5/12/2019)

During our interview, Nia did not go into great detail about Nicholas's father. She mentioned that she believes that Nicholas is however better off without him...

I thought I knew him, but I was totally deceived. It's like that man lived four of five different life styles. I was totally deceived. I was with him for a little over a year. I didn't know until he put me in a very compromising situation with the possible threat of going to jail that I was dealing with a con artist. The cop that had questioned me, even told me that he had several other aliases and identities. I thought he was this other person, but did not find out until I was pregnant with Nicholas that he had a rap sheet a mile long with all of these, conspiracy misdemeanors and he even had felony bank fraud and some other stuff, that I have just tried to erase from my memory. I confronted him about his background and why he

never told me, he became defensive and disappeared, I mean literally disappeared. Nicholas was born a couple of months later, I tried calling he changed number, his mom claimed she didn't know where he was so at that point I just gave up, and I have not seen or heard from him since and that was 14 years ago. It's like, I just don't know how you as a man know that you have a whole child out here somewhere in the world and attempt to never make contact with him...(5/12/2019)

Keeping Nicholas Safe: Nia's Challenge

Nia describes the time when she found out that she was going to have a boy, she mentioned the immediate feeling of a heavy weight come over her. She knew that raising a boy as a single mother would possibly be the greatest challenge of her life; providing him with the life skill that he needs to survive and navigate through a society that is racist as well as protecting him from being victimized by someone who looks just like him.

Cooper (2005) asserted that in addition to mothering, Black Mothers also must deal with equipping their children with the tools necessary to survive in a racist society.

I have had to endure many things in my life that have happened to me, but when they happen to our children it is as if someone is literally ripping out our heart... a couple of months ago I was up north, me and Nicholas just came from shopping and were on our way to a restaurant.

I see the police in my rear view signaling me to pull me over. I tell Nicholas to take off his baseball cap and to be cool and to not make any sudden movements. It was night time so that to me made it worse... both of the cops were white, one woman and one man. The lady came to my side and the man went to the passenger window. She claimed she was stopping me because I did not make a full stop at the stop sign, meanwhile the other cop had his light in my son's eyes asking him all these damn questions like; how old are you? What school do you go to? Where do you live? I said to him sir he is a minor, he is twelve years old, and he tells me to mind my business and my response was "yes sir, but he is my business".

At that point my son stated crying... at that point the cop walked away from his side and back to his car with his partner who was running my info. Meanwhile, my sons is petrified, petrified because he watches the news and is aware of the attacks on Black people and he has seen the movie 'the hate u give' so it definitely stuck a nerve when that office told me to mind my business... and actually that was the very first time that my son had ever been in the car with me while I was stopped.

The police eventually brought me back my license and registration and told me some BS like next time make sure I come to a full stop. That was just crazy, but of course the real reason I was stopped was because I was a driving while being a black woman, in a Lexus, with a black boy in the passenger seat, who could initially have been mistaken as a man, and on

their side of the city...so of course I had to make that a teaching moment for my son... but nothing prepared me for the day that I got a call from my best friend that my son and her son had a gun pulled on them at the park...he and my Godson were at the park across the street from my best friend's house a park they frequently go to and have played basketball at since they were seven.

They and some other boys on their team won the game and the other guys could not take getting beat. These guys lost, and came back to the court about 20 minutes later and pulled a gun on Nicholas and his friends, saying they talk too much shit and demanding their shoes money and phones. What makes it so bad, they were the same age as my son and Godson who were thirteen at the time and they were neighborhood kids. When my best friend called me I literally broke down on the phone, I rushed to go and get him I just knew I was goanna get pulled over but I didn't care, I just had to get there... I just had to get to him...that's all I knew. Something like that happened to me before, so I knew how he felt, I just had to get to him...That day changed both of our lives forever. You always hear stories about other peoples kids getting shot, and all I could think about is what if he just pulled the trigger...all I can say, all I can say, was it was God... he definitely kept my son and Godson safe that day... How else do you explain it?

Kids are out here getting shot by each other every day, I mean the cops don't even have to do it... its crazy because you try and warn them about the cops, and how to deal with the cops when they are stopped or harassed, but sad to say it's our own people most of the time that we have to worry about. They can't even go to the park and play ball, without someone getting their feeling hurt and running home to go and get a gun, that can potentially end someone's life ... I don't know, I am just grateful my baby is ok. (5/12/2019)

Daily Prayer: Nia's Spirituality

When I asked Nia about her spirituality she quickly acknowledged that she is a believer in Jesus Christ. Nia shared that after a personal traumatic experience happened to her at nineteen she instantly reflected on the times her grandmother would take her to church and have the sister in the church pray over her. She believes in the power of prayer, stating that "it's a part of our daily lives". Nia believes that her faithful prayer life has helped to sustain her mentally and has kept her and her son safe, as well honoring her mother and her father up until the time they each passed away.

All I remember was sitting on my boyfriend's porch one summer evening, and these guys came from the gang way and just started shooting, I barely crawled into the front door and my boyfriend at the time, he was sitting on the bottom step and he ran and while he was running they hit him twice in the leg. I mean I was traumatized for like two years, had to go to

counseling and everything. He survived and so did I, I didn't get hit. That's when I knew that God was real, that was I would say my spiritual awakening... and not long after I started going to church and have been since I was nineteen... (Nia 5/12/2019)

Nia's Support System

Nia's support system consists of her best friend of twenty nine years. She describes her as a second mother to Nicholas and that she and her husband really stepped up when Nia's parents became ill. She also indicated that her best friend's husband has been like a father figure. Nia's ex-boyfriend whom she was with for five years calls and checks in with Nicholas.

My bestie and her husband are the best... I owe them everything. They have really helped and supported us, and I even appreciate my ex...even though he and I could not get it together, he did not neglect my son. He was there with him in many of his formative years and they really had a great relationship. Actually they still do, we are still friends actually because of my son. My son's coaches, and male teachers have really been a great influence in his life as well. I am most thankful to God, because if it were not for God I mean I just couldn't do it. (Nia, 5/12/2019)

Jamie's story (Jordan)

“If you seek knowledge and you're a well put together Black woman, there are a ton of opportunities. But I also think at the same time where there's a ton of opportunity there is also a ton of disappointments” (Jamie 5/11/2019)

Jamie is a Black single mother who is raising her 13 year old son. She was born and raised in the city nearby where she lives now. Jamie was raised by her mother and father, who currently live in Florida. Jamie's mother was a school teacher and her father was a Real Estate Broker. Jamie holds a Bachelor's degree in Health Care Management and a Master's degree in Health Care Administration and Supervision. She is currently working in Health care administration for a large health care corporation. Jamie was married for twelve years until her ex-husband abandoned her and their son who was four years old at the time. Jamie is extremely focused on the needs of her son and getting him through high school and into college. Though Jamie is currently employed she is currently in the job market. She indicated that her son was just accepted into a very prestigious private high school and though they did give her son a scholarship she still needs a boost in salary to help offset the scholarship cost, and still be able to provide the type of lifestyle that they currently live. Jamie has been interviewing for positions and feels confident in a position that she just interviewed for.

Jamie was the third mother to respond to my recruitment email. I knew of Jamie through a mutual friend. Though I never met her in person, my friend would speak highly of her and her son. The day I met Jamie for her interview, she was enthused. She greeted me with a big hug. She looked just as my friend described. She was light brown skinned

with a short haircut that framed her face. She was wearing a blue pants suit, blue pumps and carried a black brief case. When we sat down to begin the interview, she thanked me again for the opportunity to be able to be a part of what I was doing. She said, “People really need to hear our point of view of what it’s like being single mothers and raising black boys”. She was extremely personable, with a huge smile and a very warm and humbling spirit.

Jamie’s Experience

Jamie believes that Black women in general have a world of opportunities at their disposal if they are determined, smart, savvy, and have faith.

As a Black woman I believe that if you seek knowledge and you’re a well put together woman, there are a ton of opportunities. But I also think at the same time where there’s a ton of opportunities there is also a ton of disappointments...There have been occasions within corporate America where I had to prove myself and my value to the theses people time and time over. I have been over looked for promotions because I am a Black woman who is educated and I believe they view me as a threat. There have been instances where my supervisors would transfer to another department and instead of promoting me who would be next in line, they would hire a Caucasian and have me train them. I have been overlooked for a management positions three times since I have been at my company. I have been here for 19 years and there has never been a Black person in

upper management. It's something totally wrong with that picture. On the flip side I have been able to do ok for myself and my son financially while working here and plus the job is very flexible, but I have come to the point where I need move on. (Jamie 5/11/2019)

Jamie describes her son Jordan as self-motivated, respectful, and compassionate and just an overall great kid. She said that as of late he has been dealing with the transition from middle school to high school. In addition, Jamie mentioned that he has been dealing with some rejection from his father, whom he desperately wants a relationship with. Jamie stated that when her ex-husband left them eleven years ago, he has only managed to come and see his son five times in past eleven years. Jamie mentioned that she often times has difficulty processing how a father can just turn his back on his own son. She mentions that her son often calls and asks to see his dad.

However, he is generally left with empty promises of him showing up.

