African American Males' Perceptions of Factors Aiding Their Completion of High
School: A Population Raised by Single Mothers

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ABSTRACT

"Societal factors of racism and implicit bias are present in the United States' school systems and they result in inequities in achievement outcomes" (Green., 2016, p. 2). The objective of this qualitative study was to discover more about African American males raised by single mothers, and the perceived factors that helped them complete high school. The interview protocol for this study consisted of fourteen questions. Researching the perceived factors that contributed to the academic success of African American male students who came from single parent households may provide the insight needed to create strategies for schools, communities, and families to help African American males from single parent homes achieve high school completion. This study included a purposive sample of African American male alumni from a high school in Southwest Virginia as participants. The research question, what perceived factors aided African American males from single parent homes completing high school and the role of their immediate family members, networks which may include teachers, counselors, administrators, coaches, mentorship organizations, places of worship and after-school programs served as the research question.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to identify the factors African American males raised by single mothers attributed to them completing high school at a particular school in Southwest Virginia. Five African American males who completed high school from 2011 to 2021 were interviewed. From the interviews conducted, the researcher found seven themes. The themes were strong relationships with their mothers, relationships are important, mothers involved in schools, exposure to extracurricular activities and programs, extended family support, religion, and self-determination. School administrators, teachers, and school personnel could use the data from this study. Schools should consider incorporating activities to strengthen mother-son relationships, establish mentorship programs, and school personnel should consider organizing internships for the African American males who are being raised by single mothers.

Dedication

To my brother, your memory continues to strengthen my resolve in times of adversity and challenge. All I need is a memory of your laugher and jovial spirit and I am back focused and determined. We continue to press towards the mark. Onward and upward.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"Through determination, resilience and persistence African Americans have overcome oppression, racial injustice, and discrimination after centuries of bondage, discrimination, oppression, and segregation" (Rury, 2013, p.18). Documented are issues of distress, poverty and failure for some African Americans. Nonetheless, it is important to note that African Americans are not a monolithic group, and more importantly, failure and oppression are not defining characteristics of African Americans. Increasingly, African Americans are experiencing more achievements. A study of high school graduation rates from 1973 to 2012 by Jones (2015) found increases in high school attainment for African Americans. Graduation rates in 1973 for African American males went from 76.8% to 81 % by 2012. In a report by the United States Census Bureau (2022) High School Completion rates for Blacks and Whites increase and the gap between Black and White high school completion is decreasing but it is closing over the course of generations. The information in Table 1 is from the United States Census Bureau (2022) Educational Attainment in the United States Report.

Table 1

High School Completion Rate of Persons Age 25 or Older

	Blacks	Whites
1940	7.70%	26.10%
1970	33.70%	57.40%
1980	51.20%	70.50%
2000	78.50%	88.40%
2008	83.30%	91.50%
2021	90.30%	95.10%

Note: Adapted from U.S. Census Bureau (2022) "Educational Attainment in the United States: 2021"

To understand the complexities of the African American Community with a purpose to seek solutions, one must understand that there are African Americans who are experiencing degrees of success, but there are many who not (Fantuzzo et al., 2012) are.

Statement of Problem

The problem is African American males complete high school at lower rates than any other group. The Schott Foundation (2015) documented that in the 2012-2013 year the graduation rate for African American males was 59%, for Latino males, the graduation rate was 65% and for White males, the graduation rate was 80%. According to the Scott Foundation report, data collected in 48 states and the District of Columbia indicated that African American males were at the bottom of the four-year graduation rates in 35 states and the District of Columbia. Latino males were at the bottom in 13 states. According to Kena et al. (2016) with the National Center for Education Statistics, "There are significant gaps between African American males and their counterparts across academic outcomes for reading and mathematics" (p. 76). African American males' experience lower graduation rates, higher suspension rates, and over identification in special education. The results of these negative outcomes play a role and they affect the livelihoods of African American males (Howard, 2013). These negative results for African American males are chronic high unemployment, over incarceration, disparate health conditions, and lower life expectancies than any other racial/ethnic and gender groups in the United States (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020 ; U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2020).

The unequal number of African American males not completing high school and the relationship associated with the young men raised in a single parent home is the central issue. The relevance according to Jeynes (2014) is because a strong relationship exists between fathers who are involved in the lives of their African American sons and positive academic outcomes.

Braswell et al. (2020) documented that the percentage of African American children born to single mothers was nearly 70% in 2018. In 2018, more than half of the Hispanic children born in the United States were born to single mothers but the percentage of children born to single mothers rose for every race from 1960 to 2018. As compared to other races, African American fathers are less likely to live in households with their children and are less involved in the daily lives of their children than fathers of other races are. This study, through the experiences of African American males raised by single parents, identified the perceived factors aiding African American males in graduation from high school.   African American males were the focus of the study because the high school graduation rate is higher for African American females than for African American males (Murano, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

 The purpose of this narrative qualitative study was to identify the perceived factors that helped African American males raised in single parent homes complete high school. Researching the perceived factors that contributed to the academic success of African American male students who come from single parent households provided insight into the strategies utilized by schools, communities, and families that help African American males from single parent homes achieve high school completion. This study included a purposive sample of African American male alumni from a high school in Southwest Virginia who were at the high school between 2011 to 2021.

Significance of the Study

African American males experience lower high school completion rates, are suspended more, and are over identified for special education services. The results of these negative outcomes affect the earning potential of African American males (Howard, 2013). These negative results for African American males are chronic high unemployment, over incarceration,

disparate health conditions, and lower life expectancies than any other racial/ethnic and gender groups in the United States (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020; U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2020). Disproportionately, African American males are not completing high school at the same rate as Whites, and other racial groups. Single parents are raising many of these African American males without the resources needed to support high school completion (Jeynes, 2014). The findings from these stories have the potential to inform, and provide strategies needed to create better outcomes for all students. Moreover, the data derived from this study contributed in a unique way because few studies provide insights into the perspective of African American males from single parent homes who complete high school.

Research Question

A review of the literature aided in the development of the open-ended research question: The following research question guided this study:

What perceived factors aided African American males from single-parent homes in completing high school and what were the perceived roles of

      a) Their mother

      b) Relatives

      c) Friends

      d) School personnel (teachers, counselors, and administrators)

      e) Community organizations (mentorship organizations, places of worship, afterschool programs)

Limitations/Delimitations

The sample size consisted of a small number of participants from one selected site in Southwest Virginia that will make generalizing for all African American male students who grew

up in single-parent homes and completed high school throughout the United States problematic because the findings are limited to Southwest Virginia. Due to the small sample size and location of the study, the African American male participants' voices may not represent those of the entire population of African American males from single parent homes, which may further decrease the ability to generalize the findings in this study. A comparative analysis is needed from various regions in the United States. Participants were asked to recall experiences or events from their high school years solely based on their memories instead of data and records while they were attending high school. The researcher relied on the participants to give an accurate response to each question. Another limitation is researcher bias since there will be one researcher who created research questions, recruited participants, analyzed data, and developed themes. Parents, teachers, or individuals within the community were not interviewed and the only data gathered were from the African American males who were asked specific questions regarding their perceptions of the factors that aided them in completing high school. The role of the researcher within the school division allowed for a quick connection with participants.

Data from the African American males selected using a purposeful sampling was collected. African American males with whom the researcher did not have a relationship did not have an opportunity to provide data for this study, and they may have had experiences or opinions that were different from the participants.

Description of Terms

Achievement gap--The observed, persistent disparity, which occurs when one group of students outperforms another group on educational measures and educational attainment, particularly when those groups are defined by race/ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status (Lewis & Diamond, 2015).

Disproportionate — adjective meaning too large or too small in comparison with something else. (Merrian-Webster Online). For the purposes of this study, *disproportionate* will be used to refer to the over or under representation of a given population group, often defined by racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Single parent—for the purposes of this study, the term *single parent* will be used to describe an unmarried biological relative of an African American male who is neither receiving assistance from a biological parent nor cohabitating with an intimate partner.

Conceptual Framework

This study has five chapters, a reference list, and appendices. In the first chapter, the term *high school completion gap* is discussed. Provided in this study are the statement of the problem, research question, purpose, rationale, and the significance of the study. Assumptions and definitions of key terminology are in Chapter I. Contained in Chapter II is a review of the literature, which elaborates upon the historical effect the high school completion gap has had on the United States. Factors believed to influence Black male student achievement are analyzed. Presented in Chapter III are the qualitative research design used, rationale for the use of the qualitative research design, participant descriptions, the role of the researcher, and ethical considerations. Contained in Chapter IV are the data and findings. Chapter V is comprised of the summary, conclusions, and recommendations. Also in Chapter V are the implications for future research and policy influencing Black male high school completion. The study concludes with the reference list and appendices.

Summary

African American males experience lower high school completion rates than other groups (Kena et al., 2016). This negative result has an effect on the earning potential of African American males

who do not complete high school (Howard, 2013). This study identified the perceived factors that aided African American males from single parent homes to complete high school. The sample size for this study was five African American males who completed high school from a particular school in Southwest Virginia.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify from the voices of African American males raised in single parent homes, the perceived factors that helped them complete high school in an effort to identify potential narratives to the African American male high school completion gap. The perceptions of African American males from single parent homes who successfully graduate from high school was the focus of this literature review. What does the literature suggest regarding the perceptions of African American males from single parent homes who successfully complete high schools? The literature review is in four main sections: Methods Used to Search Literature, Education and Race in Virginia, Educational Leadership and Race, and Contextual Information and Perspectives.

In Methods Used to Search Literature section reviews the methods and sources used to research and find literature on the perceived factors of African American males from single parent homes. In Education and Race, Virginia and the United States seem to become increasingly more diverse yet increasingly more segregated with underfunded schools in predominately African American and impoverished communities. In Educational Leadership and Race, authors Diem and Welton (2020) provide the importance of eliminating racism in order to perpetuate academic success for all students. In Contextual Information and Perspectives, the authors of various studies provide qualitative data from the real-life experiences of African American males from single parent homes.

Methods Used to Search Literature

Utilized to locate relevant research studies were the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), the Virginia Tech Library using ProQuest Dissertations and Thesis Global initially, and Virginia Tech Library databases. In addition, the Virginia Department of Education

(VDOE), the United States Department of Education (DOE), and Diem and Welton's (2020) book were used as sources. The following keywords were included in the search: *High school, African American, achievement gap, critical race theory, mentoring, African-American, social capital, achievement, equity, parent engagement, poverty, urban, academic achievement, gender, resilience, dropout, persistence, race, retention, student achievement, motivation, self-efficacy, social justice, academic success, at-risk, socioeconomic status, perceptions*, and *Black males*, and the keywords yielded 337 results. Based on the abstracts, it was determined that more research is needed as it pertains to the perceptions of the factors that aid African American males from single parent homes in completing high school.

Education and Race in Virginia

Students throughout Virginia are becoming more racially diverse. Overall students of color comprise a majority (52%) of all students statewide (22% African American, 17% Latinx, 7% Asian American/Pacific Islander, 6% multiple races)[1], which is a 30% increase from the 2003-2004 school year, yet the schools in Virginia have become more segregated in the last 15 years (Mendes & Duncombe, 2020). Mendes and Duncombe (2020) unravel how an increasingly diverse student population in Virginia has not resulted in diverse schools.

The researchers conclude that many neighborhoods and communities are still segregated, and the devastating result of the segregated communities has perpetuated the continued existence of underfunded and under resourced schools. Many of these predominately African American, impoverished schools and communities have a disproportionate number of failing schools when compared to predominately White schools and communities. Virginia's system of funding, Standards of Quality (SOQ), is unrealistically low, and the funding of schools is still heavily

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[1] School Quality Profiles, Virginia Dept. of Education (VDOE), 2019

dependent upon local governments. [2] High-poverty African American communities have less funding to provide predominately African American schools the resources to educate African American students, and the Standards of Quality funding does not adequately address the shortcomings of impoverished communities. Consequently, African American males living in high-poverty single-parent homes have under resourced, underfunded schools (Mendes & Duncombe, 2020).

