The Voices of Single-Headed Household African American Mothers Concerning the High School Completion of Their Daughters

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THE VOICES OF SINGLE-HEADED HOUSEHOLD AFRICAN AMERICAN MOTHERS CONCERNING THE HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION OF THEIR DAUGHTERS

by

Lametria A. Johnson-Eaddy

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology at Western Michigan University, April 2020.

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THE VOICES OF SINGLE-HEADED HOUSEHOLD AFRICAN AMERICAN MOTHERS CONCERNING THE HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION OF THEIR DAUGHTERS

Lametria A. Johnson-Eaddy, Ph.D.
Western Michigan University, 2020

African American female students in urban schools are not graduating from high school at the same rate as females of other ethnic groups (Bucknor, 2015; Martin & Halperin, 2006; Stillwell & Sable, 2013). This study sought to investigate the voices and lived experiences of single-headed households of African American mothers whose daughters graduated from high school within the traditional four-year schedule. Through the voices and lived-experiences of these African American mothers, this study sought to capture the impact certain internal and external support systems from within both the home and school environments had on their daughters’ persistence in graduating from high school within the traditional four-year time period.

This phenomenological study involved 13 African American mothers whose daughters attended two urban Midwestern high schools. Participating mothers had daughters who were 17 years of age, or older, and had graduated from high school, or were eligible to graduate from high school within a four-year time period.

In conducting this qualitative study, an interview protocol was developed to capture the reflections and lived experiences of the 13 participants. Additionally, a demographic questionnaire and an in-depth face-to-face interview were also conducted with willing participants. Data were compiled and analyzed into a manageable system for synthesis and
analysis by using a qualitative analysis procedure. The data generated allowed this investigator to organize the data into notes, key documents, tabular materials, narratives, and audio files (Baxter & Jack, 2008). These data files enabled the investigator to answer the research questions posed in this study.

The findings in this study suggested that single African American mothers utilized various strategies that helped to support their daughters’ timely graduation from high school. These strategies included such activities as (a) recognizing the challenges of raising daughters as a single parent; (b) creating an environment of balance, (c) keeping daughters safe from predators, (d) minimizing, to the extent possible, negative influences from peer pressure, (e) helping daughters with developing a sense of “self-worth,” (f) not allowing mothers’ jobs to affect their relationship; (g) working not to allow fathers’ absence to affect daughters’ self-esteem.

The study concludes by offering recommendations to individuals who wish to pursue further research in this area.
I want to first give honor to God, who is the head of my life. My educational journey would never have been completed without His spiritual guidance, grace, mercy, favor, endless prayers, and blessings. To my mother and father, Marilyn Renee’ and Samuel James Woodhouse, I thank and love you for always believing in me and loving me despite the number of journeys that I have taken you on. You were always supportive and the wind beneath my wings. Mother, you always encouraged me to want more out of life and strive for greatness. I want to thank my grandparents Willie Mae Johnson and the late, great Raymond Johnson. Your values and expectations for getting an education was instilled in me as a child and remain with me today. A huge thank you goes out to my aunts Jean, Lois, Barbara, Shirley, Tina, and my family members who have always kept me lifted and grounded.

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To my spiritual sisters, Dr. Breshawn Nicole Harris and Lashawn Clemons, thank you for listening to my struggles and never once judging. Thank you for your prayers and support in every way from dinners at my favorite spot in Phoenix to late-night phone calls and prayer hotlines from New York. You truly demonstrated you are my sisters in Christ. I want to thank my church families S. 17th Street and Southeast Churches of Christ. Your fervent prayers will never be forgotten.
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I want to thank three of my all-star teachers. My fourth-grade teacher at Emerson Elementary School, Mrs. Richardson. She told me I would one day write great things to inspire the world. Thank you for your vision. Next, I want to thank my Central Junior High School English Language Arts teacher, Beatrice McAfee. You saw the best in me and told me how I was smart and talented. I always loved how you would take another classmate and I out on Saturday afternoons and make us feel special and blessed to have you as an educator. Last, I want to thank my high school Exploratory Writing teacher, Sharon “Mama” Floyd. Thank you for never allowing me to deliver mediocre writing pieces. You always expected the best from me and nothing less.