My son loves his father... it's like he can do no wrong in his eyes. But he continues to not do right by our son. I mean he invited him to all of his 8th grade events and he did not come to one, not even graduation. I mean that tore my son up inside. He didn't really say it, but I could just see the disappointment written all over his face, he would be at each event waiting for his father to walk through the door and he would never show. I mean it's not like he was on drugs or in jail, I mean my God he's a cop.

He is out here so called protecting and serving and he can't even protect or serve his own son. Periodically my son will still call him, I never tell

him not to, and I guess he's hoping that one day something in his father will just click".

(Jamie 5/11/2019)

Jamie shared that when her son was four, her ex-husband informed her that he wanted a divorce. Jamie admitted that that was the most difficult time of her life. She felt that she had failed her in her marriage. She envisioned her self being married to her husband until death. She envisioned the two of them raising their son together and having what she called a "happily ever after".

I thought that my life would be similar to my parents. I never thought that I would be a single mother, that's actually something that I never wanted. I watched too many of my friends and family members raise their kids on their own. I really thought that I had a fairytale life and that I was living my happily ever after. But nope. I ended up finding out that he was having an affair a year before he told me he wanted a divorce. It was actually his work partner, this man ended up getting her pregnant and they had a baby and I guess he just chose that family instead of ours. I have since gotten over all of that, but what I have not gotten over is the way he just totally neglected his son. I mean this man is still in the same city as his son and does not have any kind of relationship with him... I don't get it. My heart hurts for my son, but I'm so proud of him because he is a good kid, I mean just a great kid. (Jamie, 5/11/2019)

Jamie describes her son not only as a star athlete in football and basketball, but he is also a scholar who has received numerous awards and recognition for his academics.

Jamie is very proud of him. She says that “he is a brilliant kid”. He values education and loves playing sports. Jamie discussed that they have a very good relationship. There was a period when Jamie noticed that her son began to challenge her more and was being more oppositional than usual, that caused alarm. However, Jamie now believes that their relationship is healthy and transparent.

I guess when Jordan was around nine or ten he became intolerable. It's as if he disliked me. He would just give me so much push back at home, did not want to do anything that I asked of him. There were never any issues at school just at home. Talking was not working, spanking not working, nothing was working, he was just bad, didn't want to clean up his room, he was not eating my food, talking back, I mean it's like he turned into an alien or something. My mother would have to come over and cook or I would take him over to their house for him to eat... it's just like my baby became my enemy... During this time my parents were still living here and my dad ended up having a serious conversation with him, more intense than the ones they usually have. My dad told me that Jordan said him he was upset with me because he thought I was the reason that dad left. My dad of course told him that I was not, and something along the lines of- people have choices, and we have absolutely no control of the choices that people make... it was a deep conversation that he had with

Jordan, he really broke it down on his level for him to understand... after that conversation I mean he was like a totally different person. That was my segue to come in and just shower him with love, because that's all I knew how to do anyway was just to love him. (Jamie 5/11/2019)

Jamie's Challenges

Jamie mentions the impact of being a single mother has been a tremendous challenge on her. She describes her life as a single mother...

I've basically have not had a life of my own, my life has been dedicated solely to my child. You know I have to be this kids everything. I know I can't physically be his father, but you know I have had to be his mother, I've had to be his father, I've had to be counselor, I've had to be his doctor, I've had to be his cook, I've had to be his maid, his chuffer, his spiritual adviser, I mean everything that you can possibly imagine that a kid needs I've been that and more. I've had to be everything so you know that left no time for me. My life for myself is after him and I do that intentionally because he didn't ask to be here, he's an innocent human being and he should not be put to the waist side because I'm a single parent. Sometimes I tell my son that it didn't take two of us, it took three, it was your father, God and me, so I've never been alone. At the same time I'm the only one here in human form so all of this pressure has definitely taken a toll on my life, I have not had had a life, I have not traveled and

have not dated, and gone out very little. I've had to sacrifice a whole lot, I mean a whole lot so that my son, so that my son could live just a little bit. (Jamie 5/11/2019)

Jamie also shared that one of her concerns is her son's safety. Now that he is getting older, she recognizes that she has to give him some level of freedom, which is really hard because of the environment they live in but necessary.

On top of all of this, I have to teach him how to survive and navigate out here in this world, in our community. He is getting older and I can't continue to shelter him, I would if I could, but I know I can't. So instead I try my best to prepare him... I teach him to watch out for his peers who are jealous because they think he has something, to not to get into confrontation with the wrong guys whether he's at the park, a dance, or just walking down the street, to be aware- I have always taught him to be aware is to be alive. I also teach him "as best as you can make it your business to be and live at peace with everyone". (Jamie, 5/11/2019)

Jamie's Support

Jamie describes how her parents have been a huge support in she and her son's life. She mentioned that they were really a huge impact in her son's formative years and the years that Jamie needed them the most.

My parents are awesome. Truly they are my backbone. I mean they have always been active in my son's life, but it's like they took on another role when my ex left. My father has always been hands on with Jordan, they would play sports together, go fishing, bike riding and Jordan would often go in the field with my father who is a real-estate agent and investor. He is his model of what a man should be and do for his family. He's always having what I like to call lectures with Jordan. Since they moved out of state, my father still talks to Jordan on the phone every day and every night on Face Time...it's their ritual. (Jamie 5/11/2019)

Since Jordan was five year old Jamie shared that he has always had coaches and strong images of Black men in his life.

My son has always been involved in sports so he has always had coaches, great coaches at that. Some he has had a bond with since he was small, a couple of them still coach and train him. They know that I'm a single mom, and they offer so much support... they are not creeps, like you hear in the news, taking advantage of these kids, or the moms, but they are genuinely what I believe to be good men and they care about my son. If he needs a ride home from practice or to a game because I'm still at work, they are able to grab him for me, feed him and I trust them. (Jamie 5/11/2019)

Jamie shared that Jordan has also been a part of a mentoring group that mentors young men ages eleven to eighteen years old. Jordan has been a part of this group since

he has been eleven years old. They have bi-monthly meetings at the church and throughout the academic year they have several outing with the boys and in the summer they have a two-week rites of passage program at a designated campsite.

This program has been a life saver, I think the program coupled with my dad and his coaches have really helped my son to mature in so many ways. The program is like boy scouts for Black boys. It teaches them about becoming men, how to survive in urban areas, how to respect and honor themselves, their families and God. It also teaches them about being responsible and accountable for their actions and behaviors...They take them on all kinds of educational and cultural field trips. It's a blessing that we found this program...it has really help my son see that he is not the only boy who is without his father, he is a part of a brother hood where they have a unfortunate commonality, Black boys that have absent fathers. (Jamie 5/11/2019)

Jamie's Spirituality

Jamie admitted that though she does not attend church regularly, she does however have has a strong relationship with God. She believes that it is because of her relationship with God, that she has been able to persevere and withstand some very troubling times in her life. She acknowledged that it was God who gave her the strength to go on after her divorce and the raise her son.

Seriously, if it were not for God I would not have made it through my divorce, because I'm going to tell you there were times I thought about

just checking up out of here. I was at the weakest point of my life, and before me I had a greater challenge...raising this little boy who was totally innocent in all of this. My God... I'm trying to tell you, he really gave me the strength to endure... You know they say that we all have our time on the cross, well that was definitely my time... to have your husband up and leave you and a four year old baby to go and start a whole new life with another woman and a new baby... I persevered even though at times I wanted to give up. He allowed me to still have my parents in my life who were a huge support and friends who came and picked me up when I was down at my lowest point. And he gave my son and I a network of strong Black men who have stepped in like surrogates to help support us. (Jamie 5/11/2019)

Angel's Story (Andre & Anthony)

“As a single mother raising these kids, especially boys, I need help, not only physical help but spiritual and emotional help that can only come from my creator”. (Angel 5/24/2019)

Angel is a 35-year-old Black single mother who is raising her two sons Andre, 17 and Anthony, 10. Angel was born in the inner city, in the same neighborhood where she and her sons reside now. Angel is the only child and was raised by her mother and father. Angel's mother was a house wife and her father was an accountant. Angel recalls having a very comfortable and happy childhood. It was her hope that she would have a similar life to the one her parents provided for her and her siblings. Angel finished nursing school 6 months ago and is currently working as a nurse at a community health clinic.

The day we met for our interview, Angel was dressed in her medical uniform. She was about 5'8' and slim, with long Black hair that was pulled back into a ponytail. Angel was the fourth participant that agreed to take part in this study. What stood out about Angel was that she seemed to be reluctant and a little timid about the interview. By far, she was the most reserved of my participants. I could tell that I would have to ask more probing questions because of her personality. When we sat down to begin the interview, she stated that “I am a very personal person”. She went on to say “I don't usually tell people, especially strangers my business, but maybe my story could possibly help someone who is in my situation”. To ease her mind prior to beginning the interview, I reassured her that she could take a break anytime she wanted to and I also reassured her that she and her sons would be assigned pseudonym.

Angel's Experience

Angel described her experience as a Black woman as “interesting”. She recalls being a young Black woman working as a sales associate in a major downtown department store. This was the first time that she blatantly experienced racism and sexism. Angel was one of the only black women in sales, no Black males and no Blacks in management. During her time there Angel encountered many challenges with fellow co- workers and management.