Educational Leadership and Race

The academic performance and achievement of a high school relies heavily on the effectiveness and attributes of the school's leadership. School leaders have to wear many hats if they desire to be successful. Strong educational leadership capabilities are necessary, and fostering a positive environment where all students can learn does not take place if a school leader cannot cultivate a positive school-wide culture. As a bare minimum, schools must have school leaders who take actions to address and eliminate racist ideas, structures, attitudes, and actions (Diem & Welton, 2020).

In a study by Branch et al. (2013), the researchers observed 7,420 individual principals and used 28,147 annual principal observations as the basis of their data. According to Branch et al. (2013), the study provided evidence that highly effective educational leaders make a difference and that effective educational leaders are able to raise the achievement of individual students and the entire student body within a particular school between two and seven months of learning in a school year (Branch et al., 2013). The researchers stated that the information in the study will assist highly effective educational leaders in organizing and coordinating resources

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[2] FY 2018 Annual Survey of School System Finances, The United States Census Bureau

and strategies needed to promote better graduation outcomes for African American males from single parent homes (Diem & Welton, 2020).

Diem and Welton's (2020) contributions in their book to the area of educational leadership and race serve as a framework for how leaders can address overt and covert racist policies and practices. Issues involving racism, such as racial inequity, color-evasiveness, and color blindness, might have affected the perceptions of African American males that successfully complete high school. Moreover, the issues involving racism that school leaders successfully mitigate in their schools to address systemic racism, color evasiveness, and color blindness are promulgated as factors that could ultimately lead to some of the African American males from single parent homes successfully completing high school.

The policy and governance issues associated with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the intended outcomes for all students are important to understand. The provisions of the law determine how well schools teach high academic standards to African American males and others, and prepare them to succeed in college and careers (ESSA, 2015).

Contextual Information and Perspectives

Because African American males do not perform as well as other ethnic groups or even as well as African American females, studying African American male graduation attainment is important. The Schott Foundation for Public Education (2015) documented that African American males were least likely to secure a four-year diploma after beginning high school. The report found that African American males had a graduation rate of 47% during the 2009-2012 school years (Jones, 2015).

Browne and Battle (2018) studied the association between African American single parent families and their children's educational achievement. The educational outcomes of

African American female students in single-parent households were better than the educational outcomes of African American male students in single parent households. The Educational Longitudinal Study and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) provided the data in this study that spanned over 40 years. The sample size for the study consisted of 750 schools with over 15, 000 students (Browne & Battle, 2018).

Suh et al. (2014) analyzed the dropout rates during the 2000s using two cohorts. Suh et al. (2014) stated there were, "four factors to the widening of the Black-White gap: school suspension policies, peer impact, fatherless households, and the student-teacher relationships" (p. 20). The high school graduation gap between African American and White students is as old as the nation itself (Suh et al., 2014). The authors focused their study on the widening of the Black and White high school graduation gap and the causes of the widening during the first decade of the 21st century (Suh et al., 2014).

The information in the study came from two cohorts of the National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth 1979 (NLSY97) and 1997 (NLSY97). The cohorts were samples from the United States of youth who were between the ages of 12 and 22 as of December 31, 1978 and 1996. The NLSY79 cohort was in high school during the 1980s and the NLSY97 cohort was in high school during the 2000s. The cohorts of 1979 and 1997 were interviewed for the first time in 1997 and 8,984 respondents participated. Men accounted for 51 percent (4,582) and women accounted for 49 percent (4,402). The survey included 51.9 percent White non-African American/non-Hispanic, 26 percent African American non-Hispanic, 21.2 percent Hispanic or Latino, and 0.9 percent mixed-raced respondents (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020).[3] The

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[3] Interviews were conducted annually from 1997 to 2011 and biennially since then. The data has been surveyed 18 times as of 2018. Data are available from Round 1 (1997-98) through Round 18 (2017-18).

youth were determined as dropouts if they neither graduated nor enrolled in high school as of 1991 for the NLSY79 cohort and 2009 for the NLSY97 cohort (Suh et al., 2014).

Suh et al. (2014) gathered data from the personal, behavioral, family, and educational experiences of the youth over the years. The researchers selected fourteen independent variables. Socioeconomic and family factors that were analyzed included gender of the youth (GEN), biological parents as of the initial survey year (BIO), number of household members (HHSIZE), ratio of household income to poverty level (POVERTY), and whether the mother was employed. The authors analyzed two youth-culture variables, study habits and behaviors. In addition, the researchers used the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery score (ASVAB), number of students who were suspended (SUSPENSION), and number of days absent from school (ABSENT). Variables identified as school-related included perception of teacher (TEACHER), percent of peers who plan to go to an institution of higher learning (PEER), whether the youth was residing in a metropolitan area (MSA), and census regions of residence in a Metropolitan area (MSA).

Suh et al. (2014) analyzed data and determined that the biggest increase in terms of the variables was the suspension variable. Suspension of African American students increased by 30 percent, and the suspension rate for White students increased by less than 5 percent for the same period. The gap widened from 1980 to the 2000s, and the researchers attributed the phenomenon to school policy and youths' environment. The factor that contributed most significantly to the disparity in graduation between African American and White students was suspension. The authors found that African American students received harsher penalties than White students did. Dropout rates for White and African American suspended students were higher than for students who received few or no suspensions.

Suh et al. (2014) perpetuated the idea that discipline policies may have stifled African American students' progress toward closing the gap since the adoption of the Gun Free School Act of 1994 and the NCLB Act of 2001. Students who frequently got into trouble were perceived to be hindrances towards Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which meant that schools had motives to exclude underperforming students from school through harsh discipline for offenders of school rules as a way to make AYP. The trend towards strict discipline for African American male students worsened between the 1980s and 2000s and during that period the number of African American students suspended from school increased by 11.4 % while for White students the same variable only increased by 0.9% (Suh et al., 2014).

Williams and Bryan (2013) conducted a qualitative study that identified school, home, and other factors that contributed to the success of eight African America high school graduates from poverty-stricken communities living in single-parent homes. The researchers investigated the contextual factors that attributed to the youth completing high school. The researchers noted in the introduction that it was important that they discuss how the African American youth overcame adversity because much of the research on academic performance focused on causes and consequences of underachievement as opposed to the factors that led to the students becoming successful.

Experiences and perceptions of those experiences are significant to this study and exemplified in the research purpose statement: "The purpose of the research was to identify the factors and process that contribute to the academic success of urban, African American male and female high school graduates from low-income, single-parent families" (Williams & Bryan, 2013, p. 67). The research question was what experiences do African American high school graduates from low-income, urban backgrounds report as contributing to their academic success.

The study was qualitative because the authors believed the actual experiences of the African American youth would provide more in-depth data. Williams and Bryan (2013) noted that seldom are the perspectives of African American youth taken into account. Yin (2009), as referenced by the researchers, claimed that a multiple case study design was useful in providing an organized analysis of events, data, and information as well as reporting results.

   Eight participants took part in the study. Four of the individuals were men, four were women, and they were between the ages of 18 and 21. All of the participants identified themselves as being African American. Seven of the men lived in a single-parent household with their mothers; one respondent lived with his grandmother. The grade point averages of the participants were between 2.65 and 4.20 on a 4.0 grade point scale. The average grade point average was a 3.5, and all of the participants attended high schools in Chicago, Illinois (Williams & Bryan, 2013).

   Williams and Bryan (2013) generated potential candidates for the study and they called the participants to verify that they met the criteria. Researchers Williams and Bryan (2013) created interview questions by analyzing the general literature related to successful African American students from single parent households. The question asked was, "Why do you think you received good grades in high school?" Participants provided more detail based on specific questions such as "What messages, if any, did you hear about education while growing up in your home?"

   The researchers used multiple data sources to establish trustworthiness and to answer the research question. The authors of the research used peer debriefing and member checking to validate the data collected. Peer debriefing was accomplished by gathering the support of two colleagues with knowledge of how to conduct qualitative research (Patton, 2002). According to

Williams and Bryan (2013), "Member checking involved having the respondents review their responses to the interview questions and results to check for clarity, review their personal interview transcripts, and comment on the themes and expressions of patterns that contributed to the results" (p. 293).

Ten themes emerged from the interviews with the African American students. Four were home related, four were school related, and two were community related. The home-related themes were school-related parenting practices, personal stories of hardship, positive mother-child relationships, and extended family networks. School-related factors were supportive school-based relationships, school-oriented peer culture, and extracurricular school activities. Community-based factors were social support networks and out-of-school activities (Williams & Bryan, 2013).

With regard to school-related parenting practices, Williams and Bryan (2013), stated that "all eight participants noted that they received verbal praise for good grades, their mothers set high but realistic expectations, monitored academic progress, supervision of help with schoolwork, and they used physical discipline in response to bad grades and behavior in school" (p. 297). Six of the respondents stated that their mothers worked multiple jobs, but their mothers made it a priority to check on homework and to ask them if they were having problems in school. All of the participants reported that verbal praises and support from their mother or guardian kept them focused on school (Williams & Bryan, 2013).

In their personal stories, seven of the eight respondents discussed how they struggled financially and the effects the financial struggle had on their parents or extended family members. The hardship stories contributed to their drive to succeed and graduate. The parents and family members discussed how difficult it was to "make a living" without a high school

diploma. The parents and extended family members told the students to continue with their

education so they would not have to struggle (Williams & Bryan, 2013).

Five of the eight participants discussed positive mother-child relationships and the five

respondents discussed an internal drive to "give back" to their mothers by completing high

school and by enrolling in college. The participants discussed wanting to provide for their

mothers when they got older. According to the respondents, extended family networks were

essential. Aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents positively affected their academic

performance. The extended family members supported the African American students by

providing emotional support, financial assistance, and social support whenever the young people

were going through difficult times. The extended family members also served as mentors and

positive role models for the students (Williams & Bryan, 2013).

Participants summarized that supportive school-based relationships were important,

warm, open, understanding, and essential. Eight of the student participants claimed that having

at least one adult at their school who cared about them and knew them well contributed to their

academic engagement and performance. The respondents gave examples of relationships that

they had with teachers, counselors, coaches, and college recruiters. The researchers noted in the

study that the respondents attended high-poverty public high schools where 76% or more

students were eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch (Williams & Bryan, 2013).

The African American respondents recognized the importance of close friendships among

peers who faced similar challenges, yet valued education. Six of the eight respondents

articulated that the relationships were invaluable, the relationships held them accountable, and

the relationships motivated the men to succeed academically. Participants used the close

friendships as a support system. The close friendships positively influenced the respondents to make good decisions (Williams & Bryan, 2013).

Six of the eight respondents stated that they participated in after-school activities that included athletics, academic clubs, and social organizations as a factor in their academic success. The six respondents met positive role models and they received opportunities to meet professionals who had lived in poverty as children, but through hard work and determination, they became successful. One of the respondents appreciated having an opportunity to meet professionals who had lived in poverty as a child, but through hard work and determination, they became successful. The researchers' results suggest that schools can better serve African American students by considering their homes, schools, and communities as key roles in fostering the resilience and success of African American students from low-income, single-parent homes (William & Bryan, 2013).

Randolph (2018) interviewed three African American high school males in order to get their perceptions of factors that contributed to academic success. The participants were from South Carolina and they answered questions throughout the interviews. Topics for the questions included schooling, sources of support, and high school culture. All of the participants responded to the following:

1. What was school like growing up (elementary, middle, and high school)?
2. How would you describe yourself (in school, with friends, and with family)?
3. Describe your academic performance in school.
4. Explain what role your parents play in your education.
5. What can the community do to help African American students achieve academic success?