The work I have completed was not done alone. I want to acknowledge my editors and transcriber for their commitment to meeting deadlines and steadfast support. Lastly, I am grateful to the African American mothers who shared their stories with me. My goal was to bring your world to life and give it a space so others could hear your voices. The community in which you live and the daughters you raised have become stronger and greater because of your courage and perseverance. Thank you!

*Always... “Have a belief in yourself that is bigger than anyone’s disbelief.”* – August Wilson

Lametria A. Johnson-Eaddy
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In conversations among African American women, the names of extraordinary historical figures such as Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, and Angela Davis often surface. These women graced the world with noteworthy activism and leadership, and influenced the lives of many; however, unsung heroines also have great influence in the lives of women. My mother, Marilyn R. Johnson Woodhouse, for example, was an education professional who shared numerous reports throughout my childhood about the alarming dropout rates of African American girls and boys reared in single-headed households. These stories had a profound influence on me at an early age and gave me the determination needed to become a successful woman by acquiring a college education. In short, the relationships I had with my mother and other women, such as Willie Mae Johnson, Beatrice McAfee, and Sharon Floyd, had a direct impact on my sense of value and how I perceived success.

Research on student achievement and the impact of familial relationships in African American families are primarily related to African American males. There has been a paucity of research on the impact of females raised in households headed by single African American women and their success in attending large urban high schools. Furthermore, few studies include African American female analyses, comparisons, or the voices of African American mothers from single-headed households or their African American daughters in their research. Much of the research has focused on male children and adolescents and has neglected the experience of females in these groups (Battle & Coates, 2004; Collins, 1993; Dickerson, 1995; Frazier, 1949; Grant 1997). My study addressed this gap in the literature by investigating the lived experiences of single African American mothers. I described what these mothers did to help ensure their
daughters’ graduation from high school in the typical four years while residing in an urban community.

**Background of the Study**

Out of over 40 million African Americans in the United States, 23.5 million are women, representing 52% of the African American population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013, 2019). The data from this U.S. Bureau of the Census noted that 73.7 million children younger than 18 years of age lived in the United States, of which 25.8 million lived with one parent (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2013). In this study, the definition of a one-parent family is any child living with one of their unwed parents.

The United States of America is referred to as “the land of opportunity.” In 1931, James Truslow Adams described the American Dream by stating, “…life should be richer and fuller for everyone and opportunity remain open to all…” (The Epic America, 1931, p. 308). This American opportunity becomes increasingly difficult for single, unwed, African American mothers raising daughters to become successful in school, but it is not impossible.

In single-parent families, many children have less parental time, intimacy, and valuable connections, which can affect them well into adulthood (Jones, 2006). Another concern that plagues one-parent households is parenting styles concerning gender differences associated with achievement in African American girls as opposed to African American boys. Cultural beliefs tend to influence parents’ attitudes and expectations about childrearing (Harris, 1999). In fact, Harris (1999) found evidence that suggests parental attitudes and expectations between African American mothers and their children affect their development in relationship to achievement levels. Parents who have authoritative parenting practices, that is, having parenting styles that demonstrate affectionate, involved, controlled, and consistent relationships, experience positive
adolescent and academic performances from their children (Dishion & McMahon, 1998). For example, in a study conducted by Merten and Henry (2011), African American female adolescents in single-parent, female-headed homes residing with their mothers experienced greater success than their White and Hispanic counterparts. The study revealed single African American mothers provided flexibility, support, spirituality, and demonstrated a strong mothering presence, resulting in African American female adolescents developing healthy relationships and promoting personal success.