I was a threat to them. They did not like me at all. Most of my co-workers were white women, some my age and some probably around my mother's age. When I first started working there I tried to be nice, tried to speak, but most of these women did not even want to speak to me. The lady who was training me, was very rude and condescending, and talked to me like I was a child. When I told the manager, who actually hired me, how this lady was talking to me, he said “don't worry about it you'll get used to it”.

At that point I knew I was not going to be working here for long. There was another time when a white couple came into the store, I began helping them. The husband was being nice, it was as if the wife was getting frustrated because her husband was being nice, I remember her saying something to him and he basically ignored her... she walked off and came back with the manager and another sales person, who was white... that sale was taken from me. That actually happened a few times, where white customers did not want my assistance and sought out another white sales

associate to help them... Believe it or not, I worked there for two years... I was young and I guess then I had more tolerance for that foolishness.

Those interaction that I had with white people at the time made me feel like I was not human. I heard stories from my parents and grandparents but never really had those type of experiences myself until I started working there... (Angel, 5/24/2019)

During the interview, Angel came to a pause. She then started reflecting on a time during her life when she worked at a department store...

You know it's funny because that's really the only time that I have ever had a problem with white people, and that's because I was in their space. I never really experienced racism until began working down town and mingling with them, I have always lived in Black communities and went to all Black schools which I guess is a good and bad thing. (Angel, 5/24/2019)

Angel admitted to being “woke” and more “conscious” now that she is an adult.

She is an avid reader and expressed how she has educated herself and her sons on African and Black history. As a Black woman Angel is empowered. She believes that Black women have made and continue to make strides in our country, however she still believes that Black women have a long way to go...

With so much going on in our communities and within our world, I really had to wake up. I had to do this by educating myself, in order for me to educate my boys on the reality of them being in their Black skin, and all of what that means. I had to let them know what that means for their

survival, and how they have to be on guard and make good decisions, and how they are not privileged and will never have the same privileges as their white counterparts. I consider myself to a very transparent mother... I mean you have to dealing with kids' these days. They are way more advanced then we were and they have access to so much more, and so I look at it as you have to stay current, stay relevant, and stay in their business. I know I get on their nerves but they will be okay. (Angel, 5/24/2019)

Angel's Challenges

Angel mentioned that being a single mother raising two boys has been extremely challenging and has had a serious impact on her life. Though she has a very strong support system, she mentioned that it is at times been “unbearable”. Angel shared that her eldest sons’ father was killed two years ago and the youngest son’s father is currently serving a 25 year prison sentence. Aisha’s mentioned how the loss of her eldest son’s father really traumatized her son.

He was a good man. Though we were not together he was there for his son, he provided, he did what a man was supposed to do. This loss hit my son, OMG... it crushed him. He was a standup guy, he was not in the streets, he worked for the post office, and I mean a good guy. And some young boys decided they were going to rob him one night and not only did they rob him of his material possession, they robbed him of his life. They

robbed his mother from having her son, they robbed my baby of his father... (Angel, 5/24/2019)

My youngest father... I mean it's like the streets kept calling him. He did what he felt he had to do to survive, and I get it... I really do. When you come from the community where we come from and the background and upbringing that he came from he really had no other choice, his whole family was affiliated with that street life. It's just caught up to him and now he has to do his time, and my son has to do his time without his father. I debated for the longest time on taking him to the prison to see him, and then I finally did, actually a few months ago... I needed him to see early that this is not where you want to end up. He asks a lot of questions about his father so they actually have started writing each other, I tell him "write him letters and ask him all the questions you want". Yup its tuff...I weep on the inside for both of them because still to this day when I see men with their sons, my heart breaks it just breaks...I work hard to provide them the best life possible. My priority has always been them, and making sure they had everything that they needed. I make sure that I keep them busy so they have no idle time. That in turn keeps me busy, but I'm good with that, because I know what happens if they do have idle time. (Angel, 5/ 24/2019)

During our interview, Angel showed me a picture of her boys. They were very handsome, with big vibrant smiles just like their mother. Angel believes that her

relationship with her boys is what she describes as a “partnership”. Aisha sometimes feels bad because she thinks that she has put a lot on Andre who is 17 to care for his younger brother Anthony who is 10.

When I started nursing school Andre was 12 and Anthony was 5. I told Andre that I was really going to need him to help mommy, he was more than willing, like he just wanted to please me. And for the past 5 years he has done nothing but be an awesome big brother. Even when he and I are on shaky ground, because sometimes we are, he never deviates from his brother, and I think that's what I love so much about him, his loyalty and commitment to his brother. He's going to be graduating this year and is talking about staying in the city to go to school so he can still help with his brother, but I told him “no you're not your getting the hell out of this city”. That's what I want for him, to go and experience some place different. I tell them that this is a big world and it is your duty to go and experience what's out there. I told him that you have been a great partner in helping me with your brother now you must get out of this city. (Angel, 5/24/2019)

Angel's Boys

Angel shared that although Andre is a great big brother, he has been dealing with what she believes to be some social-emotional issues. Challenges with his peers in school has led to some fights which later resorted into Andre being expelled from school. Angel mentioned that these challenges began when his father was killed when Andre was

fifteen years old. A year before Andre's father was killed, he unfortunately faced a similar situation where he and his friend were robbed at gun point.

Andre rode the bus every day to and from school. After school he would just go to my parents' house until I got off of work. I always would tell him to stick to the route, don't deviate, but this one day I didn't get a call from him like I usually do when he gets out of school, so I called him...there was no answer. So I kept calling... no answer. Called my parents and they had not heard from him, so at this point I'm panicking, not thinking straight, I called his school and they said that he was in school so I immediately went to my parents' house and by the time I get there they had already called different precincts to see if he had been picked up, and hospitals, but there was no sign of him. I called one of my best friends who was an officer that was assigned to my parents' district which is where my son's school was located as well. He and his partner came to my parents' house to begin to take a report and not long after my son walked in. He said that he and his classmate were robbed at gun point and they took his phone and his money, so he didn't have a phone to call or money to get on the bus so he just ran to his grandparents' house. I just started crying thanking God that he was alright. He explained how he and his friend didn't transfer to the next bus because it was such a nice day they decided to walk....so on the way to his grandparents which is where he comes to everyday after school they have

to walk under a viaduct and that's when two guys stopped them and told them to empty their pockets. They asked my son and his friends "what set you claim" and my son said "I'm not in a gang, they then told them to "empty your pockets" they gave them the few dollars that was in their pockets and their phones and the guys told him and his friend to "turn around, keep walking and don't look back". I just remember holding him not wanting to let him go, I held him so tight and just kept telling him how much I loved him... that was one of the scariest most traumatic days of my life for all of us, especially him. That day actually still haunts me, I have known women whose kids did not make it home, I just thank God that he saw fit to let my son survive that encounter. (Angel, 5/24, 2019)

During the interview as Angel was sharing her story, there were moments where she was understandably overwhelmed with emotion and fought to hold back tears. I asked her if she needed a break before we moved forward, but she insisted that we move on.

Angel shared that after Andre's father was killed that they together briefly sought counseling to better cope with all the recent trauma.

I had to get my baby some help so we went to my father's friend who was a retired therapist and he really I believe helped Andre to get back on track and helped him to process some of his emotions, fears and anger. I mean he was cutting up in school, he was having nightmares, he was just not himself, it's like he was in a dark place and that's a bad place for anybody to be in, especially a teenager. He was scared all of the time,

and through all of this he was going through puberty, becoming a man, and so I think he even felt like he needed revenge or something. I know it was ruff, it was a lot for him to deal with and honestly I didn't know anything else to tell him except for "I love you and it's going to be all right". Thank God though... he's now seemingly ok, actually he much better. He is back drawing, he's an artist... he has been drawing since he was like 6, very serious with it and has won several competitions and had his work displayed all over the city. Plus he is excited about this year...it's his last year of high school and he ready to graduate, he even has this little girlfriend, whom I actually like, so yeah he's is good. (Angel, 5/24/2019)

Angel describes her youngest son Anthony as extremely curious and having a really big imagination. Anthony is currently in the 5th grade and Angel shared how he really likes school and has developed an interest in the sciences...

Anthony is smart as a whip... since he was in kindergarten his teachers have always said how much they just adore him. He loves learning, he has always gotten really good grades, I just hope he keeps this same passion for school and learning as he gets older. I signed him up for this science program when he was five and he has been going ever since...he loves it. It's really hands on and interactive, he's always so engaged and plus he really likes the teachers in the program and the other kids, he's made

some really good friends there. So as long as he continues to show an interest I will keep him in it.

One thing about Anthony is that he is always around my parents... a lot... he loves his “papa” and “g-ma” that’s what he calls them, and they adore him too. They usually pick him up from school for me every day and he hangs out with them, until I pick the boys up from my parents. He is around my parents a lot so he thinks that he is grown. I call him little man because he reminds me of a little old man that knows everything, and if he doesn’t know it he is surly going to ask. He’s awesome though! I recently took him to see his father, who is in prison.