The framework for Randolph's (2018) study was critical race theory. Randolph stated in his research, "Critical race theory starts with addressing racial inequality, color blindness, and meritocracy." Critical race theory serves as a bridge between counter narratives and articulation of lived experience (Randolph, 2018). The basic tenets of the theory posit that society must be viewed in the context of race and the inequalities that exist in education and in other institutions (Randolph, 2018).

Significant to Randolph's (2018) research was the perceptions of African American males from single-parent homes regarding the factors that contributed to their success, which were a supportive parent, caring teachers and positive school environment, peer support, and community initiatives even though they stated they believed they were disciplined more harshly than White males. Identified in the study is the term "discipline gap" to discuss the difference in the administration of discipline for African American males compared to the administration of discipline for White students (Randolph, 2018).

Wilson et al. (2016) described the lived experiences of successful African American men raised by single mothers in fatherless homes. *Fatherless* refers to the fact that the African American men in this study had little to no relationship with their fathers. The term *fatherless* also referred to the fact that the fathers did not provide financial or emotional assistance in raising their sons. The researchers analyzed and identified themes that captured the respondents' experiences in order to share the information with educators, community counselors, and school counselors.

The authors of the study discussed the growing phenomenon of absent fathers in African American households across the United States. In 2011, approximately 25% of children were in households where the head of the house was a mother or grandmother. Wilson et al. stated, "Two

research questions drove the study: (a) what are the experiences of successful African American men raised in absent-father households? (b) What are the experiences of single African American mothers who raised successful African American men?" (p.196). The purpose was to provide counselors, mental health professionals, social workers, and educators with the knowledge needed to analyze and obtain the resources necessary to support successful African American men (Wilson et al., 2016).

The researchers used a phenomenological approach to examine the lives of successful African American males from absent-father homes and the mothers who raised them. The African American men and their mothers were audio-recorded and informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could stop the interview at any point. The researchers created an interview procedure for gathering the perceptions of the participants. The questions were open ended and semi structured (Wilson et al., 2016).

The single mothers and sons received different questions in the interviews. The mothers received the following questions: (a) What was your relationship like with your child's father before his birth? (b) What were your beliefs, thoughts, and ideas concerning single motherhood? (c) What was your situation like as a single mother raising a young man? (d) What kind of man did you think your son would grow to be? (e) What are some words you would use to describe your son now? Wilson et al. (2016) asked the following questions: "(f) How would you describe growing up in your absent-father home? (g) What are some words you would use to describe your mother? (h) What are some events that you remember growing up as a child in an absent-father home? (i) What does your relationship (or lack of) with your father mean to you? (j) Who had the most influence on you and why? (k) How has the relationship with your absent father

made an impact on how you view yourself today in society? (l) How do you and your mother

view your mother-son relationship?" (p. 196).

The analysis of the data occurred in seven steps. The first involved collecting data and

eliminating redundant responses. Wilson et al. (2016) determined in the second step whether the

interview information constituted a theme. In the third step, the researchers clustered and

identified core themes, and in the fourth step, the researchers validated the themes by making

sure the responses were consistent and compatible with the respondents' words and expressions.

Researchers analyzed in-person verbal and nonverbal communication in the fifth step and in the

sixth step, an analysis of the respondents' expressions occurred to determine how the themes fit

together. In the seventh step, the researchers incorporated the descriptions from step five and

step six so they could capture the essence of the interviews (Wilson et al., 2016).

To validate the respondents' statements and expressions the respondents reviewed the

summary of the findings and the respondents read and reviewed the interview transcripts.

Fourteen respondents participated in the study. Seven mothers and seven sons participated in the

study. The mothers in the study were between the ages of 44 and 57, and the successful sons

were between the ages of 28 and 30. The researchers noted that incorporating activities to

strengthen the mother-son relationship might be helpful during counseling services

(Wilson et al., 2016).

The African American men in this study credited the assistance of extended family,

community support, strong mothers, and resilience as major factors in their success. The

following themes were organized and categorized for the interviews: a strong relationship with

their mothers, awareness of father's absence and interaction with mentors and role models,

exposure to activities and programs, their visions of themselves as fathers, extended family

support and a desire to give back and help others. The question posed to the mothers in the study was "What are the experiences of single African American mothers who raised successful African American men"? Wilson et al. (2016) stated there were seven themes: "acknowledging the importance of education, discretion with intimate partners, financial struggles, attachment styles of the mothers, extended family support, religion, and not speaking ill of the children's father" (p.199). The mothers in the study discussed their reluctance in having men that they were dating in their homes unless the relationship was serious (Wilson et al., 2016).

Wilson et al. (2016) did not discuss whether the successful African American men had siblings, but the researchers did report that the mothers emphasized the importance of education early, and often. The mothers in the study stressed that upward social mobility was likely if their sons did their best in school, and they had high expectations for their sons when it came to doing well in school. All of the single mothers indicated that the financial struggles were because of a lack of financial support from the fathers of the young men, and they emphasized the difference between needs and wants. The mothers in the study told their sons they were to, "live their lives and that they would be fine." The mothers articulated that they did not want their sons to live for them, but instead, they wanted them to be successful and have healthy families of their own. All of the mothers expressed concern that they did not want their sons to miss opportunities because they were overly concerned about them. The mothers recalled several instances where they relied on the assistance of parents, family members, and friends for their sons. The mothers recalled their faith in God and they all stated that they were Christians. Commonly, the mothers in the study shared that they never spoke ill of their children's fathers because they did not want their sons to have hatred in their hearts (Wilson et al., 2016).

Miller et al. (2014) investigated the lives of extremely vulnerable African American adolescent males in the Eastern Region of Brooklyn, New York. The neighborhoods were described as vulnerable because the environments were plagued with violent crime, substance abuse, high poverty, and failing schools. They used a comparative case study method to analyze the comparable and contrasting differences in the lives of African American adolescent males who became high school graduates or dropouts. The central focus of the study was to examine the interrelated factors of family, neighborhood, peers, and education experiences that shaped the youth's perspectives on school.

The primary data sources utilized for this study were interviews from African American males who graduated or dropped out of high school. The study compared the risk factors and protective factors among the African American males who successfully completed high school to those of the individuals who dropped out of high school (Miller et al., 2014)[4]. The researchers used the data from the interviews and they examined the academic and non-academic barriers across life domains that affected the educational outcomes of African American males in the New York Community. In the study, "*Life Domains"* were identified as family characteristics, local economic conditions, illegal opportunity structures, labor market participation, awareness of social networks, and barriers to high school graduation (Miller et al., 2014).

The sample for this study was comprised of 52 African American males from Brooklyn, New York. The criteria for this study were the following: 1.) the individuals had to identify as African American male, 2) the individuals had to provide their educational attainment

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[4] Risk factors, as determined by the authors of the research were circumstances that might hinder the African American Males from graduating high school. The researchers asked respondents to identify risk factors associated with family, neighborhood, peers, and educational experiences

information, and 3) individuals had to indicate that they were no longer in high school. There were slightly more high school dropouts (53.8%) compared to high school graduates (46.2%). Of the 52 respondents, 25% were legally employed full or part time.   The average age of the participants was 21.2 years old and the participants' ages ranged from 18 to 24 years old (Miller et al., 2014).

Risk factors included violence in their neighborhoods, school domain risk factors, negative attitude toward school, a strong belief that the quality of education in their schools needed improvement, conflicts with authority, behavior problems/issues, victimization in school/safety concerns, distractions, hanging out with the wrong crowd, financial concerns that stopped education, morning hours, and an attitude that school was boring. The authors of the research identified school domain risk factors as negative attitudes toward school, conflicts with authority, behavior problems/issues and victimization in school/safety concerns, people who do not want to be there causing disruptions, hanging out with the wrong crowd, financial concerns stopped education, morning hours, and school was boring. The authors of the research noted that morning hours were a concern of some of the respondents because they thought school started too early in the morning. Protective factors included caring teachers that were believed to have made a difference, family encouragement for education, and enjoyment of learning and positive attitude toward school in general, positive educational goals, and valuing the social benefits of school (Miller et al., 2014).

Risk factors of the dropouts in the study reported in the interviews that they had negative experiences that ultimately pushed them out. The dropouts reported structural inequality to some event or situation that caused them to stop attending. *Structural inequality,* as defined in the study, is the failure of the schools to have structures in place to identify struggling students.

They described negative points about school and specifically they noted that there were

unresponsive faculty and staff in their schools who did not tend to their essential needs and they

failed to assist them in maneuvering an educational path to graduation. Males who completed

high school recognized that they had positive qualities and attributes about themselves, their

families, and neighborhoods when it came to school outcomes. The graduates noted that they

overwhelmingly had positive experiences in the school and they articulated that high school

would ultimately help them achieve their goals for their future (Miller et al., 2014). The

qualitative analysis derived from interviews with African America males regarding their

perspectives of the factors that helped them graduate or drop out of school indicated that both

groups reported risks and protective factors. The respondents who dropped out reported more

school experiences of behavior problems, and they had negative attitudes toward schooling

(Miller et al., 2014).

      Moon and Singh (2015) provided a phenomenological study of African American males

and their lived experiences and perceptions of the achievement gap. According to Creswell

(2007), a phenomenological study "describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived

experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (p.27). The researchers chose a phenomenological

approach because they believed the perspectives of African American adolescent males are

essential in further understanding the systemic barriers African American males from single-

parent homes face. According to the researchers, school counselors are the ideal school personnel

to help increasing opportunities for African American male students. The authors frame their

work using Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a means to support professional school counselors as

they develop initiatives that support African American males. "CRT is a theory that challenges

perspectives that do not address racism as a reality for people of color and Critical Race theorist

seek to examine experiences people of color have of societal racism" (Moon & Singh, 2015, p. 5).

Analyzed are three tenets of CRT. The first tenet claims racism is institutional, structural, widespread, and unavoidable for people of color. The second tenet is counter-storytelling, which posits that there are negative perceptions about people of color that counter-storytelling aims to identify because these narratives generalize realities for people of color (Love, 2004). The third tenet of the study is an analysis of colorblindness, which confronts the assumption that all people are treated equally in United States institutions (Moon & Singh, 2015).

The researchers procured 10 parental consents and the participants were 1) 14-18 years old, 2) African American, 3) male, 4) and currently enrolled in school. Two study instruments used in this research were a demographic sheet to collect information about participants, and individual and group semi-structured interview protocols. Prior to beginning the study, the team of researchers discussed possible preconceived notions and they explored the themes from the first interviews. The data analysis included descriptions of the researchers' experiences with the African American males, determining the meaning of the statements, grouping the statements into themes, and infusing the themes into the reality of the adolescent males' experiences. The researchers utilized several verification processes, which included bracketing researchers' biases, member checking of transcripts, and an external audit (Moon & Singh, 2015).

Moon and Singh found five themes in the interviews: a) achievement gap or resource gap b) salience of parental support, c) environmental obstacles d) individual motivation and effort, and e) resiliency and persistence in the face of racism. In the first theme, the African American males expressed that it was hard to compete with the academic success of Whites because they were from low-income neighborhoods and families. They also noted that their schools were not

as highly resourced as the affluent schools with predominately White students. The African American participants explained that they were given old books, a scarce amount of computers, overcrowded classes, and instructors who they believed did not care about students (Moon & Singh, 2015).

Salience of parental support addressed the levels of encouragement they received from parents regarding academic achievement. Those who had parental support claimed that the approval from their parents made them feel like their academic success mattered. The participants who did not have parental support shared that it was difficult for them to achieve academically because of the lack of support (Moon & Singh, 2015).