Additionally, Jones (2006) conducted a qualitative study that examined the effect of women, 18 and over, raised in families headed by single mothers. The specifics of the study focused on interpersonal relationships, support systems, and family perceptions. Jones estimated that 52% of African American children were living in single-parent homes. Single parenthood has been associated with greater behavior problems and negative behavioral outcomes. Accordingly, Jones suggested that by investigating single-parent female-headed households, the results will greatly enhance the existing body of knowledge of African American female students, the role of home, and the role of school on influencing student achievement (Jones, 2006, pp. 2-3).

Jones’ (2006) research revealed that many of the women in the study were adversely affected in their interpersonal relationships. Reflected was a vast majority of the women experienced a sense of loss and incompleteness as a result of their personal experiences as an African American mother raising children in a single-headed household. Additionally, the study concluded there is a need for further research on the effects of parenting decisions as a result of being raised in single-parent households, the effects of father-daughter relationships, and the effects of absent fathers and women’s ability to establish trusting relationships with men.
Moreover, other studies have focused on interpersonal relationships, support systems, and family perceptions from the lens of single mothers (Battle & Coates, 2004; Beckert, Strom, Daree, & Weed, 2008; Jones, 2006).

Finally, Xia (2009) suggested that several factors that significantly contribute to student achievement for African Americans are associated with parental expectations and beliefs, as well as the presence of disciplinary practices and parental involvement. Thus, factors experienced in rearing African American female adolescents are likely to have an important impact on student achievement and academic outcomes. Unfortunately, there is limited research exploring these factors and documenting best practices for academically successful African American female students raised by African American mothers in single-headed households (Battle & Coates, 2004; Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997; Slaughter & Epps, 1987).

**Statement of the Problem**

There is limited research exploring factors contributing to the success of African American girls raised by single African American mothers. The question to which this study addresses, namely, is this: What expectations and beliefs do African American mothers hold for their daughters’ persistence to complete high school in the suggested four-year time period? Additional questions are embedded in this overarching question such as (a) what goals and expectations did mothers have for their daughters regarding the completion of high school, (b) how do African American mothers describe their parenting style that supported their daughters in high school, (c) how do African American mothers describe their involvement in their daughters’ high school experience, and (d) describe any school or community programs African American mothers participated in that supported their daughters’ education and social development while completing high school? Understanding
answers to these questions from the lived experiences of single African American mothers can help to develop a greater awareness of African American mothers’ expectations and beliefs, and may provide additional solutions to schools about how they can better support the needs of these mothers in their daughters’ educational process.

There is growing speculation about the relative influence of being raised by mothers without the presence of a father in the home for African American children (Collins, 1993; Dickerson, 1995; McAdoo, 1988). Over the years, data have shown that every year, millions of biological fathers, irrespective of race, are absent from their children’s households (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2007).

Father absences have declined little, if any, over the past five decades in the United States. Between 1960 and 2014, the number of children living in single-parent households equates to 17.4 million children who are currently living without their biological father present in their homes (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Moreover, children living in female-headed homes with no spouse present had a poverty rate of 47%, which is four times the rate for children living in married-couple families (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2012).

**Practical Problem**

Serious concerns exist in many school districts across the United States, especially in urban school districts, relative to the achievement gap between African American and majority students. This subgroup of African American female students that came from single-headed, maternally-dominated households, and who graduated from high school within the expected four years for completion, in particular, is an area where additional research is needed. The achievement gap continues to grow for students, specifically for African American students as they enter high school (Cooper & Jordan, 2003; Taylor & Graham, 2007). For this reason,
Hayes (2011) identified means to address “student achievement and improving school environments in urban communities by increasing the focus on parental involvement, or home to school communication” (p. 154).

**Studies Addressing the Problem**

In 2003, high school completion percentages for females, by their ethnic background, included 88.7% for Hispanic students, 77.6% for African American students, and 94.6% for White students (Seastrom, Hoffman, Chapman, & Stillwell, 2006). During the 2015-2016 school years, the National Center for Education Statistics revealed the average freshman graduation rate by gender/ethnicity showed African American female graduates finished high school at 95.5%, Hispanics at 91.3%, White females at 95.1%, and 96.8% for Asians, respectively. These data demonstrate that there was a slight increase in the graduation rates for all ethnic groups over the past 10 years (Greene & Forster, 2003; McFarland, Cui, Rathbun & Holmes, 2018; Stetser & Stillwell, 2014).