His father got locked up when he was one so he really does not know him at all. But this was the first time I took him, it was a really hard decision because of the process that you have to go through to get in the prison.

But I took him and as much as I hated taking my baby to that place, I’m happy he had an opportunity to see his father. His dad wants me to bring him every few months, but I told him I don’t know... That’s something that I’m really going to have to pray about. But they have started writing each other...that’s important for both of them, at least they can begin to establish a relationship at through their letters if nothing else, because he’s not getting out of there anytime soon, matter fact buy the time he comes home my son will be a grown man. But we will see how that relationship evolves. That all I can really say about that. Anthony does

know his father's mother, and his uncles on his dad side but I have to limit the encounter with them because that whole family is real heavy in the streets and I really just can't have my son around that environment. (Angel, 5/24/2019)

Angels Support System

Angel talked a lot about her parents being her primary support system. They are currently and have always been very hands on with helping Angel to raise her sons.

My parents are my backbone. I don't take them for granted at all, because I know so many people just don't have a support system at all especially one that they can just trust. My parents have done so much for me and theses boys, I just thank God that he saw fit to keep them around. When I was not working and going through my financial problems they were there, they were supporting me as a grown woman. When me and the boys were at our lowest point they stepped right in to support us, my dad is so good with the boys too and my mom, you know she is just grandma...anything her boys need she is going to see to it that they have it and more. My parents are a true blessing... (Angel, 5/24/2019)

Angel did acknowledge that when her eldest son's father was still alive that they had a healthy co-parenting relationship.

My big boys' father was always around. I'm just happy that we were still able to co-parent, without ever any real issues or drama. He always respected me and the

boundaries that I put place for our son and I respected what he taught and showed him. He was very hands on with him and there were times where they were inseparable. My sons' father grew up without his dad so he always told my son that he would be there for him no matter what, yup.....it's just crazy....my baby misses him, but one thing that I can say is that his father taught him a lot and imparted a lot of wisdom...
(Angel, 5/24, 2019)

Angels Spirituality

Angel shared that she was raised in the church. She said that she and her parents attended church almost every Sunday while growing up. She described attending church as a ritual, “as something you just do”. However, it was not until later in life that she began to really seek God for herself and establish what she refers to as a “true and authentic relationship with my creator”.

As a kid you go to church because your parents tell you that you have to go, it was a ritual in my family, and my parents were both active in the church, my mother an usher and in the choir and my father was a Deacon. But not until I became a grown woman with problems of my own did I really begin to have a relationship with God. I remember learning stories about Jesus, how he healed this person and provided for that person, and forgave this person, and how he is a God of love... I mean I remember all the stories from church. But when I became a woman with kids and started having life problems and issues and needed some serious clarity and direction, and let's be real some strength and help to preserver

through each day... I have to say that's when my relationship with God became strong. I believe that I do have a true and authentic relationship with my creator, I mean I just don't understand how people don't acknowledge God.

I meet people and they don't even believe... it's like they just think they got here on their own or something and have no reverence for a higher supreme being... I mean you don't have to go to church to have a relationship with your creator... that often times is religion and I don't subscribe to religion but I subscribe to relationship.... It's crazy because I have made some mistakes, a lot of mistakes, and been through some stuff that probably should have killed me, but I was able to remain sane and have some peace of mind through it all. As a single mother raising these kids, especially boys, I need help, not only physical help but spiritual and emotional help that can only come from my creator. (Angel, 5/24/2019)

Michelle's Story (Malik)

"My greatest challenge is... as a woman, trying to raise a man"
(Michelle, 5/25/19)

Michelle is a 39 year Black single mother with one son named Malik, who is 16 years old. She grew up in the household with her parents, both educators. Michelle has two brother who are ten and eleven years older than she. Michelle is a cosmetologist and entrepreneur who owns a hair salon. Michelle has a bachelor's degree in business management and a master's in business administration each earned from historically Black college and university. Michelle is extremely focused on her business and raising her son. Her main concern at this point of her life is getting him through high school unscathed by his environment.

My son is my biggest priority. Getting him out of high school, mentally and physical sound and into somebodies college somewhere far from here. (Michelle, 5/25/2019)

Michelle was the last of my participants to respond to my recruitment e-mail. She mentioned that when she saw the e-mail, she was very curious yet a bit hesitant about responding because she admits to being a private person. Michelle is a brown skinned, about 5'2". She had on sunglasses, wore her hair in a pulled back ponytail with a baseball cap, and was dressed in black leggings a burgundy cardigan and ankle boots. I met Michelle near her home at the local library. When we sat down for the interview Michelle took off her glasses, gave me a big smile and said "o.k. I'm ready when you are".

Michelle was born and raised in the inner city. Upon graduation from high school she immediately went to the east coast for college. After completing her undergraduate

degree, she immediately went back to school to pursue her master's degree. Michelle admitted that she never really wanted to go to college. She attended and completed her higher education because she knew it would please her parents. However, her passion was to be a cosmetologist and an entrepreneur.

My dream was and actually still is to own my own full service day spa and clothing boutique. I just opened my salon, so I'm on my way. I never wanted to go to college, but my parents were both educators and that was their expectation of me, but I wanted to do hair and so I went and got their piece of paper and then I went and got mine, my cosmetologist license.
(Michelle, 5/25/2019)

After graduating from college Michelle worked as a cosmetologist in a salon in New York, before she moved to Charlotte. Her move to Charlotte was sparked by some close friends who had recently moved there, who raved about how much they loved it. However, after a few years in Charlotte, Michelle became pregnant and made the decision to move back home where she would have the support of her parents.

Michelle as a Black Woman

Michelle describes her experience as a Black woman as a blessing yet she describes herself as vulnerable and always having to be on guard.

Being a Black woman, I sometimes feel as though I get the short end of the stick. I have learned to navigate in my skin and have become very intentional in my every action and even the words that I speak to people.

For the longest time I was told that I was angry, bitter, and mean. I personally didn't think I was any of these things. I was always just no- nonsense and I guess people always took that as being mean. I had and still do have a very low tolerance for bullshit. So in the eyes of people, because I am strong and confident, and very forthcoming I was made out to be some sort of bitch.

So not until late, I made a very conscious effort to be more intestinal with the way I talk to people, my employees, my family, friends, people in the public and especially men. The one misconception that I believe society has about Black women is that we are all the same. I mean, it seems no matter your education level or economic status; we are looked at as being ghetto, loud, ignorant, and always looking for a hand out. I always have to prove myself to society and for some reason to the men in my life...I also feel that I have had to constantly be on guard, I mean you never know peoples true intentions until it's too late. I have learned a lot from life, some say it's the best teacher, and I totally agree. I have been beat up, mentally and physically, disappointed, taken advantage of, misunderstood, used, hurt in so many ways by those closest to me yet still I am still standing. I remember when I was pregnant and found out that I was having a son, I was actually distraught...I felt at the time having a girl would be easier for me, because I was a female.

One day I was having a conversation with my best friend who happens to be a male and he distinctly told me that “you can handle it, God has already equipped you”. That comment brought me so much peace because I was scared, honestly, scared to birth a Black boy into this country, scared for all of the threats and attacks that would come against him, scared for how he would be judged by people who didn’t even know him, but real talk that comment my friend made gave me the peace that I needed. It’s like he had this confidence in me that I didn’t even have in my self. I just had to trust God that He knew what He was doing.

(Michelle, 5/25/2019)

Michelle’s Challenge

Michelle said that being a single mother is the hardest thing that she has ever had to do. She even described it as being a traumatic experience because she always had the intention on having a child with someone who was going to be there for her and her baby. She never imagined that she would have to take full responsibly of raising a child that she and another person created together.

I never imagined that I would have to practically raise this kid by myself. That’s not how envisioned my life. I came from a home with both of my parents and that’s the type of life that I wanted for my son. I kind of feel at times that he has been cheated out of not having his father. It’s crazy because I would always hear of men who would just totally neglect their

kids and I could never understand that. But it's another thing to actually live it. When I got pregnant, my sons sperm donor, I don't call him a father because he's not, just basically wanted me to have an abortion. He said that he didn't want children and if I decided to go on with the pregnancy he was going on with his life... (Michelle, 5/25/2019)

Michelle found herself in what she called a “desolate place”. She moved back home to her parents’ house, a place she left when she was eighteen years old. She was not returning alone. She was coming home with a newborn baby.

I was in a “desolate place”. It was humbling. I left home at eighteen, and came back at twenty five with a brand new baby boy. I had no job, no money, seems like I had lost all ambition and motivation but my parents and friends were there to encourage and support me and to help me get back on my feet. (Michelle, 5/25/2019)

Michelle described her greatest challenge, as a single mother is having to raise a ‘man child’. Throughout our interview she would reflect on the words of her friend who stated, “You can handle it. God has already equipped you”. She stated that these words have always given her hope and peace. Michelle also reflected on a song from the late hip-hop artist Tupac Shakur.