The third theme was Environmental Obstacles related to Academic Achievement. Participants discussed the hardships they faced coming to school after facing challenges at home. They described their home situations as being dismal, and entering school solely focusing on school was extremely difficult. Some participants discussed how their families moved frequently and how they struggled financially. Their lifestyles created situations where the students felt burdened, unable to focus on school, and depressed (Moon & Singh, 2015).

The authors' next theme was Individual Effort and Motivation and it reflected the participants' definition of academic success for themselves. The African American male respondents explained that a student who made primarily A's and B's, with very few C's and avoided receiving discipline referrals was academically successful. All of the participants professed that they tried to keep high grade point averages and stay out of trouble. The respondents noted maintaining good grades was difficult (Moon & Singh, 2015).

The fifth theme was Resiliency and Persistence in the face of Racism. The participants accepted that they would have to face overt and covert forms of racism but they were nonetheless

resilient to the challenges in their school environments. This research provides insight into the experiences of African American students that contributes to the current literature with African American students where achievement gap includes low teacher expectations, school cultural shortfalls, and environmental factors (Moon & Singh, 2015).

In conclusion, African American males from single-parent homes face a myriad of challenges and obstacles in their path towards high school graduation. Some are systemic challenges that are in schools while others come from the homes of African American males with one parent/guardian. The studies in the literature review provide an analysis for how schools can support racial equity and eliminate discrimination, and the literature review provides perspectives of successful African American males as a means of understanding the ways in which some African American males have overcome racism, discrimination, and the abandonment of a parent.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this narrative qualitative study was to identify the perceived factors that helped African American males raised in single-parent homes. This chapter identifies the research design and methods used throughout the study. The Methodology chapter contains the research design and justification, the research questions, the selection of the participants, the instrument used for data collection, and the data collection procedure.

Research Design and Justification

In this qualitative inquiry, the researcher employed a narrative research design. Qualitative research is a study that identifies the observer in the world. Creswell (2015) stated that the aim of qualitative inquiry is to "explore the meaning that individuals or groups of individuals or give to a social or human problem" (p. 65). Creswell (2015) also noted that "qualitative inquiry is guided by philosophical assumptions and beliefs, which are interpreted through a lens or a framework that guides the procedures for the conduct of the inquiry" (p.65). African American male participants were asked to share their experiences completing high school as African American males from single parent homes. Narrative stories are experiences and they sometimes shed light on how individuals see their situations and how they may see themselves (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These narrative stories may serve as a means to inform and identify strategies to help close the high school completion gap of African American males from single parent homes. There will be a collection of stories about completing high school gathered from interviews using themes and told by the researcher in chronology.

This study used narrative inquiry to analyze specific social issues such as fatherlessness and suspension from school and the perceived effects the social issues had on African American males from single-parent homes. Researchers often use narrative design to tell stories for individuals and groups. To formulate an identity, narrative research design can assist in formulating an identity, which can help to mobilize marginalized groups and initiate political action (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Creswell and Poth (2018) explain narrative inquiry in this way:

> As a method, it begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals. The focus of narrative inquiry is an exploration of the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences were, and are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted. (p.67)

Research Question

This study on the *African American Males' Perceptions of Factors Aiding their Completion of High School: A Population from Single-Parent homes* will have the following research question:

What perceived factors aided African American males from single-parent homes in completing high school and what were the perceived roles of

a) Their mother

b) Relatives

c) Friends

d) School personnel (teachers, counselors, and administrators)

e) Community organizations (mentorship organizations, places of worship, afterschool programs)

Research Setting

According to Creswell (2018), qualitative researchers gather information by talking directly to people and observing their behavior within their environment and they do not bring

individuals into a contrived situation such as a lab. The site for this study was a high school in Southwest Virginia, and the participants of the study completed high school. According to the National Center for Education and Statistics (NCES, 2017), the school is located in an area identified as a town-distant locale. A *town-distant locale*, as defined by the National Center for Education and Statistics, is a territory inside an urban cluster that is less than or equal to 10 miles from an urbanized area. The students in the school division live in households where 60% are female led with no husband present, 30% of the students live in a married-couple household, and 9% live in a household with no wife present. The median household income was $33,224, and 37.8% of the students come from families that have an income below the poverty level (NCES, 2017).

Participants

From 2011 to 2020, 340 African American males graduated from a high school in Southwest Virginia. Selected will be five to fifteen African American male participants who completed high school between 2011 and 2020 using a purposive sampling. A purposive sampling allows the researcher the opportunity to select the site and participants that are most appropriate for the study (Creswell, 2018).   Used to determine who was eligible to participate in the study was the following criteria:

1. African American males from single parent homes for whom the researcher was aware of the fact that they were raised in a single-parent home (without the assistance of two biological parents or a cohabitating parent).

2. African American males from a single-parent home who completed high school from one high school in Southwest Virginia and are between the ages of 19 and 28 and completed/graduated high school between 2011 and 2020.

Data Collection

Qualitative data from participants were collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews.   Using "Zoom", one-on-one interviewing was used as a method to gather the participants' true and accurate experiences and/or feelings. The study used a purposeful sampling of African American Males for whom the researcher was aware that they completed high school and grew up in a single parent home. Included in the study were five African American males who met the criteria, and for those of whom the researcher was aware of the fact that they completed high school and grew up in a single parent home. Personal contact information was used to call and then email African American males from single parent homes who completed high school from one high school in Southwest Virginia. Participants who agreed to participate in the study were instructed to read the Informed Consent Form for understanding, and ask any questions regarding the study. Upon receiving the participants' written consent, all responses were audio recorded and field notes were taken during and after the time of interview. Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 1 hour. Six pilot interviews were conducted using the interview questions for the study and the interviews on average lasted 51 minutes. For validity and constancy, the introductions and instructions for the interviews were explained in the same manner. Closed and open-ended questions were used (see Appendix A) to gather data. To ensure privacy and confidentiality, all interviews were held in private with just the researcher and the participant. Upon concluding each interview, the researcher allowed time for any additional questions from participants regarding the research study.

Data Sources

The researcher collected the interview data using "Zoom". "Zoom" software was used to document the face-to-face interviews and online interviews. Transcripts were the primary source

of data gathered from the interviews. The transcriptions from the interviews were sent to the

participants and they were asked to verify that the transcript data was accurate. Participants were

given an opportunity to use documents and other sources of data but they declined to do so. The

researcher determined what themes or commonalities were present in participants' perceptions of

the factors that aided them in completing high school.

Instrument Design

After providing consent, participants completed a demographic questionnaire (Appendix

C), which was used to collect data related to the participants' age, siblings, and highest level of

education. Then the participants answered questions from an interview instrument, which was

designed to identify potential themes among the participants in this study (See Appendix A). The

interview instrument was given to a colleague to determine if the questions answered the

research question and the colleague answered the questions to determine if the questions needed

clarifying or elaboration. The individual reviewing the interview instrument read the research

question and then was asked to read the interview questions to determine if interview questions

answered the research question. It was determined that sub questions were needed to help

participants elaborate on their answers.

Through the interview, participants answered questions intended to identify how African

American males from single-parent homes complete high school. Questions 1, 2, 3 and 13 are

close-ended. The questions consist of (Q1) What is your age? Q2) Who lived in your home while

you were in high school. (Q3) What was your highest level of education achieved? Questions 4-

15 are in an open-ended format, designed to explore and collect in-depth information about the

participants' experiences while in high school.   Table 2 below has the interview questions and

the literature from which the questions were derived.

Table 2 **Interview Questions**

Research questions	Question validity using research
Q1　　What is your age?	Wilson et al. (2016)
Q2　　Who lived in your home while you were in high school?	Wilson et al. (2016)
Q3 Would you say you made poor, good, or great grades when you were in high school?	Randolph (2018)
Q3　Do　you　have　any postsecondary education?	Wilson et al. (2016)
Q4　　Who would you describe as being most impactful on you completing high school?　Why?	Wilson et al. (2016)
Q5　　Feel free to describe issues or events that you believed helped you complete high school.	Williams & Bryan (2013)
Q6　　Describe what tactics a family member, school official, or mentor used to help you complete high school. --Did you have family members, school officials, or mentors use positive incentives to encourage you to complete high school and if so what were they.　--Did you have any family members, school officials, or mentors use negative sanctions to encourage you to complete high school?	Williams & Bryan (2013)
Q7　　Please describe any frustrations you felt raised in a single parent household.　--Do you recall feeling upset, ashamed, or embarrassed by the fact that you were being raised in a single parent household when others were being raised in a two-parent household?　If so what was the situation.	Wilson et al. (2016)

Q8 Were there any outside influences that played a role in helping you complete high school. --Was there someone you looked up to that helped you complete high school? --Did you have any personal goals that led you to complete high school that were not given to you by immediate family members or school personnel?	Williams & Bryan (2013)
Q9 Did you receive any support from extended family (uncle, aunt, grandparents, etc.)? What affect did they have on your completing high school?	Williams & Bryant (2013)
Q10 How was your attendance in school? --On average, would you say you missed more or fewer than three days of school a month?	Randolph (2018)
Q11 Did you have any behavioral problems in school? If so, how often and what was the nature of the trouble? --If you didn't get into any trouble in school why do you suppose you never got into trouble in school	Suh et al. (2014)
Q12 Was your single parent active in your school? Please describe. If your parent was active, how were they active and how did that, affect you? If your parent was not active in your school, how did that affect you?	Wilson et al. (2016)
Q13 Were all your basic needs met as a child (food, clothing, shelter, love)?	Williams and Bryan (2013)

Q14 What advice would you offer a young African American male from a single parent home that is in high school?	Williams and Bryan (2013)
Q15 Would you like to add any comments?	Williams and Bryan (2013)

Confidentiality and Ethical Treatment of data

The participants in this study have pseudonyms instead of having their names referenced. The participants received an informed consent form (Appendix B) modeled after a consent form from a study conducted by Cumberbatch-Smith (2016). Cumberbatch-Smith used the consent form in Appendix B to identify factors that contribute to the academic success of African American Boys attending elementary schools. The participants' identifying data was included in the long-term storage process and it will be stored for three years from the end of the study. The data is maintained in a secure Google Cloud Drive. Personal identifiers will be destroyed three years after the study has concluded.

The minimal amount of private information required to complete the study was asked for and no one outside of the research team will have access to the individuals' identifying data.

Data Analysis

In this process, the researcher transcribed the participants' responses to all 14 questions. At the conclusion of the interview, the researcher determined what themes or commonalities were present in participants' perception of the factors that aided them in completing high school as it related to the role of family members, friends, school personnel, and community organizations. Results for each question were reported based on the frequency of the emerging themes and commonalities. Merriam (2009) suggested that the establishment of themes begins with coding of the data presented in the interview to allow for classification and construction of

emerging categories or themes. The researcher followed the Merriam (2009) suggestion of

constructing categories, sorting these categories further, and then naming the categories. The

researcher kept a reflective journal to document the researching process.

The process for coding the feedback from the interview started with gathering the audio

transcripts from the interviews. Spreadsheets were used to organize the data from the interviews.

In the next step, the comments from the participants were read and a decision was made to

organize the comments into categories. The researcher read all of the comments from the

participants, made some decisions about the comments, and organized them into categories.

Coding of the data was performed by hand using a color-coded process for identifying words that

appeared in the participants' statements. The color-coded process was used to separate themes

and organize data. Once the readings were completed, another colleague read the same

comments to determine if they agreed with the coding of the comments.

Summary

The focus of the research was on the factors that aided African American males from

single parent homes complete high school. Interviews were conducted using an interview

protocol that was developed by the researcher. The data collected for this study was qualitative

and the design employed for the study was narrative. Using a purposeful sampling, five African

American males served as participants in the study.   Transcripts of the interviews were used to

determine if there were emerging themes.