African American female students in urban schools are not graduating at the same rate as females of other ethnic groups (Martin & Halperin, 2006; Stillwell & Sable, 2013). Disturbingly, many African American female students do not fully understand the importance of education and the debilitating effects an inadequate education has on unhealthy relationships, drug use, and a person’s self-esteem (Pearlstein, 2011; Popenoe, 2011).

Yet, significant proportions of African American female students raised in single female-headed households graduate from high school. These students have internal and external support systems at home and in school that aid in their educational attainment, including parental expectations and beliefs, parental involvement, extra-curricular activities, and school support personnel (Epstein, 2002; Floyd, 1996). Nevertheless, in spite of “significant gains in
educational achievement and attainment, African American female students still lag behind their White counterparts at all levels of education” (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012, p. 199).

**Deficiency Statement**

There has been a paucity of research investigating the success of African American females reared in homes headed by single mothers in urban high schools (Hrabowski, Maton, Greene, & Greif, 2002; Murry, Bynum, Brody, Willert, & Stephens, 2001; Stringer, 2009; Walsh, 2002). Despite the amount of research conducted on African American single-parent families, the emphasis has been concerned primarily with African American males while minimizing the involvement of African American females and their academic achievement in school (Everet, Marks, & Clarke-Mitchell, 2016).

Further research is needed on the expectations of African American mothers and the expectations and beliefs they hold for their daughters regarding completing high school, the school curriculum, extracurricular activities they participated in, post-secondary education goals, personal and professional development experienced in school, and school leaders (Gantt & Greif, 2009; Robinson & Werblow, 2012; Wilson, Henriksen, Bustamante, & Irby, 2016).

This study enhances the existing body of knowledge concerning African American mothers who reared their daughters in a single-headed household. Knowledge gained from this study can help inform mothers of single-headed homes rearing daughters about how to become better prepared to improve opportunities for their daughters in high school and the post-secondary arenas if they choose. Equally important is the possibility this study has in adding to the existing body of literature. Findings from this research can lead to recommendations to schools, and school staff can play in supporting the educational needs of female students, particularly African American students who come from single-headed households.
Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate the lived experiences of single African American mothers and describe what methods and beliefs they took to ensure their daughters would complete high school within four years. The study did not consider the educational preparation of the mothers. Findings in this study may help educators and parents make more informed decisions that could enhance the academic success of African American female students attending a Midwestern, urban high school.

Maternal attitudes and values about success are some of the more salient predictors of academic achievement (Johnson, 1992). Parents’ aspirations for their children are prerequisites for effective parent involvement resulting in increased student achievement (Bettler, Burns, & Strother, 2005). Johnson (2016) proclaimed that mother-daughter relationships are one of the “strongest, closest, and most impactful ingredients in human relationships greatly influencing the daughter's self-esteem, autonomy…” (p. 157). Parental involvement is a comprehensive concept that includes both direct and indirect involvement in school, including volunteering in classrooms, attending parent-teacher conferences, discussing school and family issues, and communicating educational expectations (Hayes, 2011, p. 155). Additionally, parent involvement has been considered a key component of school reform that impacts academic achievement (Desimone, 1999). Deplanty, Coulter-Kern, and Duchene (2007) conducted research utilizing focus groups, interviews, and surveys, which revealed teachers and students believed parental involvement was an important aspect of student academic achievement.