The song 'Dear Mama' from Tupac... I remember in one of his verses he said "I finally understand for a woman it aint easy trying to raise a man". Those words ring so true. It's crazy that as a young man Tupac understood the struggle that his mother went through, and the fact that he acknowledged and honored her in this song, I'm sure when she heard it she had solace in knowing that her pain and struggle in raising him was not in vain. And even though he had an early demise, his legacy still lives on. I don't really think that people really wrap their heads around the fact that there are millions of single mothers out here who are raising men.

That's just crazy... These boys/young men need actual men to be their models.

My personal belief, and this is just how I was raised.... is that the family is a structure... God is at the head, then the man/father, the woman/ mother and then the children. The man I believe is the provider, protector and the wife is the comforter, nurturer, but we as women and single mothers have had to take on roles that I don't think we were designed to take on. But the fact is that we have, and so many other Black single mothers have raised wonderful Black men, and on the other hand you know some not so much.... I wonder if that's because many of the women were operating in roles that they were never intended to operate in and the pressure and pain got to be so much that they just couldn't take it, ...And certainly there are mothers that have totally poured into their sons, providing everything

they needed, loving them and the whole nine and they turn out to be lost anyway. I mean I just don't know. (Michelle, 5/25/2019)

Michelle mentioned that she has always maintained an incredibly open and transparent relationship with Malik and that they have a great relationship. She believes in being totally honest with him about everything. She stated that “the world is never going sugar coat anything so why should I” (Michelle, 5/25, 2019). Michelle shared how her biggest concern is that she fails to teach him everything he needs to know to survive in this society. She mentions how she is always teaching and even preaching.

My father was always lecturing me about something, generally the topic had to do with the friends that I chose to associate with, the places I went and the things that I would do. I mean I got lectured all the time and at the time it was agonizing. Now as a grown woman with my own child I totally understand why he did it. It's funny because I actually do the same thing to my son and I know he hates it but I tell him he will appreciate me and my words as he get older and starts having real life experiences. As of late my new saying to him is “play time is over”. When my son turned like 9 or 10 I knew that the baby stage was over. I coddled him for as long as I felt necessary and then I did kind of get a little militant. Just kidding, but at that point I had to start wearing both hats as mom and dad, so my tone and disposition started to gradually change with him. He had to know that even though I am mama, and I love you more than anything, and will go to

war for you, just know that I will get at you if I need to. I knew that I had to do what the old school saints use to say and “instill the fear of God”. He had to know that there are rules in boundaries in my house, just like at school and in the world. (Michelle, 5/25/2019)

Malik would definitely try me and challenge me as little boys do with their moms, but he also knew that if he came at me crazy there were going to be some serious consequences. See it's crazy because Malik has his grandpa, but he's just that grandpa ... not really a disciplinarian, he and my mother gave and still do give him anything that he wants, so I am always left to be the bad guy. Thank God he has balance in his life. See, he's fourteen and six one, I'm five two. If there were no boundaries in place, I mean...I know boys that have actually jumped on their moms, who waited until they were damn near grown to start disciplining them and they were not having that. But at the same time we have the most open and honest relationship... he tells me all kinds of stuff, stuff I don't even want to know. But I rather he come to me, tell me and ask questions or pick my brain then to go out here and listen to his friends who have no clue about anything in life. (Michelle, 5/25/2019)

Michelle opened up losing some tremendously close friends as a young woman.

She shared that she is extremely protective and at times overprotective with Malik.

As a teenager I lost some really close friends to gun violence in these streets. I know what that life is all about. One of my friends was downstate in his freshmen year of college at a party on his campus when he was killed, I had another friend who he and his whole family was gang related and some guys ran up in his house and killed his whole family...a friend who was sitting in the car talking to his girlfriend at like 9 o'clock at night and some guys just pulled up on the side of them and sprayed the car up...I mean it's insane. And a couple just at war with other gangs and were casualties of that war... I lost these friends and many more associates before I was 20 years old. It's sad, but Malik is not allowed to move around without me, or my parents or some other adult that I trust. I am constantly telling him to be vigilant and be aware, how to act, how to talk, especially when we are in public. It's really all about survival out here and I guess when you live long enough and are exposed so many crazy situations your just programmed to be on guard. (Michelle, 5/25/2019)

Michelle's Support

Michelle talked about her father and mother being her greatest support system. She said that they were her "life line". She describes her son's relationship with her father;

My father and my son are very close. That really is his best friend. He has always been in his life and really stepped up to help me raise this boy. Both of my parents.... Malik loves history and loves reading, my father exposed him at a very early age...they also love playing chess. Whenever my parents' travel which is a lot, Malik always goes with them, even if he has to miss a few days of school, he always goes. I think, especially now that he's older, my parents really enjoy having him around because he is a big help to them... Malik is at my parents' houses practically every day, that's his second home. He has an ongoing chess match with my father... that's their thing. (Michelle, 5/25/2019)

Michelle's Spirituality

Michelle's faith in God has played a major role in her life. Michelle believes that her relationship with God has sustained her and kept her through many tumultuous situations in life. Though she admitted to not being a frequent church goer, she still has a very close relationship with God, and has taught her son about the value of a personal relationship with God.

Since Malik was old enough to really understand the things that I was saying to him, I always told him that God was his father just as he is also my father. I taught him that God is the one who protects and provides everything that we have. I teach him not to take things for granted, and

especially not to take me or his grandparents for granted. I tell him to be thankful and giving and help people who are in need, if you can. I teach him to just be a good person, and give out the type of energy that you want to receive back from people. I taught him how to pray, so he does pray at each meal we have together and he prays when he gets up and before he goes to bed. Look, we even pray when I'm dropping him off at school in the morning, the way I see it is that you can never pray too much, especially over your baby.

I just know, from my own life experiences that you don't necessarily have to go to church, if you do that good, but if you don't so be it. It's always been important to me to have a personal relationship with God, and this is what I teach my son. I have shared with him some of the crazy situations that I have experienced and how it was not luck or chance that brought me out of them, but that it was God... I planted that seed a long time ago in him, and so far I believe he is moving in the right direction with his faith and it is my hope that what I have instilled and what my parents have instilled in him will be a light to his path in life. (Michelle, 5/25/2019)

Analysis of Findings

The mothers in this study experienced many emotions, challenges and adversities while rearing their son(s). When the mothers spoke about their sons, you could hear the excitement in their voices and see the joy in their eyes. They acknowledged that watching their sons learn, development, and grow into young men, not only brought them hope but a sense of immeasurable joy. As the lives of the mothers in this study unfolded, several themes emerged. The following major themes were identified: (1) resiliency/perseverance; (2) safety of their sons; (3) support systems; (4) mother-son bond, and (5) faith in God. In addition, life skills was a sub theme that emerged out of safety of their sons. Co-parenting and positive Black male role models were also sub themes that emerged out of support systems.

According to Gantt and Grief (2009), Black single mothers make use of a number of parenting strategies to assist them in raising their sons. These strategies aim to meet one of two primary goals. The first goal is to protect. Several strategies are implemented to protect their sons such as; shielding them from negative influences, avoiding harm, praying and educating them. The mothers also believed that their greatest challenge was raising their sons. However, the mothers acknowledged that they have gained their strength and resiliency from their relationship with God. Each of the mothers stated that their main priority is to raise and protect their sons as much as possible from the perils set before them. In addition, teaching them the necessary life skills that they need in order to survive. Each of mothers also expressed their concern about positive Black role models in the lives of their sons, and how that male role model(s) is critical to the growth

development of their sons, whether it be from the maternal grandfather, coach, teacher, uncle or mentor or friend of the mother. Although some of the mothers were not churchgoers they all however talked about how their personal relationship with God is what sustains them and has given them the hope and strength to mother and persevere through some tumultuous times in their lives.

Theme 1: Resilient and Perseverance in Black Mothers

Through their treacherous journey of the middle passage Black women have brought with them many diverse characteristics of their African mothers, such as, the ability to raise their sons and daughters, the sense of independence, strength, resiliency, and various skill sets (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). Black mothers have proven their resilience over time by continuing to be the backbone of their families (Brodsky, 2000; Brodsky & DeVet, 2000). Resiliency, in the traditional sense, usually means the strength of an individual to persevere through a challenge. However, according to Shene (1999), resiliency is how certain individuals are able to adapt and bounce back from risk factors and challenges in life. In the context of this research, the term resilient was shown through the ability of these mothers to overcome the many adversities, traumatic experiences, pain, fears and challenges that Black single mothers raising their sons in contemporary urban communities face. Being a mother can be a challenging role for even the most successful, educated, or invested woman (Luthar & Ciciolla, 2015). In addition, the mothers in this study were also, primary caregivers and primary wage earners for their children which proved them that much more resilient. According to

Hilton and Desrochers (2000), the resiliency of single mothers is apparent through their ability to support their families both financially and emotionally. Lastly, they all shared their own personal testament and individual challenges of raising their son(s), which makes them not only resilient but unique.

London has proven to be resilient by taking a stand against her family that had been for years trying to use her instead of assist her as a single mother with two sons. She has evolved and reached a point in her life where she had to solely focus on herself and her sons. As a result, she was able to persevere and purchase her first home while, working a full time job, and taking college courses full time.