Chapter IV: Findings

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this narrative qualitative study was to identify the perceived factors that helped African American males raised in single parent homes complete high school by using the voices of African American males as a source of data. Researching the perceived factors that contribute to the academic success of African American male students who come from single-parent households may provide insight into the strategies utilized by schools, communities, and families that help African American males from single parent homes achieve high school completion. This study included a purposive sample of African American male alumni from a high school in Southwest Virginia from 2011 to 2021.

In this chapter, a synopsis of the process used to determine key findings will be presented. After the interviews were conducted, participants' responses were individually transcribed using Zoom software. The participants in the study received a copy of their transcript. All of the transcripts were put into a spreadsheet document. Once all of the responses were organized by question, an analysis of the data was completed through inductive coding exercises. This chapter is organized into four areas: Participant profiles and background, Seven Themes, Data from interview question, and Summary. Discussed in Participant profiles and background are information pertaining to the participants' age, current occupation, how they regarded themselves as students when they were in high school, highest level of education obtained, siblings living in their home when they were in school, and the highest level of education of their mother. The seven themes are as follows: strong relationships with their mothers, relationships are important, mothers involved in schools, exposure to extracurricular activities, extended family support,

religion, and self-determination and motivation.   Following the identification of the seven themes are an explanation of the interview questions and the themes that emerged from each question.

Data analysis and organization were performed free handed by using a color-coding process for identifying words that appeared in the participants' statements. The color-coding process was used to organize themes. An inductive method of analysis was used in this study. The present chapter displays the findings from the interviews. The research question used to guide this study was, What perceived factors aided African American males from single-parent homes in completing high school and what were the perceived roles of a) their mother, b) relatives, c) friends, d) school personnel (teachers, counselors, and administrators), e) community organizations (places of worship, after-school programs, and mentorship organizations).

From this research question, seven themes were created: (a) a strong relationship with their mothers, (b) relationships are important, (c) mothers involvement in schools, (d) exposure to extracurricular activities and programs, (e) extended family support, (f) religion, and (g) self-determination.

Participant Profiles and Background

Pseudonyms were used for the five African American males who agreed to participate in this study. Academically, the self-description these men gave ranged from being a poor student to being a great student. Behaviorally, the men in this study reported that they were disciplined for minor infractions like talking in class to getting in fights. To be included in this study the participants had to be African American males who completed high school at a particular high school in Southwest Virginia. The African American males (a) identified themselves as African

American, (b) completed high school, and (c) are alumni of a specific high school in Southwest Virginia.

George: George at the time of the interview was 26 years old. He is a deputy sheriff and he is an ordained minister as of November 14, 2021. He will serve a Baptist congregation as an assistant pastor and will continue serving the community as a police officer. He attended a community college after high school and earned an associate's degree in general studies. George has a sister that is three years older and a sister that is three years younger. Both sisters lived in the household when George graduated and they both graduated from high school. According to the study participant, his mother graduated from high school and attended a community college but never completed because of work. George described himself as a good student in high school but acknowledged that he could have made better grades. He recalled having a note mailed home because he was talking in class when he was in middle school but did not recall getting into trouble when he was in high school. When asked to describe how he felt being raised in a single parent household he stated he recalled being somewhat frustrated that his father never came around in spite of the fact that he only lived twenty miles away.

Steve: Steve at the time of the interview was 24 years old. He currently works for a car rental company as a full time customer service representative and has been working for the company since he graduated from a four-year university with a Bachelor's of Science in Communication. His responsibilities as a customer service representative include communicating rental terms and conditions, discussing vehicle features and other services, selling optional protection products, answering phones, assisting customers with car rental reservations, and he is a cashier. Steve is the oldest of three boys. He is a year and a half older than his middle brother is, four years older than his youngest brother is, and his two younger

siblings lived in the home when Steve was in high school. Steve's siblings graduated from high

school and he reported that high school is the highest level of education his mother received.

The participant acknowledged that he got into trouble a few times for not coming to school and

was assigned after-school detention and in-school detention for the misbehavior. He described

himself as an average student who made average grades.   When asked to describe how he felt

being raised in a single parent household he explained that his father did not live in the home but

he had a relationship with his father. He would see his father periodically, and would stay at his

home over the summer but he stated things changed when his father remarried and he went into

high school. Steve recalled not going to stay with his father at all and only seeing his father

maybe five to six times a year once he got into high school.

Daniel: Daniel is 26 years old and he works in Richmond, Virginia as a mechanical

engineer. Daniel graduated from a four-year university and he is the middle child. He has an

older brother, and a younger sister; his older brother is five years older, and he is two years older

than his sister is. Daniel's older brother went to college by the time he entered high school.

Daniel and his younger sister were the only children in the home when he graduated. Daniel's

sister and brother graduated high school, and his mother graduated from a local community

college with an associate's degree as a registered nurse. Daniel described an incident when he

was in 10th grade and got into a fight with an 11th grade student because the felt like the male

student was disrespecting him in front of a group of young women. Daniel explained,

Yeah, I got into a fight one time in 10th grade, because dude tried to clown me about my
shoes. My shoes were dusty, but he was trying to clown me in front of some females. Crazy
thing was, we was cool but I wasn't sure why he was trying to put on in front of people. So, I
told him I would kick his ass if he kept talking shit. He stood up and I punched him in the face.
He ran around the table, I hit him two more times, and two teachers broke the fight up. I was
suspended for 10 days, but dude never messed with me after that.

Daniel admitted to having other disciplinary infractions in high school but they were for being late to school or class. Daniel described himself as a good student and he claimed that he made mostly "A's" in school and sometimes "B's". When asked how he felt about being raised in a single parent home he stated that, "My pops was a dead beat but my mom held us down and I guess we came out alright".

Jason: Jason was 22 years old at the time of the interview. Jason does not have any postsecondary education. He worked at a large retail/grocery store in high school and is currently working for the company. Jason has one older sister sibling that is three years older and he reported that his older sister really tried to direct him away from trouble when they were younger. Jason's older sister lived in the home until his junior year of high school. She moved in with a boyfriend his junior year in high school but she did graduate high school. Jason reported that his mother finished school with a G.E.D. He recalled getting into trouble in high school for things like smoking cigarettes in the boys' restroom, "skipping school", and talking in class. A high school administrator, on three different occasions, assigned him in-school suspension for skipping, talking in class, and the same administrator suspended him for smoking cigarettes in the boys' restroom. The participant described himself as the type of student that did just enough to pass. When asked how he felt about being raised in a single parent home he stated,

You know, I don't have any hard feelings for my dad but I ain't got nothing for him. My mom looked out for us and I got her back, but as for my dad, I don't have hard feelings, but I wouldn't piss on him if he was on fire". I mean, it was tough with him not being around because other kids had their dads and we didn't have a lot coming up because he basically deserted us.

Michael: Michael was 23 years old at the time of the interview. He completed his associate's degree in general studies from a local community college, took some time off, and he is currently taking classes online so he can get a job working as an adult mental health professional. Michael is an employee of a large home improvement store stocking shelves and

he is a cashier. He is the oldest of three children. He is two years older than his middle sister and four years older than his brother. His sister graduated high school and his brother completed high school with a G.E.D. Michael's two siblings lived in the home when he was in high school, his mother dropped out of school, and she received her GED certificate. Michael stated that he never got in trouble in school because he feared what his mother would have done and he described himself as a "pretty good student".   When asked what his grades were, he described them as being mostly "B's" and some "C's". Michael played junior varsity football, varsity football, junior varsity basketball, and varsity basketball.   When asked how he felt about being raised in a single parent home he shrugged and stated, " I am not sure how you mean, it's all I ever knew, so I really never even gave it much thought".

Interview questions

The following interview questions were utilized to procure responses for this study:

1. Who would you describe as being most impactful on you completing high school? Why?

2. Academically, would you say you made poor, good, or great grades when you were in high school?

3. Describe issues or events that you believe helped you complete high school.

4. Describe all the tactics used by family members, principals, teachers, school counselors, coaches to help you complete high school.

   - Sub question: Did you have family members, school officials, or mentors use positive incentives to encourage you to complete high school and if so what were they?
   - Did you have any family members, school officials, or mentors use negative sanctions to encourage you to complete high school?

5. Please describe any frustrations you felt being raised in a single-parent household.

- Do you recall feeling upset, ashamed, or embarrassed by the fact that you were being raised in a single parent household when a two-parent household was raising others? If so what was the situation that led you to feel frustrated?

6. Do you have any brothers and sisters and if so, did they graduate or complete high school?

7. Were there any outside influences that played a role in helping you complete high school?

- Was there someone you looked up to that helped you complete high school?

8. Did you receive any support from uncles, aunts, grandparents, or cousins? What effect did they have on your completing high school?

9. How was your attendance in school?

- On average, would you say you missed more or fewer than three days of school a month?

- What would you say was your primary reason for missing school when you were in high school?

10. Did you have any behavioral problems in school? If so, how often? If you didn't get into trouble in school, why do you suppose you never got into trouble in school?

11. Was your single parent active in your school?

- If your parent was active, what kinds of organizations or activities did your parent participate in and how did that affect you?

- If your parent was not active in school, how did that affect you?

12. Were all your basic needs met as a child (food, clothing, shelter, love)?

13. What advice would you offer a young African American male from a single-parent home that is in high school?

14. Would you like to add any comments?

For question one, respondents were asked who would they describe as being the most impactful on them completing high school. Below is the question and table indicating how the participants responded to question one.

Question 1.
Table 3.
Interview question 1. Who would you describe as being most impactful on you completing high school? Why? All of the participants responded to question one and they all acknowledged that their mother was the most impactful person on them completing high school. One of the participants stated that his aunt was just as important as his mother was in terms of helping him complete high school.

Most impactful towards completing high school

Participant Responses	George	Steve	Daniel	Jason	Michael
Mother	x	x	x	x	x
Extended family member				x	
Other					

In question two, the researcher asked the five participants to recall and give a brief description of how they saw themselves as students when they were in high school. Below is the question and table, which indicates how the participants responded to question two.

Question 2
Table 4
Interview question 2. Academically, would you say you made poor, good, or great grades when you were in high school? The answers to question 2 varied but all of the participants answered the question.

Self-assessment of grades

Participant Responses	George	Steve	Daniel	Jason	Michael
Great grades					
Good grades	x		x		x
Average		x		x	
Poor grades					

For question three, the researcher asked were there any specific moments or epiphanies in their lives that they can recall that motivated them to complete high school. Illustrated in table five are the responses to interview question three.

Question 3
Table 5
Interview question 3. Describe issues or events that might have helped you complete high school. Three of the five interviewees stated that they were not aware of a specific event that served as a catalyst for them to want to graduate. Daniel stated that they had a career day at his middle school and meeting an "actual engineer" was very impactful. George did not recall one specific moment but he recalled not wanting to be like some of his family members who did not graduate from high school when he was in elementary school.

Specific events that were catalysts for completion

Participant Responses	George	Steve	Daniel	Jason	Michael
No specific event		x		x	x
Event occurred in high school					
Event occurred in middle school			x		
Event occurred in elementary or earlier	x				

Respondents were asked if there were specific incentives or punishments given to them by family members, principals, or teachers as consequences for their actions. The responses to question four are provided in table six below.

Question 4
Table 6
Interview question 4. Describe all the tactics used by family members, principals, teachers, school counselors, coaches to help you complete high school.
- **Sub question: Did you have family members, school officials, or mentors use positive incentives to encourage you to complete high school and if so what were they?**
- **Did you have any family members, school officials, or mentors use negative sanctions to encourage you to complete high school?**

The five participants discussed at length the positive and negative incentives or consequences their mothers imposed and did not mention the positive and negative incentives or consequences anyone one else imposed. The men in this study recalled their mothers praising them, giving them hugs, money and gifts, and affection to show approval and to show disapproval the single parents would take items away, spank, and ground the young men, Grounding meant that the students were not allowed to go out with their friends and could only go to school and home.