Finally, a study conducted by Wasley et al. (2000) found that establishing courteous and caring relationships were vital in creating a constructive relationship between home and school. The investigators concluded, “If America is to continue to be a strong nation, it must make its
programs and policies relative to the needs of the poorest citizens” (Wasley et al., 2000, p. 64). Additionally, a meta-analysis of 80 studies on parental involvement conducted by Allen (2008) revealed, “Family involvement was likely to increase student achievement when involvement was connected to academic learning” (p. 23). These studies lend further credence to the need for continued research involving single African American mothers and their experiences helping their daughters to complete high school.

**Research Questions**

In 2018, nearly 49% of African American daughters were raised by their single mothers (Geiger, Livingston, & Bialik, 2017). Despite the research conducted on African American mothers in single-headed homes, their daughters, and their relationships, scholars are still seeking ways to examine other variables relative to the success of daughters in single-headed homes (Johnson, 2016).

The primary research question for this study is this: What beliefs and expectations do African American mothers of single-headed households have for their daughters that contribute to their completion of high school in four years? Additionally, the study explores the lived experiences of African American mothers and choices they made that lead to their daughters’ obtaining a high school diploma in the suggested four-year timeframe. Additionally, the following four sub-questions provide a more in-depth focus for this study:

1. What goals and expectations did mothers have for their daughters regarding the completion of high school?
2. How do African American mothers describe their parenting style that supported their daughters in high school?
3. How do African American mothers describe their school involvement during their
daughters’ high school experience?

4. Describe any school or community programs African American mothers participated in that supported their daughters’ education and social development while completing high school?

**Conceptual Framework**

Figure 1 provides the conceptual framework that undergirded the development of my research study.

*Figure 1. Conceptual framework explaining the relationship between home and school and its influence on student success*

The above conceptual framework is based on the work of Joyce Epstein (American School Counselor Association, 2009). Despite many other framework models, Epstein’s framework was selected to support the body of research for this study. The Epstein model was developed to focus on parents, students, and community involvement that lead to greater support for student achievement. Furthermore, the framework’s purpose is to depict the elements of the relationship between home-to-school regarding African American single mothers and the
expectations they hold for the daughters while attending high school. This organization of concepts helps to explain Epstein’s theory, which suggests students generally are more likely to succeed when there are positive and productive relationships between home and school (American School Counselor Association, 2009, p. 3).

Table 1 provides a depiction of Epstein’s Framework. This framework displays conceptual structures, or archetypes, identifying the influence of each structure on student learning when support from home, school, and the community is present.

Table 1

*Representation of Epstein’s (2002) Model Home to School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type 1: Parenting</td>
<td>Help families establish home environments to support children as students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 2: Communicating</td>
<td>Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 3: Volunteering</td>
<td>Organize parent help and support, and improving recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 4: Learning at Home</td>
<td>Provide information and ideas from families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 5: Decision-making</td>
<td>Include parents in decision-making, such as including families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, professional learning committees, action teams, and other parent organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 6: Collaborating with the Community</td>
<td>Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.</td>
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Epstein’s (2002) framework serves as the basis for which this study is concerned, namely, the experiences of African American mothers. The surrounding variables represent the
relationship between home-to-school while supporting mothers, the mothers’ expectations and beliefs they hold for their daughters, and the resulting outcome from the interplay between these variables and eventual success in school. Additionally, this theoretical model describes a framework that contains six major types of involvement that exist between home, school, and community.

Epstein's six types of involvement begin with Type 1: Parenting, which involves helping all families establish home environments to support children as students. Type 2: Communicating involves designing effective forms of communication, including communicating with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications. Type 3: Volunteering involves organizing parent help and support and improving recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at school or in other locations to support students and school programs. Type 4: Learning at Home involves providing information and ideas from families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning. Type 5: Decision-making involves parents being included in decision-making by including families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, professional learning committees, action teams, and other parent organizations. Type 6: Collaborating with the Community involves identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development (Epstein, 2002, pp. 39-40).