Nia has shown resiliency by not only taking care of her son, but also caring for her elderly parents when they became ill. Nia believes that she has preserved through some really challenging times in her life, which she attributes to the strength that she inherited from the women in her family. *“I come from strong women, proud women.*

Women who have persevered through some really difficult situations, thinking about that gives me strength when I get into some really bad situations or when I feel like I’m not going to make it another day”. (Nia, 5/12/2019)

Jamie’s has been resilient in many areas of her life. In the workplace, Jamie has been able to preserve through blatant racism and discrimination by being overlooked for promotion opportunities within her current employer. In her personal life she was left to deal with the harsh reality that her husband was divorcing her, and leaving her to raise their four year old by herself. Jamie’s mentioned that though her divorce was the most

difficult time of her life she and her son were able to rebound and persevere despite the hurt, feelings of rejection and

Angel has proven resiliency in her personal life. Though she mentioned at times being a single mother is “unbearable” however she has been able to push forward and preserve with the help and support of her family. Unfortunately, Angel is left to raise both of her sons after the demise of both of their fathers which has not only taken a toll on her but also on her sons. The eldest father, whom was brutally murdered and her youngest father who is currently incarcerated.

Michelle has shown resiliency through relocating back home where she was raised order to get the help and support from her parents needed to raise her son. *I was in a “desolate place”. It was humbling. “I left home at eighteen, and came back at twenty five with a brand new baby boy. I had no job, no money, seems like I had lost all ambition and motivation but my parents and friends were there to encourage and support me and to help me get back on my feet”.* (Michelle, 5/25/19). With the initial fear and reservation of being a woman having to raise a male child, Michelle was able to persevere and find solace in the words of her best friend who stated “you can handle it, God has already equipped you”.

Theme 2: Safety Of Their son(s)

Each of the participants in my study stated that their main concern was the safety and wellbeing of their son(s). Safety was a big concern because all of these mothers reside in the inner city, within communities that are plagued with violence, drugs and

gang activity. According to Collins (1994), Black mothers, unlike White mothers, must negotiate racist social contexts while fighting for the physical survival of their children. Black single mothers' perception of their neighborhood, dictates the manner in which they parent their sons (Taylor, 2000; Zalot, Jones, Forehand, & Brody, 2007). For example, London describes one of her major tasks is trying to protect and keep her sons safe from the violence within their community. London mentions how she is constantly talking to her boys, counseling them, in hopes of them making good decisions and to be aware of their surrounding at all times. London describes how there are shootings that take place often at the park across the street from her home. She also mentions how the police are constantly patrolling her neighborhood. They patrol so much to the point that she doesn't let either of her children go to the park anymore or walk the streets in her neighborhood because she does not want them to become the victims of mistaken identity by police or the target of a bullet that may have been intended for someone else.

Elliot and Reid (2016) state, "raising kids is hard, but raising children who face daily assaults on their lives is especially challenging". I believe Elliot and Reid are referring to children, living in communities where Black children, more specifically Black males, are disproportionately arrested and incarcerated and living in unsafe neighborhoods that have high homicide rates. Nia and Angel both shared the harsh reality of their sons being robbed at gunpoint. Nia admitted to still having nightmares about the day Nicholas was at the park and another kid pulled a gun on him. As a mother, she said she felt empty knowing that her son was in trouble, his life was being threatened, and there was nothing that she could. Angel's says the day her son was held at gunpoint is

the day that changed both she and her sons life forever. *“I held him so tight and just kept telling him how much I loved him... that was one of the scariest, most traumatic days of our lives”*. (Angel, 5/24/19)

Nomaguchi and House (2011) state that, Black mothers’ experience heightened levels of parenting stress as their children grow older, and mothers’ concerns about their safety and survival increased. Jamie shared that now that her son is getting older, she recognizes that she has to give him some level of freedom, which is really hard because of the environment they live in. *“On top of all of this, I have to teach him how to survive and navigate out here in this world, in our community. He is getting older and I can’t continue to shelter him, I would if I could, but I know I can’t. So instead I try my best to prepare him”*. (Jamie, 5/11/2019)

Life Skills

All of the mothers agreed that in addition to the safety of their sons, life skills were needed in order to survive in their society. Cooper (2005), asserted that in addition to mothering, Black Mothers also must deal with equipping their children with the tools necessary to survive in a racist society. Cooper defines a racist society as a system of oppression based on physical and cultural difference that is deeply embedded within dominant cultural narratives and social institutions. In Western societies, dominant cultural narratives about Black peoples date back to the European colonization of Africa and the Americas. Narratives about European racial superiority and moral imperatives to

civilize the savage, sub-human Africans were used to justify institutionalized slavery and the violence required to maintain it (Cooper, 2005).

Research also states that in addition to life skills single mothers highly value their son's independence, and they incorporate monitoring as a means of socializing them in the areas of self-reliance, educational achievement, and social well-being (Brody, 1998). London mentioned that teaching her boys morals, values, responsibility, and survival skills, was a normal practice. Nia discussed that providing her son with the life skills that he needs was important to her so he can navigate through society. She stated *"I had to tell him that gangs may try to recruit you at some point, or ask you what set you from, but always smile, tell them you're not affiliated be polite and keep moving. I had to teach him how to get on the bus, and when to get off and how to always sit in the front of the bus. It was a fact that he had to grow up quicker than I wanted"*. (Nia, 5/12/19). Jamie said, *"I have always taught him that to be aware is to be alive"* (Jamie, 5/11/19). That was something that was constantly preached to her in her youth by her father, therefore she would always tell her son that same thing. Angel stated, *"With so much going on in our communities and within our world, I really had to wake up. I had to do this by educating myself, in order for me to educate my boys on the reality of them being in their Black skin, and all of what that means. I had to let them know what that means for their survival, and how they have to be on guard and make good decisions, and how they are not privileged and will never have the same privileges as their white counterparts"* (Angel, 5/24/19). Michelle believes in being totally open and honest with her son about everything. She stated that *"the world is never going sugar coat anything so why should I"*

(Michelle, 5/25/19). Michelle also shared how her biggest concern is that she fails to teach him everything he needs to know to survive in this society. Though all the mothers had the same intentions on protecting their sons and faced with the task of preparing them to navigate in this society, some had different tactics as to how they went about it.

Theme 3: Support Systems

The support of an extended family and loved ones is crucial to a single Black mother's success (Brotsky et al., 2000). The extended family and support system consist of a larger family that plays a key role in the well-being and care of the single mother and her children (Jones et al., 2007). In the Black family, for example, it is widely acknowledged and understood that the extended family goes far beyond biological relatives; rather, support consists of neighbors, friends, distant relatives, and those individuals whom the family can trust (Jones et al., 2007). Single mothers depend on this support to assist them emotionally and in other aspects of single parenthood (Green et al., 2007). African-American single mothers receive support from extended family members, friends, community members, church members, and teachers; their sons are more likely to obtain social and academic success (Sullivan, 2008). The family is the primary agent of socialization to provide children with core information about themselves and their environment (Franklin, 1984; Dunifon & Kowaleski-Jones, 2007). One factor that presents itself repeatedly in the research as contributing to resilience is the support from family. It is apparent that the more social support a person has or feels they have, the more resilient they are in a given situation (Kennedy & Bennett, 2006). The single

mothers that participated in this study all acknowledged how critical their support systems were to them and their son(s).

African-American grandparents are also very active in helping to rear their grandchildren (Dickerson, 1995). African-American grandparents are more likely to be active in helping to rear their grandchildren than their White counterparts (Dickerson, 1995). Jamie describes how her parents have been a huge support in her and her son's life. She mentioned that they were really a huge impact in her son's formative years. Angel states, *"My parents are my backbone. I don't take them for granted at all, because I know so many people just don't have a support system at all especially one that they can just trust"* (Angel, 5/24/19). Michelle talked about her father and mother being her greatest support system. She said that they were her "life line".

Co-Parenting

An emerging body of research states that African-American single mothers employ parenting, which is defined as the process by which mothers and another adult share childrearing responsibilities (Belsky, Putnam, & Crinic, 1996; Coiro & Emery, 1998; Shook, Jones, Forehand, Dorsey, & Brody, 2010). Co-parenting may occur between the child's biological fathers (married or divorced), extended family members, or fictive kin such as close friends and neighbors (Coley et al., 2001). Angel acknowledged that when her eldest son's father was still alive that they had a healthy co-parenting relationship. *"My big boys' father was always around. I'm just happy that we were still able to co-parent, without ever any real issues or drama. He always respected*

me and the boundaries that I put place for our son and I respected what he taught and showed him” (Angel, 5/24/19). Nia’s support system consists of her best friend of twenty-nine years. She describes her as a second mother to Nicholas and that she and her husband really helped when Nia’s parents became ill. Nia also shared that her best friend’s husband has been like a father figure to Nicholas.