Tactics for positive and negative behavior

Participant Responses	George	Steve	Daniel	Jason	Michael
Positive incentives					
Praises	x	x	x	x	x
physical affection (hugs and kisses)	x		x		x
Other signs of affection		x	x		
Money and gifts					

Negative consequences for actions

Items taken	x	x	x		x
spank	x	x	x	x	
grounding	x	x	x		x

Below are question 5 and table seven. The researcher asked the respondents to recall any emotions they felt as high school teenagers without two parents in the home.

Question 5
Table 7
Interview question 5. Please describe any frustrations you felt raised in a single parent household. Do you recall feeling upset, ashamed, or embarrassed by the fact that you were being raised in a single parent home?

Do you recall feeling upset about not having
your father in the home

Participant Responses	George	Steve	Daniel	Jason	Michael
Upset	x		x		
Indifferent					x
Not upset		x		x	

Below are question six and table eight. The purpose of the question was to ascertain if there were others in the home who graduated from high school.

Question 6
Table 8
Interview question 6. Do you have any brothers and sisters and if so, did they graduate or complete high school? The African American males in this study had siblings and their siblings completed high school as well.

Number of siblings in the home and completion

Participant Responses	George	Steve	Daniel	Jason	Michael
Brother		xx	x		x
Sister	xx		x	x	x
No. of Siblings complete high school	xx	xx	xx	x	xx

The researcher asked respondents if there were any individuals besides their mothers that they would state helped them complete high school. The respondents recalled that there were teachers, coaches, and others who helped them and the data regarding the participants' responses are below in table nine.

Question 7
Table 9

Interview question 7. Were there any outside influences that played a role in helping you complete high school? Was there someone you looked up to that helped you complete high school? All of the participants stated that there were individuals besides their family members that encouraged and influenced them to complete high school.

Individuals outside home that influenced participants to finish high school

Participant Responses	George	Steve	Daniel	Jason	Michael
Teacher	x	x	x	x	x
Coach					x
Other influences					

The five African American males were asked if an extended family member helped them and their single mother. In table 10, George, Steve, Daniel, Jason, and Michael are asked if uncles, aunts, grandparents, and cousins supported them when they were in high school.

Question 8
Table 10
Interview Question 8. Did you receive any support from uncles, aunts, grandparents, or cousins?
All of the participants stated that they had extended family support.

Extended family support

Participant Responses	George	Steve	Daniel	Jason	Michael
Uncle			x		
Aunt					
Grandparent	x	x		x	x
Cousin					

In question nine, the researcher asked the respondents to recall their attendance in high school and the respondents were asked if they recalled the primary reason why they missed school. The information from the interview is in table 11.

Question 9
Table 11
Interview Question 9. How was your attendance in school? On average, did you miss more or fewer than 3 days of school a month? What was the primary reason why you missed school?

Did you miss more than 3 days a month and reasons for missing school

Participant Responses	George	Steve	Daniel	Jason	Michael
Miss more than 3 days a month					
Reasons for missing school					

Illness	x	x	x	x
Skipping (missing school without permission)		x	x	
Doctor's appointment		x	x	
Other				

The researcher asked the African American males if they misbehaved in high school and the results of question 10 are in table 12.

Question 10
Table 12
Interview question 10. Did you have any behavioral problems in school and if so what was the misbehavior? Four of the five participants admitted to getting in trouble in school.

Trouble in school

Participant Responses	George	Steve	Daniel	Jason	Michael
Was disciplined in school	x	x	x	x	
Reasons for why student was disciplined					
Talking in class	x				
Skipping school or skipping class		x		x	
Physical altercation/fight			x	x	
Smoking/Drug possession/Use				x	

The interviewees were asked if their parents volunteered at their school, and if their parents joined any parent/teacher organizations.

Question 11.
Interview question 11. **Was your single parent active in your school? If your parent was active, what kinds of organizations or activities did your parent participate in and how did that affect you? If your parent was not active in school, how did that affect you?** All of the participants discussed how their mothers had to work and therefore were not involved in any parent organizations, but they were actively engaged in their son's education. They made it a point to call the school when needed, email teachers, and they came to parent/teacher conferences.

During the interviews, the five African American men were asked if they had all of their necessities met when they were in high school.

Question 12.
Interview question 12. Were all of your basic needs met as a child (food, clothing, shelter, and love). All of the respondents reported that they had all of their basic needs met.

In question 13, the researcher asked what advice the respondents would give African American men living in a single parent home. The data from question 13 is in table 13.

Question 13
Table 13
Interview question 13. What advice would you offer a young African American male from a single parent home that is in high school?

What advice would you offer

Participant Responses	George	Steve	Daniel	Jason	Michael
Stay in school	x			x	x
Stay determined	x	x	x	x	x
Use your resources available					x
Go to class and pay attention		x		x	

Question 14
Interview question 14. Would you like to add any comments? None of the respondents added anything related to the study or the previous interview questions but they did provide well wishes and they said thank you at the end of the study.

Data from the interview questions were compiled and are displayed in the Theme participation table. Table fourteen displays theme participation by respondent which was based on their answers to the interview questions.

Table 14. Theme participation

Theme participation	George	Steve	Daniel	Jason	Michael
A strong relationship with their mothers	x	x	x	x	x
Relationships are important	x	x	x	x	x
Mothers involvement in schools	x	x	x	x	x
Exposure to extracurricular activities and programs	x	x	x		x
Extended family support	x	x	x	x	x
Religion	x		x	x	
Self-determination	x	x	x	x	x

Seven Themes:

Strong relationship with their mothers

All five participants discussed that they had a strong relationship with their mothers. One participant mentioned that the relationship with his aunt was equally as important as the relationship he had with his mother. Four of the five participants mentioned that they want to be able to support their mothers financially. Four of the participants stated that they provide financially for their mothers and one of the participants stated he tries but his mother resists his help. All of the participants expressed their appreciation for their mothers' hard work, efforts and the sacrifices their mothers made to raise them and help them complete high school, and the love their mothers showed them. The participants pointed to the fact that their mothers worked extremely long hours, and went without new clothes so the kids could have the clothes they needed for school. During the interview, George recalled that his mother worked hard at a packaging company and served as the church secretary when he was a high school student. Steve's mother worked as a cashier for a locally owned grocery store until the business closed and then she got a job as a cashier for a large grocery store chain. Daniel reported that his mother completed an associate's degree and started working as a nurse at the local hospital. He was in middle school when she first started working as a nurse. Jason stated that his mother worked at a fast food restaurant much of his high school years and she has cleaned homes since he can remember. He recalled how tired she was and how she sometimes slept all Saturday. Michael's mother worked two jobs as well. She is employed at a daycare where she watches, feeds, and changes babies and she waits tables at a locally owned restaurant. Three of the five participants discussed having a relationship with their mother and never wanting to disappoint their mothers. The participants discussed the desire of not wanting to disappoint their mothers as a catalyst for them completing high school. One of the participants stated,

> My mother was so many things all wrapped into one person. She was my mother, father, teacher, preacher, lawyer and executioner. She didn't play! She taught me, loved me,

and we could talk about anything; she was during those times and still to this day is my heart. We made it through some dark, terrible times during those years, but, and whenever I was down she picked me up. No lie, my mom is my heart and there's nothing I wouldn't do for her.

Relationships are important

Another theme that appeared for the five participants in this study was that teacher/student relationships are important. The teacher/student relationships within the school helped to provide a sense of belonging, encouragement, inspiration, and motivation to be successful and complete high school. According to the participants in the study, the ability and willingness of school personnel to engage with students on a personal level influenced the participants' educational experiences and it aided them in completing high school. The relationships strongly affected the participants' academic achievement.

All of the participants in the study commented that there were teachers who cared about them not only as students, but as also people who had lives outside of the classroom. The participants claimed that their teachers spent time with them, not only to discuss their grades, but they also took time out to discuss issues that were outside of school. The issues that they discussed outside of school ranged from problems they had with girlfriends to issues with their parents. The personal relationships were essential to the participants being able to identify the norms and rules associated with being in high school. Three of the participants noted that their relationships with two teachers and one coach helped because they had adults who could advocate for them if they needed it. George mentioned that one of his teachers saw his schedule his junior year and she went to his guidance counselor and insisted on a schedule change so George could take her advanced placement English 11 course. George described the relationship with that same English teacher as one that was more like a mother/ son relationship and he stated,

This one teacher was like a mother. You could go to her for anything. She believed in all of us. She taught me to believe in myself and embrace it. I still see her from time to time, she asks me how I am doing, and we always talk about how I behaved in school. We usually laugh and talk for at least 15 minutes whenever we run into each other.

Steve defined his relationship with a former teacher as one in which the teacher began to take interest in him and she eventually began to respect and appreciate him as a person. He discussed how he was more than just a name and numbers in a grade book. For George and Steve it was important that the teacher took time to try to get to know and understand them when they were in high school. According to the participants, it was important that the teachers understood the participants had many dimensions, which included more than just being a student.

Other participants commented about how teachers encouraged them to make good grades. Daniel, who is currently an engineer, stated,

Teachers were always telling me to do my best and be the best student I could be and they were always pushing me and encouraging me. My (National Society of Black Engineers) NSBE teacher, I don't think I would have gone to college to study engineering and mass communications if it wasn't for my NSBE teacher. My NSBE teacher stayed pushing me and she talked to my mother all the time about scholarships and opportunities.

Respondents also noted that there were relationships that formed because teachers had older brothers or older sisters in their classes prior to having them. The relationship with the respondents' older siblings provided the teachers with an understanding of the respondents' family life. All of the respondents stated that having an adult in the school that they trusted was important and it aided them in completing high school. Two of the respondents mentioned that the teachers were like guides who helped them graduate from high school. The teachers were also advocates for the students and the support of the teachers helped the men through situations with other adults. Michael explained that there was an incident involving a substitute teacher. The substitute teacher wrote Michael a referral and told him to go to the office for being

disrespectful. The teacher spoke to the principal and convinced the principal to take it easy on Michael and that she would address the situation with him. Michael also had a great relationship with his varsity football coach. When the coach learned of the incident, he went to the principal and asked that the principal show leniency and the coach served as a character witness for Michael. The African American males mentioned that the teachers that they had built trust and relationships with would share with other teachers that they knew the African American males and that they were good kids. The two respondents noted in their interviews that the teachers would tell them that another teacher speaks highly of them. The participants in the study also noted that trust allowed them to open up about family issues. One of the participants noted that his older brother played multiple sports, was involved in various clubs, and was on academic teams. The teacher's relationship with the respondent's brother facilitated a degree of trust. Jason reported that his English teacher had a good relationship with his older sister and that was how he came to know and build a relationship with the English teacher. Jason's English teacher sharing that she saw a physician because of anxiety helped him to know that his teachers were real people with real problems and challenges like everyone else. Jason expressed that teachers sharing that they had challenges allowed him to see the teachers as being genuine.

Mothers involved in schools

The African American males' mothers were the ones who were encouraging, oversaw the completion of schoolwork and kept them on a path towards completing high school. Sometimes, the mothers served as advocates, and they were the ones who emphasized the importance of getting a good education. All of the participants in the study attributed their mothers being involved in schools as a contributing factor towards them completing high school. Being

involved in schools meant that the mothers at least emailed their students' teachers regarding

their grades, came to parent/teacher conferences, and came to or participated in PTA (Parent-

Teacher Association) meetings. The mothers also made sure that their sons had their basic

school supplies and the mothers were visible on the school site. Daniel's comments about his

mother being involved at the school were,

> My mother always made it a point to make sure my teachers knew who she was and it was embarrassing at times. She would come to the school for parent/teacher conferences or anytime she felt the need and she would insist that if the teachers ever had any problems call her and it would be addressed at home.