Furthermore, the Epstein framework serves to support with parenting skills as well as school and family assistance for student learning, and seeks to understand home conditions and the development of goals for children at each grade level (Aud, Hussar, Kena, Bianco, Frohlich,
Kemp, & Tahan, 2011). For example, Bush (2011) theorized that “cultural models emphasize the informal aspects of organizations…They focus on the values, beliefs, and norms of individuals in the organization and how these individual perceptions coalesce into shared organizational meanings” (p. 170). In other words, building respectful relationships between groups or individuals such as parents (home) and school leaders (school) is vital to closing the educational gap, especially in the homes of African American females. There are many benefits regarding parent involvement in education. Research results conclude that child and adolescent learning and academic success has a direct relationship to parent involvement and other factors relating to student motivation, student engagement, and parenting practices (Gonzalez-DeHass, Williems, & Holbein, 2005).

**Methods Overview**

The overarching purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate the phenomenon of African American mothers of single-headed households with daughters who have, or will have completed high school in the suggested time frame of four years. According to Creswell (2008), phenomenological studies utilize the six characteristics of qualitative research that range from exploring and understanding, to evaluating research that is flexible and reflexive.

The study was conducted in a Midwestern state. Participants in this study included 13 African American single head of household mothers whose daughters graduated from an urban high school within a four-year time period. The data gathered came from the lived experiences of these mothers through personal interviews.

**Chapter I Summary**

As education has advanced, there has been significant research about effective leadership in schools, school reform, and instructional strategies that work to support student achievement.
However, there is an absence of research that focuses on the lived experiences of African American mothers in single-headed households raising their daughters as they complete high school. This chapter provided an overview of the focus of this study, which was designed to capture the voices of African American mothers in single-headed homes raising African American daughters as they completed high school in a large Midwestern urban setting. This study will explore the mother’s role in identifying and determining factors that may have contributed to their daughters’ success.

In Chapter II, Review of the Literature, I examine the current research that pertains to the role of school leadership and program development and how these institutions influence the academic achievement of African American females raised in single-headed households toward their successful completion of high school.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, I provide a review of the relevant literature on the purpose of this dissertation, which is to examine the lived experiences of African American mothers of single-headed households with daughters that graduated from high schools during the suggested four-year time period. The following literature review provides a historical background of the problem and also briefly covers key points from the 1950s, 1960s, and the 21st century.

Female Pioneers in African American Education

As noted in an article written by Thomas and Jackson (2007), “in the late 1800s through the mid-1900s, the major focus of study of African American education was primarily limited to access” (p. 365). The contemporary issues currently addressed pertain to matters related to educational equity, diversity, tracking, standardized testing and underachievement, student dropout rates, and school and teacher quality (Thomas & Jackson, 2007, p. 365). Throughout the years, there have been many educational visionaries who have made significant contributions to society and the educational field that have helped to advance opportunities for Black people, and particularly Black female students, starting as early as the Civil War up until the present day. Such people include, for example, pioneers like Mary Jane McLeod Bethune, Lucy Diggs Slowe, and Nannie Helen Burroughs, and many, many others (McCluskey, 1989). To help set the tone for this chapter, let me share a bit about these African American pioneers.

Mary Jane McLeod Bethune (1875-1955) is one of the great educators in U.S. history but rarely mentioned relating to African American female student academic achievement. Education for African American female students would not be as it is now in the 21st century without Bethune’s precursory endeavors. She was an educator known for championing the civil rights of
African Americans, advocating for women issues, and opposing sex and racial discrimination (Thomas & Jackson, 2007). Bethune battled her most daunting task when charged with designing the Daytona Literacy and Industrial School for Negro Girls. The school is now known as Bethune-Cookman University for African American female students who she knew would have limited opportunities because of their race (Thomas & Jackson, 2007).

Another supporter of education and gender and race equality was an activist for Black women in education named Anna Julia Cooper (1858-1964). She was a teacher and principal who “possessed an unrelenting passion for learning and sincere conviction that Black women were equipped to follow intellectual pursuits…” (Rashidi, 2002, p. 1).