Positive Black Male Role Models

African American males who have constant social interaction with their fathers or other positive adult males have greater feelings of self-worth and better social and academic achievement in school (Coley, 1998; Roy & Burton, 2007). In Rhodes and Dubois’ (2008) study, the researchers identified how DuBois and Silverthorne (2005) found that those who reported having a mentoring relationship during adolescence exhibited significantly better outcomes within the domains of education and work (high school completion, college attendance, employment), mental health (self-esteem, life satisfaction), problem behavior (gang membership, fighting, risk taking), and health (exercise, birth control use). In a successful mentorship, over a period of time the mentee developed a special bond with the mentor. Hence, having special bonds, such as these, tended to contribute to positive outcomes, because the mentee wanted to make their mentor proud. A mentorship relationship could be naturally formed. Youth would automatically develop a relationship with someone older, like a teacher, coach, and even a family member. Research has indicated that children, especially

“at-risk” African-American boys, in the absence of a father, need and will look for someone to identify with so they can develop their own self-image (Harris & Taylor, 2012).

The mothers that participated in this study were ‘blessed’ to have positive Black Male role models and mentors in their sons’ lives and recognized how important it was for their son(s) to have these positive images and relationships. They shared their gratitude in the role that each of the grandfathers, coaches, teachers, or male family members played in the growth and development of their son(s).

London mentioned, that she has a lot of respect for her, brother and the other Black males who have stepped up and helped to guide her sons in the right direction. She said *“I sent my son to an all boy high school because I knew there would be Black men there. That was important to me. Even though my son is a part of a male mentoring group, he would only meet with them twice a week, but I wanted Black men having an influence over his life every day, and they most certainly do”* (London, 5/5/19). Jamie mentioned that since her son Jordan was five year old that he has always had coaches and strong images of Black men in his life. *“My son has always been involved in sports so he has always had coaches, great coaches at that”* (Jamie, 5/11/19). In addition, she shared that Jordan has also been a part of a mentoring group that mentors young men and has been a part of this group since he was eleven years old.

Theme 4: Mother- Son Bond

The mother’s key role in the single parent family and the tenuous position of young African-American males, the nature of the mother-son relationship is of great

importance (Zill & Nord, 1994; Gantt & Greif, 2009). Black mothers, in the absence of their sons' fathers, become necessary images for Black boys given the tropes and misrepresentations of society around Black males and family structures (Griffin & Allen, 2006). According to Davis (2006), in most instances Black moms have a profound influence on the family, social and educational development of African-American males. Hines & Boyd-Franklin (1996) state that mothers are a dominant influence in the lives of African-American males because mothers are usually in the home as they are growing up and tends to be the strength of the family. Black women are frequently viewed as the leaders of their households and must therefore carry the weight of being both mother and father to their children (Ceballo & McLoyd, 2002; Wilson, 2014). Jamie was one of my participants who expressed the weight of being both mother and father. *"You know I have to be this kids everything. "I know I can't physically be his father, but you know I have had to be his mother, I've had to be his father, I've had to be counselor, I've had to be his doctor, I've had to be his cook, I've had to be his maid, his chuffer, his spiritual adviser, I mean everything that you can possibly imagine that a kid needs I've been that and more"* (Jamie, 5/11/19).

Hrabowski, Maton, and Greifs (1998) book entitled *Beating the Odds: Raising Academically Successful African American Males*, focused on the families of academically successful Black males. Their work represents the most holistic approach to date for studies on how Black mothers participate in the development of manhood and masculinity. Based on their findings, the single mothers that participated in the study (a) develop a broad philosophy of life. The mothers described their efforts to create an

atmosphere at home where values were discussed. This is part of a preparatory stage that the mothers see as important to handle the ups and downs of life; (b) Develop a relationship that encourages open discussion of issues; (c) Teach specific ways of handling situations that arise. Mothers taught their children what situations to avoid, as well as what to do when such problems arise as drugs being offered or fights being started; (d) Talk about race-related matters. The mothers had many concerns about the plight of African American males and taught their children to be wary of the police, about discrimination at the hands of Whites, and about Black-on-Black crime; (e) Understand one's own family and learn about African culture; (f) Set high standards. Achievement in nonacademic aspects of life was underlined when mothers described their expectations of their children in terms of behavior and gaining employment; (g) Maintain family rituals and; (h) Maintain religious beliefs. (pp. 95-96).

The mothers in this study are actively participating in the development of manhood and masculinity with their sons. For example, London encourages open discussion of various issues with her boys. She mentions as a single mother it is very important for her to keep an open and transparent relationship with her boys. She says that they have times when they have no consequence conversations, so they can tell her whatever, without the fear of consequences. She went further to say that she tries to create a space where her sons feel safe, because she is aware that there are not many safe spaces in the world for them to just speak freely and be themselves. Nia recounts the time when she had to instruct her son Nicholas on what and what not to do when they were pulled over by two white police officers on a predominantly white side of town....

“I tell Nicholas to take off his baseball cap and to be cool and to not make any sudden movements” (Nia, 5/12/19). This particular incident was also a teaching moment for Nicholas on race related matters and how he should always conduct himself especially when dealing with police officers.

The bond that theses mothers share with their sons is strong, rooted in love and transparency. Nia defined her relationship with Nicholas as them being extremely close, and when her parents past away that brought them even closer. Angel believes that her relationship with her boys is what she describes as a “partnership”. *“I consider myself to a very transparent mother... I mean you have to dealing with kids’ these days. They are way more advanced then we were and they have access to so much more, and so I look at it as you have to stay current, stay relevant, and stay in their business. I know I get on their nerves but they will be ok”* (Angel, 5/24/19).

Theme 5: Faith in God

Religion has played an important role in the lives of many single Black mothers including the ones that participated on this study. It has helped them to cope with stressful life situations and has served as the foundation for personal growth, happiness, and parenting values (Brodsky, 2000; Wilson, 2014; Lewis, 2010). For example, religion provides a means for single mothers to cope with the everyday stressors of racial discrimination and also plays a pivotal role in the lives of single mothers who later become successful and resilient individuals (Brodsky, 2000; Ledford, 2010). All of the mothers in this study believe that their faith and belief in God has sustained them and

given them the power and the strength to not only raise their son(s) but to also overcome other life challenges that they have experienced. Not all of the participants currently attend church, but both attenders and non-attenders describe how they all have a personal relationship with God and they also teach their son(s) about God. Some of the mothers also shared that their parenting styles, values and beliefs are based on there are based on their personal relationships with God. Brodsky (2000) also maintained that personal and parenting values are affected by religious beliefs.

London shared that it is her faith in God that has truly sustained her though her life experiences. She is a faithful churchgoer who is active in her local church. She discussed how important it has been for her to raise her sons in church. Prayer is the most important part of her life, she said that she would not be able to endure the challenges of life as a Black single mother raising boys. Nia believes that her faithful prayer life has helped to sustain her mentally through her divorce and when her son was robbed at gunpoint. She also believes that her faith in God and her prayer life is what has and continues to keep her and her son safe. Jamie admitted that though she does not attend church regularly, she does however have has a strong relationship with God. She believes that it is because of her relationship with God, that she has been able to persevere and withstand some very troubling times in her life. Angel states, *“As a kid you go to church because your parents tell you that you have to go, it was a ritual in my family, and my parents were both active in the church, my mother an usher and in the choir and my father was a Deacon. But not until I became a grown woman with problems of my own did I really begin to have a relationship with God. I know God is real, he saved my*

son and he saved me on several occasions” (Angel, 5/24/19). Michelle’s spirituality has played a major role in her life. Michelle believes that her relationship with God has also sustained her. Though she admitted to not being a frequent churchgoer, she still has a very close relationship with God, which she maintains by reading her bible and praying. She has also taught her son about God and encourages him to develop his own relationship with God. Michelle states, “since Malik was old enough to really understand the things that I was saying to him, I always told him that God was his father just as he is also my father. I taught him that God is the one who protects and provides everything that we have. I planted that seed a long time ago in him, and so far I believe he is moving in the right direction with his faith and it is my hope that what I have instilled and what my parents have instilled in him will be a light to his path in life” (Michelle, 5/25/19).

Chapter V

Conclusion & Implications for Research and Educational Practices

This chapter will summarize the findings of this study and the implications for future research and practice. As described in Chapter 1, this research focused on the following guiding questions: How do Black woman describe their experiences in contemporary urban America? How do Black women describe the impact that being a single mother has taken on their life? What do Black single mothers perceive as some of their greatest challenges in raising their male son(s) in contemporary urban America? As a single mother how do they respond to these challenges? And lastly, what support systems, if any, do they call upon as you raise their son(s)?

I explored these questions through in-depth, open-ended, face-to-face interviews with five Black single mothers who are raising son(s). As I gathered and transcribed the data, I then compared, categorized and lastly analyzed this data. Based on the analysis from my guiding research questions, I came to the following conclusions:

1. All of the mothers despite the challenges of raising their son(s) love them unconditionally and work very hard to provide the absolute best for them. They love them through the challenges, the adversities, the pain, the disappointments, the uncertainties, and the fears that they experience on a day-to-day basis while raising their sons. There is a special and unique bond that theses mothers share with their son(s) that is rooted in love, sacrifice, resiliency and hope.
2. Because all of the mothers reside in the inner city, the safety of their son(s) was

their main concern. In addition, ensuring that their son(s) have the necessary life skills when navigating through their communities and society as a whole.