The participants expressed a belief that African American males completing high school started

at home with the parent. Daniel also noted that,

> In my eyes, it's not the teachers, or administrators, it starts with the parents. It starts at home. My mother taught me from an early age the importance of getting my education. I think parents should give their children as much attention as they need when it comes to academics and education. Communicating with the teacher and asking how my child is doing in your class would go a long way. It starts with the parents.

Exposure to extracurricular activities and programs

The mothers also helped their sons engage with the community by creating opportunities

for their sons to become involved in activities, such as after-school programs, sports, and

summer school. George and Daniel's mothers enrolled them in the local Boys and Girls Club.

The men went to the Boys and Girls club as high school students when they did not go to sports

practices or after school remediation. Daniel also attended the Boys and Girls Club during the

summer. Four of the five men agreed that they had opportunities to be in different events and

take part in different activities ranging from participating in sports to attending camps at various

colleges over the summer. One respondent even mentioned that he was given an opportunity to

attend a musical and operas. Steve noted that,

My family made sure that I never missed an experience. I've been in the band; I wasn't so good. I truly found my knack, when I discovered I could draw, and I did well. Twice I went to Harvard and I once went to Texas to compete against different debate teams from around the country. I also had the experience of playing in AAU tournaments throughout the country, and I had aunts, uncles, and cousins that came together to provide financial support.

Extended family support

All of the respondents articulated that having extended family was important. One participant remembered staying with grandparents when his mother was trying to escape from an abusive boyfriend. One participant recalled that his older sister provided day care when his mother needed it. Two of the participants stated that they had aunts who were there for them whenever they needed it. The extended family support was needed because many of the single mothers in this study had to work long hours and could not always get off work to be there for their sons. The extended family would fill the void left because the mothers had to work long hours.

Religion

The African American males, through their responses to the interview questions indicated that religion and spirituality were important. All five participants identified themselves as Christians and three out of five openly discussed their spirituality. They expressed that God was essential in helping them to complete high school and is essential in their lives still. Michael, one of the participants in the study jokingly noted,

Growing up, it seemed like we were always at church. If the doors were open, we were there. We went to Sunday school, regular church on Sunday, sometimes we had second service on Sunday, youth choir rehearsal Monday evenings, bible study on Wednesdays, and anytime we had a revival we were there. My mother allowed us to decide if we went to church when we got older but not really, because she would guilt trip us or get mad if we did not go.

Self Determination and motivation

All of the participants discussed during the interviews ways in which they have been able to motivate themselves to complete schoolwork and stay on track to complete high school. The

participants discussed that they were motivated and ambitious and the motivation and ambition coupled with various other factors helped them to complete high school. Many of the participants noted that they knew that if they did not work hard to complete high school, they would have few opportunities in the future. Michael spoke about this sense of not having regrets:

> If you think about your life, like how much time you have and you get yourself into trouble then you aren't going to be successful. I did not want to come to school some days, but I was determined that I would graduate and I would have a better life. To be satisfied in the end of your life, I guess you could go through like a lot of time just working hard and doing different things. In the end, you will feel satisfied and have no regrets.

George discussed people in his family that did not make the best decisions and today they are "stuck with whatever job they can get." The participants believed that education was an opportunity and they did not want to miss the opportunity. All five participants mentioned that they did not want to contribute to the negative statistics and stereotypes with which society has labeled African American males. Two respondents mentioned being motivated to prove people wrong who scoffed or did not believe they could be successful.

Summary

The research question used to guide this study was, What perceived factors aided African American males from single-parent homes in completing high school and what were the perceived roles of a) their mother, b) relatives, c) friends, d) school personnel (teachers, counselors, and administrators), e) community organizations (places of worship, afterschool programs, and mentorship organizations). The participants' experiences showed that relationships were the key factor that contributed to the African American males from single-parent homes completing high school. From the research question, seven themes emerged in the analysis of the findings: (a) a strong relationship with their mothers, (b) relationships are

important, (c) mothers involvement in schools, (d) exposure to extracurricular activities and programs, (e) extended family support, (f) religion, (g) self-determination.

According to the participants in the study the relationships the participants had with their mothers, family members, and school personnel, were major factors aiding them towards completing high school. All of the African American males in this study believed they successfully completed high school because they had ambition, had a goal of "doing something with their life", and they believed that they were hard workers.

Within Chapter IV was the research question, and a review of the purpose of the study. In addition, the process used to analyze the collected data was presented. The findings were identified, analyzed, and seven themes emerged from the study. In Chapter V, the implications for policies, practices, as well as recommendations for further research will be discussed.

Chapter V:

Findings, Implications, and Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this narrative qualitative study was to identify the perceived factors that helped African American males raised in single parent homes complete high school by using the voices of African American males as a source of data. Identifying the factors that contributed to the completion of high school for the African American males in this study was a unique experience. Closely aligned with the purpose of this study was the idea that researching the perceived factors that contribute to the academic success of African American male students who come from single-parent households will provide insight. The perceived factors might be useful and they could be utilized by schools, communities, and families to help African American males from single-parent homes achieve high school completion. The primary research question for this study was what perceived factors aided African American males from single-parent homes in completing high school and what were the perceived roles of a) their mother, b) relatives, c) friends, d) school personnel (teachers, counselors, and administrators), and e) community organizations (places of worship, afterschool programs, and mentorship organizations).

For this study, the researcher conducted five one-on-one semistructured interviews. Data analysis was performed free hand by using a color-coded process for identifying words that appeared in the participants' statements. Implementation of a color-coded process was used to organize themes. Themes were identified using an inductive method of analysis.

Overview of Findings

Finding one

All five African American males identified their single parent as an important factor in them completing high school. All of the participants discussed never wanting to disappoint their mothers as a catalyst for them completing high school. All of the participants expressed appreciation for their mothers' hard work, the sacrifices their mothers made to raise them, the encouragement they received from their mothers to complete high school, and the love they got from their mothers. When Jason was asked, "Who would you describe as being the most impactful on you completing high school and why", he replied,

> My mother was so many things all wrapped into one person. She was my mother, father, teacher, preacher, lawyer and executioner. She didn't play! She taught me, loved me, and we could talk about anything; she was during those times and still to this day is my heart. We made it through some dark, terrible times during those years, but, and whenever I was down she picked me up. No lie, my mom is my heart and there's nothing I wouldn't do for her.

Moon and Singh (2015) provide further support. Moon and Singh identified the important role the single parent plays supporting the African American males' completion of high school. From their phenomenological study, they determined that the participants who had a parent encouraging them to make good grades and graduate from high school mattered and did better than participants from single parent homes who did not have a parent encouraging them to make good grades and graduate from high school. Randolph (2018) researched the perceptions of African American males from single parent homes and concluded that a supportive parent was an essential element needed to encourage the African American males in his study to complete high school. Wilson et al. (2016) in *Successful Black Men from Absent-Father Homes and Their Resilient Mothers* observed the same phenomena. All of the African American male participants lived in a single parent home and they all attributed their success to having a strong relationship with their mothers.

Finding two

  The relationships that the men in the study had with their teachers and other school personnel were vital in helping them complete high school. All of the participants in the study claimed that the willingness of teachers and coaches to make relationships with the African American men helped them complete high school. All of the participants in the study commented that there were teachers who cared about them not only as students, but as also people who had lives outside of the classroom. The participants claimed that their teachers spent time with them, not only to discuss their grades, but they also took time out to discuss issues that were outside of school. George, one of the participants in the study, shared an example of how a relationship with a teacher supported him. George stated,

> This one teacher was like a mother. You could go to her for anything. She believed in all of us. She taught me to believe in myself and embrace it. I still see her from time to time, she asks me how I am doing, and we always talk about how I behaved in school. We usually laugh and talk for at least 15 minutes whenever we run into each other.

Other participants commented about how teachers pushed them toward academic excellence. Daniel, who is currently an engineer, stated,

> Teachers were always telling me to do my best and be the best student I could be and they were always pushing me and encouraging me. My (National Society of Black Engineers) NSBE teacher, I don't think I would have gone to college to study engineering and mass communications if it wasn't for my NSBE teacher. My NSBE teacher stayed pushing me and she talked to my mother all the time about scholarships and opportunities.

Williams and Bryan (2013) supported the notion that teacher/student relationships were important. The researchers summarized that supportive school-based relationships were important and participants in their study characterized them as warm, open, understanding and essential to their overall success. All of the participants in their study claimed that an adult at their school cared about them and contributed to their academic engagement and performance. All of the participants

in the Williams and Bryan (2013) study claimed that at least one adult in their school contributed to their success through mentorship, recognizing the students' strengths, and by holding high expectations for the students. Miller et al. (2014) studied the perspectives of African American males who completed high school and students who did not complete high school and all of the men who completed high school had a teacher who they claimed inspired and motivated them to do well in school.

Finding three

All of the participants in the study attributed completing high school to having self-determination. The participants believed they would have fewer opportunities in the future if they did not work hard to complete high school. According to the men in this study, the idea of not having the opportunities needed to be successful made the participants determined to complete high school. The African American males in this study pointed to the fact that they knew individuals who had not graduated or who were not successful and they wanted to do better. The participants used the people around them they knew who had dropped out of school or were struggling financially to stay determined. Mentioned in the interviews was a notion that participants did not want to be like so many others and that they did not want to contribute to society's negative view of young Black men. During the interviews, the participants discussed that they were determined to be someone that they and their family could be proud of as opposed to being someone that contributes to the negative stereotypes African American males are often characterized as by the media.

Moon and Singh (2015) identified the concept of self-determination in their work addressing African American males from single-parent homes. The researchers documented that the participants in their study had academic challenges, and they would not get the grades that they

wanted but they always tried to stay positive. The participants stated that they struggled but they were determined and that they would put in more effort if they were not successful on an assessment.

Implications

Each implication is associated with a specific finding. The implications for this study are as follows:

Implication One

Administrators, teachers, and other school personnel should consider incorporating activities to strengthen the parent-son relationships during parent/teacher conferences, or counseling sessions (Cartwright & Henriksen, 2012). According to the participants in the study, the relationship between single mother and son is vital to the African American males completing high school. School administrators and teachers could create activities that are useful for single parents and their African American sons. The administrators and teachers could create activities for mothers and sons, and the school could incorporate activities specifically for the single parents. Assistance for the single parents might include activities that help them deal with the stress of being a single parent, or the school could provide activities that could support single parents with the information they need to help their students succeed in high school (Wilson, 2015).

Implication two

Administrators, teachers, and other school personnel should establish mentorship programs and serve as mentors. From the perspectives of the African American male participants, the relationships that they had with teachers, and school personnel were important and they aided them towards completing high school. Moon and Singh (2015) substantiate the

need for mentorships with school personnel as mentors because they articulate that the opportunity would foster better academic achievement for the African American male students because the mentors might have the knowledge, and skills needed to help the students. If the mentors were school personnel, they would also know whom the students could get to help them with their classes if they were not able to assist.

Implication three

 Administrators, teachers, and other school personnel should have African American male alumnae from the school community speak to the student body about their determination and school personnel should consider organizing internships for the African American males from single parent homes. All of the participants in the study attributed completing high school to having self-determination**.** Moon and Singh (2015) advocated for the use of internships and guest speakers as a way to create opportunities for African American males from single parent homes.