As a third example, Lucy Diggs Slowe (1885-1937) was the first African American dean at Howard University. She advocated for self-determination, respect, and the advancement of college-trained African American women (Thomas & Jackson, 2007). As a strong educator and activist for women, Slowe demonstrated an “unyielding mission to address sexism and the limitations that society generally, and the African American community, in particular, placed on being female” (Thomas & Jackson, 2007, p. 363).

Finally, Nannie Helen Burroughs (1879-1961) etched her talents in education as a teacher but not commonly acknowledged for her attributes to education. She can be credited for national leadership and establishing a school for African American women and girls named the National Training School for Women and Girls (Thomas & Jackson, 2007).

Overall, the Civil Rights and Women’s Movements were “major catalysts against racial and gender discrimination in education and other aspects of American life” during the 1960s and 1970s (Thomas & Jackson, 2007, p. 365). Pioneers who “advocated for African American girls and women generally argued that elevating the Black woman’s position in society would uplift
the entire race” (Thomas & Jackson, 2007, p. 360). Additionally, in the late 20th century, issues
in education about African American girls and women evolved (Thomas & Jackson, 2007, p. 365). The next section continues the exploration of this topic beginning with the historical
background of the African American family.

**Historical Background of the African American Family**

Historically, African American women have encountered unrelenting challenges. Unlike
African American men and White women who also face obstacles of their own, several factors
differentiate the struggles encountered by African American women that influence their
academic outcomes (Smith-Evans Graves, Kaufman, & Frohlich, 2014).

**Brown v. Board of Education**

It was 1952 when the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
(NAACP) brought its first test case to the highest court of the land, the Supreme Court. Led by
the plaintiff’s attorney, Thurgood Marshall. Marshall and his team challenged a Kansas state
statute that permitted the segregation of its students based upon race. This statute also applied to
enrollment in post-secondary institutions.

This case tottered between both high and local courts, but eventually prevailed in 1953
when the Supreme Court combined five cases: Brown, Briggs v. Elliott (filed in South Carolina),
Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County (filed in Virginia), Gebhart v. Belton
(filed in Delaware), and Bolling v. Sharpe (filed in Washington, D. C.). As a result of the case,
on May 17, 1954, the decision from the Warren Court was unanimously decided (9–0) that
"separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" (Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka
Kansas, 1954). Racial segregation was declared a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the
Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution. Hence, this ruling led the way for the
integration of schools, and provided a monumental win for the Civil Rights Movement, as well as devising a framework for future impact litigation cases.

The decision, consisting of 14 pages, did not explain, the process for ending racial segregation in schools, and the Court's second decision in *Brown II* (349 U.S. 294 1955) only ordered states to desegregate schools "with all deliberate speed" (Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas, 1954). This ruling, which outlawed statutes and customs that had governed a large segment of the country for many generations, gave added meaning to the principles of “equality of opportunity” as stipulated by the United States Constitution and as amended after the Civil War by the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, commonly referred to as the “Slave Amendments” (U.S. Constitution, 1787). It was not until after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, particularly Title VI of the Act, when meaningful steps were taken to end segregated schools in both southern and northern schools. Meaningful steps were also taken to ensure equality of educational opportunity to all students (Berg, 1964).

**Key Policy Efforts**

Due to the underlying segregation of the education system, both intentional and unintentional, African American students have found themselves struggling to gain representation in areas such as simple general education courses, as well as enrollment in postsecondary institutions (Ford, 2010, 2013, 2014). With the onset of the feminist and post-civil rights movements during the 1970s, African American women were disregarded when taking a stand as a woman. African American women found themselves dismissed and placed aside while White women were the depiction of feminism (Butler, 2013).

In 1965, President Johnson’s War on Poverty led to the creation of the Head Start Program, which was “to increase the readiness for a school of low-income children from birth
through five” (Taylor, 2005, p. 53). “In predicting levels of student achievement, family incomes continue to be reliable indicators. Students who live in poverty are not only more likely to underachieve than their peers from middle and high-income households; they are also at risk of not completing school” (Taylor, 2005, p. 53).