3. Transparency and open communication are key components in the relationship between the mothers and their son(s).
4. Support Systems are critical in the lives of these mothers. The mothers were raised by their parents who were very instrumental in the support, growth and development of their son(s) as well as other positive male role models such as uncles, coaches, and teachers.
5. All of the participants expressed that their faith in God is their foundation. Their prayer life, and relationship with God is a key component because it was what sustains them and propels them to keep moving forward each day.

Conclusion

My research questions guided this overall study. My analysis helps to explain how these single mothers in this study navigate and negotiate everyday life while raising their sons in contemporary urban America - a space that has shown throughout the research to present a myriad of challenges for the mothers and their sons. Despite some of the research focusing on how Black mothers contributed to the plight of their sons in urban America, this research aimed at shedding light on the personal accounts of their lived experiences and also understand the barriers, challenges, and cultural as well as societal factors that impact them and their son(s) on a daily basis.

The themes that emerged from the study were resiliency/perseverance, safety of

their sons, support systems, mother-son bond and faith in God. The sub theme under safety of their sons was life skills. Sub themes for support systems were co-parenting and positive Black male role models.

Resiliency and Perseverance in Black Mothers

Resiliency and perseverance emerged as a theme among all of the mothers. They have each faced trials and tribulations of some magnitude, however, each one of them despite that magnitude of their trial, have managed to continue to move forward in the face of adversity and not subside to the pain and pressure of life. The challenges and stressors of raising and providing for their sons, personal issues; whether work related or relational have all emerged. However, despite each situation, the stories of these mothers illustrate their resiliency and courage to persevere.

Safety Of Their Sons

The overall safety of their son(s) emerged as a major theme from each of the mothers. All of the research collaborators reside in the inner city in communities that are plagued with gun violence, police activity, gangs, drugs, and opportunist looking to prey on their sons. Since these factors are prevalent in their communities, the mothers all find it necessary to instill life skills in their sons in hopes that if and when a compromising situation presents itself, they survive the encounter. Unfortunately, two of the mothers experienced situations where a gun was pulled on their sons in a robbery attempt; and one mother had the excruciating pain of consoling her son whose father was killed by gun

violence. A couple of the of the mothers even expressed how they lost friends to gun violence and were even themselves almost victims of gun violence, on the same streets and communities where they are now raising their sons.

Support Systems

Support systems was a theme that emerged from the data. The mothers in this study all of whom were raised by both of their parents acknowledged that they and their son(s) were blessed to have great support systems in place. In addition, they each felt blessed to have positive Black Male role models in their sons' lives. They shared their gratitude for each of the grandfathers, coaches, teachers, or male family members that played a role in the growth and development of their son(s).

Family was very important to the mothers, even the desire to have been married and raise their sons in a two-parent household surfaced. Jamie was the only one of the participants who was married. She envisioned her-self being married to her husband until death. She envisioned the two of them raising their son together and having what she called a "happily ever after". Michelle expressed that she never imagined that she would have to take full responsibly of raising a child that she and another person created together. Angel was grateful for the support that she received from her parents. She was also happy about the relationship that her eldest son had with his father before his he was killed. He was involved in the rearing and development of their son. She never received any support from her youngest son's father before he went to prison nor has much of a relationship with his side of the family. London was grateful to her brother and the support of male teachers, coaches and mentors of her eldest son. She was also proud of

her eldest son, who really stepped in to help raise, support and mentor his younger brother.

Mother - Son Bond

The mother-son bond emerged as a theme. The mothers in this research have a love that is relentless for their son(s). Though the adolescent stage, at times presents challenges and obstacles, the mothers exude compassion, appreciation and a sense of pride and joy in their boys. Each of them value and are committed to their son(s) success in life while maintaining open and transparent relationships with them.

Faith in God

The final theme that emerged in this study was the mothers' faith in God. Though not all of the mothers attend church on a regular basis, they did mention that their faith and relationship with God was critical. They believe that it is their belief in God and their prayer life, which sustains them and enables them to endure and persevere through life's challenges as women and mothers of young men.

Implications for Future Research

One of the purposes of this research was to give Black mothers a platform to share their stories of how they navigate and negotiate everyday life while raising their sons in contemporary urban America. After examining the data yielded from the mothers in this study, as researcher, I concluded the following recommendations from participants.

The mothers that were interviewed made the following suggestions for positive changes in practice. The researcher decided to cite the following suggestions because the mothers who participated felt strongly that the suggested points were integral to them raising their Black sons. The researcher agrees that the following points, can aid Black mothers in their journey of raising their son(s):

Recommendations for Black Mothers Raising Sons

1. Tell your son(s) you love them every day.
2. Surround your son(s) around positive males that he can emulate, if you don't know any, find them; mentors, coaches, teachers, etc.
3. Be open and transparent with your son(s). Listen to them and give them confidence in knowing that they can come and talk to you about anything.
4. Make your home a safe space.
5. Keep your son(s) active. Find out their interest and immerse them in it as soon and as much as possible.
6. Seek out help if you need it from; family members, friends, church, community and mentoring organizations etc.
7. Give them the tools necessary for societal survival by teaching, correcting, directing and lovingly disciplining them.
8. Pray for yourself and your son(s) daily.

Future Research: Possibilities & Directions

1. There have been limited studies that have focused on the life experiences of Black single mothers who are raising their sons in contemporary urban spaces in America. Unfortunately, a great deal of research on Black single mothers focuses on the negative effects they have on their son(s), instead of the positive effects they have on their sons. Few researchers have examined the dynamic of a mother raising a male child or the coping strategies these mothers implement on a daily basis to help them raise their son(s). Quantitative, qualitative and mixed method studies could be conducted in order to gain a better understanding the life experiences of Black single mothers parenting their young sons. This research could inform policy, benefit educators and community organizations.

2. Future study and discourse on Black mother-son-relationships should be studied through multiple lenses and disciplines within schools, community centers and other spaces in society. My study can inform researches, educators, and community organizers, on the real life experiences that single Black mothers experience while raising their Black son(s) in contemporary urban America. Though the experiences of motherhood are different for various categories of Black women, given the context of social/cultural backgrounds, educational attainment, and socio-economic status, only Black mothers can truly share what it means to birth and raise a Black male child.

3. Projecting a more positive image of Black single mothers and illuminating their strength and resiliency may dispel some of the negative attention targeted at Black mothers raising their sons. This can be accomplished by capturing the stories and testimonies of Black mothers who have raised successful sons in urban spaces throughout America that have grown to be well rounded individuals, productive citizens, active leaders, and educated in and out of academia. Hearing their stories of how they found the courage and strength to navigate the social, emotional, and physical challenges of life so they were able to protect their son(s) from the very perils that have entangled so many Black males in this country. Their testaments can hopefully bring peace, hope, joy, strength and courage to the Black single mothers who are currently raising their sons.

Implications for Educational Practices

1. This research shows a strong need for schools and community centers in urban areas to support Black single mothers who are raising son(s). Within these space discourse on Black mothers raising boys should be encouraged, giving mothers a platform to share their experiences and offer support to one another. In addition, schools and community centers should be able to provide classes for single mothers that address and teach critical factors they can use to help them as women and mothers of Black boys. Schools and community spaces can also be used to provide support to single mothers, by exposing their sons to various mentoring groups and positive Black male role models such as; community activist, coaches, school administrators, business owners etc. Identifying

processes and mechanisms that help single mothers function well, despite the difficulties and challenges they face, may be the best approach to improving the lives of Black single mother and the son(s) that they are rearing.

2. This study can inform the work of administrators, teachers and curriculum specialist that work with Black boys with hopes of implementing strategies to fully engage and motivate them throughout their K-12 education. The school and classroom should be a productive learning environment and curriculum should be culturally relevant with instructional strategies that increase student learning and outcomes. One recommendation would be to have a greater presence of Black male teachers within school districts where there is a large Black population. The presence of Black male administrators, teachers and coaches could possibly help black boys navigate inequality and systemic racism and educational barriers that our young Black males face as well as provide guidance and mentorship to boys that come from single mother households. Lastly, it is imperative that state and, or Federal task forces address the importance of black male teachers being recruited, hired and provided the training, support and professional development to succeed in K-12 education. This implementation could continue to help the many Black boys that come from fatherless homes as well as provide the mothers of theses boys another source of support that is much needed.
3. This study can inform the work of school counselors and mental health professionals regarding Black single mothers who are raising boys. Many Black mothers not only

experience everyday challenges of rearing their son(s) but many of them are also living with; trauma, guilt, insecurities, pain, toxic relationships, financial hardships, and are living with fear or anxiety regarding the safety and overall well-being of their son(s). Practitioners can be instrumental in considering various sensitive and culturally relevant methods to assist these mothers and their son(s) have successful outcomes despite the difficulties and challenges they face.

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Appendix A Interview Protocol

1. How are you today?
2. Tell be a little bit about yourself.
3. What have been some of your experiences as a Black woman in America?
4. Tell me about your son(s).
5. What does a typical day look like for you and your son(s)?
6. What type of relationship do you and your son have?
7. As a Black single mother raising a son, what are some challenges that you experience?
8. Do you have a support system? If so, who are they?
9. Are there any positive Black males in your sons life? How is their relationship?
10. What are some of the things that you teach your son?
11. What do you tell your son about being a Black male child in the United States of America?