Discussion

 Family support systems and a strong, positive relationship between the African American males and their mothers are important factors related to the participants completing high school in this study. Most of the men in this study shared information about their families in the beginning of the interviews and they stated that there were home factors that positively contributed to their academic success and ultimately contributed to them completing high school. Four of the five participants stated that their mothers were prominent people in their lives when it came to their education and the one participant noted that his aunt served in a dominant role only because his mother had to work long hours and sometimes could not make it to the school. He

stated that he knew his education was important and his mother would follow-up with the aunt regarding the school and then have conversations with him regarding grades.

The mothers' engagement was fundamental to the students' success. The mothers in this inquiry were said to have valued, and encouraged their sons to work hard in school. The study participants also claimed that the mothers set high expectations, which included conversations about going to college. One participant mentioned that his mother was involved in school and he really did not want his mother to get too involved. The mother told her son that she would come to the school and embarrass him if she had to, and on one occasion, she came to his middle school and embarrassed him in front of some classmates because he was talking in class. The mothers would email teachers and staff, but they would also take time to come to the school to check in on their students. The participants in this study expressed that their mothers' involvement in their education and specifically the fact that the mothers would communicate with the school personnel was a contributing factor in their ability to complete high school.

According to the participants in this study, a healthy sense of self-determination and control over their lives was important. The African American males in this study pointed out that self-determination, and self-discipline were necessary. Their determination was rooted in the idea that they wanted to "do something" with their lives that mattered. Additionally, the participants shared that they did not have the self-determination when they were younger but their mothers helped to encourage them and they became more determined as they became older.

The participants asserted the belief that being responsible meant that you take your education seriously; handle business in and out of school, and take ownership for your actions. The men were encouraged to be responsible and their mothers told them that they would take responsibility for their lives, for the lives of their children, and that they would provide for their

families.   In individual interviews, two participants stated, "A man takes responsibility for his actions." All of the African American males in this study noted that conversations about being a responsible man was common in their household when they were growing up.

Mentioned throughout the interviews was the fact that the African American males had positive relationships with teachers and school personnel. Teachers took the initiative to create these relationships. The men in this study noted that a teacher or school employee took an interest in them and began to build a rapport with them and the adult in the relationship would get to know the men on a personal level and encourage them to stay out of trouble and do well in school. Two of the men in this study noted that the adults in the school sometimes served as guides helping them to identify the norms, procedures, and rules of high school. George received advice from his English teacher that he should be on time for class and ask questions if he did not understand the teacher's instruction. The teachers would share their experiences with other teachers and the students would benefit from the positive references with the next year's teachers. Daniel mentioned that during his senior year his Algebra II teacher told him he had heard about him and that he had heard good things. He was welcomed to the class and he ended up passing the class with an A. These African American males maintained relationships with encouraging teachers who listened to them and helped them while they were in high school. There was at least one teacher or coach in their lives who supported them and held them accountable.

The teachers took special interest in the young men and they helped them with schoolwork or talked to the students before, during, and after school. The participants were welcome to meet with the teachers and coaches even after they completed their classes. One respondent said that he ate lunch with a particular teacher every day because the teacher created

a safe space for the student. The teachers and coaches were identified as being both Black and White. According to the participants the fact that the teachers cared and showed concern not only provided a healthy learning environment but it also encouraged students to participate and do their best in the teachers' classes. Steele and Cohen-Vargas (2013) conducted research that supports the idea that positive learning environments are welcoming, supportive, and important in helping students complete high school.

Recommendation for future research

Studies about the issues Black female students face is growing and studies that include the voices of Black female high school students from single parent homes who completed high school will provide insight into their successes and challenges. Research with Black female students may add to the narrative of educational experiences involving Black students and it may create a situation where a comparative analysis into challenges and successes for Black students could occur. Another recommendation for future research might include interviewing the mother or father of African American males who complete high school.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify the perceived factors that helped African American males raised in single parent homes complete high school. Face to face, semi-structured interviews of African American males who grew up in single parent homes and completed high school were conducted. The interviews provided detailed accounts of the school experiences of the five African American males. The themes identified in the study provided a greater understanding of how African American males from a purposive sample described the influences of various people in their lives on them completing high school. The themes

illustrated the importance that the African American males' mothers, teachers, and determination played in the ability of the men in the study to complete high school.

The findings from this study demonstrate the importance of African American male voices as it relates to high school completion. These voices helped identify factors that contributed to their success and challenges in high school completion. Qualitative data regarding African American males is extensive, but the voices of the men in this study provide another dimension to the conversation regarding high school completion. The voices of the men in this study extend the research available regarding the significance of family relationships, teacher-student relationships, and determination towards academic achievement.

The results from this study imply that parents, teachers, and schools play a pivotal role in aiding the completion of high school for African American males. Positive relationships between the males, their parents, and teachers are essential if we are to support higher percentages of African American males completing high school. If teachers and school personnel are to have and maintain positive relationships with African American males, the skills needed for educators must include sensitivity and the practice of culturally responsive instruction. If schools emphasize the use of building of teacher/student relationships, support of parent/son relationships, it could lead to an increase in the number of African American males completing high school.

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Appendix A

Questions for African American Males, which came from the literature review

1. Who would you describe as being most impactful on you completing high school? Why?

2. Academically, would you say you made poor, good, or great grades when you were in high school?

3. Describe issues or events that you believe helped you complete high school?

4. Describe all the tactics used by family members, principals, teachers, school counselors, coaches to help you complete high school.

    -   Sub question: Did you have family members, school officials, or mentors use positive incentives to encourage you to complete high school and if so what were they.
    -   Did you have any family members, school officials, or mentors use negative sanctions to encourage you to complete high school?

5. Please describe any frustrations you felt being raised in a single-parent household.

    -   Do you recall feeling upset, ashamed, or embarrassed by the fact that you were being raised in a single parent household when a two-parent household was raising others? If so what was the situation that led you to feel frustrated?

6. Do you have any brothers and sisters and if so, did they graduate or complete high school?

7. Were there any outside influences that played a role in helping you complete high school?

    -   Was there someone you looked up to that helped you complete high school?

8. Did you receive any support from uncles, aunts, grandparents, or cousins? What effect did they have on your completing high school?

9. How was your attendance in school?

    • On average, would you say you missed more or fewer than three days of school a month?

    • What would you say was your primary reason for missing school when you were in high school?

10. Did you have any behavioral problems in school? If so, how often? If you didn't get into trouble in school, why do you suppose you never got into trouble in school?

11. Was your single parent active in your school?

    • If your parent was active, what kinds of organizations or activities did your parent participate in and how did that affect you?

    • If your parent was not active in school, how did that affect you?

12. Were all your basic needs met as a child (food, clothing, shelter, love)?

13. What advice would you offer a young African American male from a single-parent home that is in high school?

14. Would you like to add any comments?

Appendix B Informed Consent Form
1. KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS AND THIS STUDY

Study title: African American Males' Perceptions of Factors Aiding their Completion of High School: A population from Single-Parent Homes.

Principal Investigator: [M. David Alexander, Ed.D, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University]
Co-Investigator(s): [Ajamu Dixon, M.Ed, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University doctoral candidate]
Faculty Advisor: [M. David Alexander, Ed.D, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University]

1.1 Key Information Things
you should know:
- If you choose to participate, you will be asked to answer questions in an interview, at a time of your choosing, using "zoom". This will take approximately an hour and a half.
- Risks or discomforts from this research are minimal but participation in this research may require an hour and a half of your time
- There are no direct benefits for your participation.

Taking part in this research project is voluntary. You do not have to participate and you can stop at any time. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.
2. PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY
The purpose of this study is to learn of the lived experiences of African American males from single parent homes who graduated or completed high school in four years from Martinsville High School. The experiences of African American males who lived in single parent homes who completed or graduated high school are not widely documented in academic literature.
3. WHO CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY
3.1 Who can take part in this study? African American adult males who completed or graduated from Martinsville High School that were raised in a single-parent home.

4. INFORMATION ABOUT STUDY PARTICIPATION 4.1
What will happen to me in this study?
Participants in this study will receive a phone call regarding the study. Interested participants will receive an informed consent form. After 24 hours, participants will be asked if they have any questions regarding the purpose of the study, or the informed consent form. Participants will be asked research questions and the interviews will take place using Zoom:
- The location where research activities/procedures will take place will be through

"zoom". For the purpose of anonymity, cameras will not be used throughout the interview. The interviewer's location will be at Martinsville High School and the interviewee will be able to pick a location suitable to him.

- There will be one research interaction, and the participant will be asked research questions throughout the interview.
- The data collection procedures will be interviews.

5. INFORMATION ABOUT STUDY RISKS AND BENEFITS

5.1 What risks will I face by taking part in the study? What will the researchers do to protect me against these risks?

The known risk associated with taking part in the study is a breach of confidentiality. A breach of confidentiality is a potential risk in all research that collects or maintains personally identifiable information and it is the only foreseeable risk in this study. The researcher will maintain records on a USB drive that will only be accessible to the principal investigator, Dr. David Alexander, and Martinsville City Public Schools Superintendent, Dr. Zebedee Talley   The records of the interviews will be stored in a secure Google Drive.

Participants will be informed that they do not have to answer any questions they do not want to answer.

5.1.1 What happens if I get hurt, become sick, or have other problems because of this research?

The researchers have taken steps to minimize the risks of this study. Please tell the researchers if you have any injuries or problems related to your participation in the study. By signing this form, you do not give up your right to seek payment if you are harmed because of being in this study.

5.2 How could I benefit if I take part in this study? How could others benefit?   You may not receive any personal benefits from being in this study. However, others may benefit from the knowledge gained from this study.

6. ENDING THE STUDY

6.1 If I want to stop participating in the study, what should I do?

You are free to leave the study at any time. If you leave the study before it is finished, there will be no penalty to you.

7. FINANCIAL INFORMATION

7.1 Will I be paid or given anything for taking part in this study? You will not receive compensation for your participation in the study.

8. PROTECTING AND SHARING RESEARCH INFORMATION

8.1 How will the researchers protect my information? The researcher will maintain records in a protected Google drive that will be accessible to the principal investigator, Dr. David Alexander, and Martinsville City Public Schools Superintendent, Dr. Zebedee Talley.

"We will not disclose your information to anyone. The only individuals with your information will be the principal investigator and co-investigator of this study.

8.2 Who will have access to my research records?
No one other than the principal investigator and co-investigators will have access to the research records.

8.3 What will happen to the information collected in this study?
The researchers will keep the information collected about you during the research for recordkeeping purposes. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be stored securely and separately from the research information, we collected from you. The data will be stored in a secure Virginia Tech Google Drive.

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8.4 Will my information be used for future research or shared with others?

Your data will be stored but it will not be shared for future research.

9. CONTACT INFORMATION Whom can I contact about this study?

     Principal Investigator: M. David Alexander
     Email: mdavid@vt.edu
     Phone: 540-231-9723

     Co-investigator/ Study Coordinator: Ajamu Dixon
     Email:ajamu@vt.edu
     Phone: 276-358-0339

10. YOUR CONSENT

Consent/Assent to Participate in the Research Study
By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. I/We will give you a copy of this document for your records and I/we will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information in Section 9 provided above.

I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

Print Legal Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date of Signature (mm/dd/yy): _____

11. OPTIONAL CONSENT

Consent to use audio recordings for purposes of this research
This study involves audio recordings. If you do not agree to be /audio recorded, you can still take part in the study.

_____ Yes, I agree to be audio recorded.

_____ No, I do not agree to be audio recorded.

Print Legal Name: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix C

Demographic Survey Questions

1. How old are you?

2. Who lived in your home while you were in high school?

3. What was the highest level of education for the single parent in your home?

4. Did you have any siblings that lived in your home, and if so did they graduate or complete high school?

5. What year were you in high school?

6. What year did you graduate/complete high school?

7. Do you have any post-secondary education?