Similarly, in 1965, the government adopted Title I, the first section of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This act allowed for the allocation of funds to schools with large numbers of low-income students, increasing their likelihood for graduation (Coleman, 1966; Taylor, 2005). “When students have the opportunity to graduate from high school, this experience creates opportunities for success in the lives of adolescents, preparing them to address the many developmental tasks and expectations of young adulthood” (Ehrenreich, Reeves, Corley, & Orpinas, 2012, p. 198). As such, a high school diploma has become increasingly important in the United States because without a high school diploma, “high school dropouts are roughly three times more likely to be chronically poor than are high school graduates” (Iceland, 2003). This fact remains true today for young adults who are not prepared for the workforce. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the 2016 Census data revealed African Americans across the country completed high school at a rate of 95.5%, as opposed to their peers at 96.8% (McFarland, Cui, Rathbun, & Holmes, 2018).

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was enacted to help promote success for all students by eliminating educational achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students (NCLB Act, 2001). In 2003, then, Secretary of Education Roderick Paige commented during his presentation at the Partners in Hispanic Education Fair that equity in education had yet to be realized (Taylor, 2005). Moreover, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, 16% of African American students comprised the total public school population in
2004 (Amos, 2008). Yet, “these students, disproportionately concentrated in high-poverty, low-performing schools, are vulnerable to poor educational outcomes that undermine their chances for success in life” (Amos, 2008, p. 1).

Not only has the United States of America failed to educate its students compared to other countries adequately, but also the lack of training has left students ill-equipped to compete in a global economy (Hanushek, Woessmann, & Peterson, 2012). “…When compared to gains made by students in other countries, progress within the United States is middling, not stellar” (Hanushek et al., 2012, p. 2). As noted by Hanushek et al. (2012), the progress the United States has made is not suitably “rapid enough to allow it to catch up with the leaders of the industrialized world” (p. 2).

**African American Female Students**

In the text, *Overcoming the Odds: Raising Academically Successful African American Young Women*, Hrabowski, Maton, Greene, and Greif (2002) discussed how the apparent challenge of “growing up female in America exposes a young woman to social pressures related to appearance…balancing families…academic and work pursuits” (p. 60). Moreover, Woods (2003) argued students who live in cultural poverty are more susceptible to repeat the cycle of generational poverty, drop out of school, be expelled, become involved in gangs, and do drugs. Additionally, research has explained the family, school, and structural factors as being significant to support African American academic performance (Kober, 2010).

African American female students who do not complete high school are more likely to pay significant costs for their lack of education compared to those groups who obtain their diplomas. When an African American female student fails to complete high school, the outcome could result in poor employment opportunities, lower incomes, ill-fated health conditions, and
considerable reliance on government assistance (Bucknor, 2015; Rumberger, 2011; The National Women’s Law Center, 2007).

In a society where individuals are usually rank-ordered against their peers rather than judged based on the absolute value of their credentials, there exists a gap that commands critical attention (McDonough, 2015; Weiher & Tedin, 2006). The achievement gap between African American students and the general population continues to remain. Even though continuous efforts have increased in part relating to improving academic performance among minority and disadvantaged adolescents, African American female students lag behind (Ansell, 2011).

In comparing White females and Black males, the volume of research studied on African American females is limited, resulting in almost exclusively addressing African American male students and sparse attention given to their female counterparts on differences in the achievement gap (Conchas, Gottfried, & Hinga, 2015; McDonough, 2015; Muhammad & Dixson, 2008; Rollock, 2007). Conchas, Gottfried, and Hinga (2015), like other research, highlight issues of inequality in education with their focus on African American, Asian, and Latino males in the inner-city neighborhoods. Their case studies explore the practices that support students’ ability to thrive academically and socially; however, despite their reported inequality, Conchas, et al. argue education remains the best hope of achieving the American dream. Unfortunately, a gap remains in their research is exposed concerning female students and, in particular, African American female students.

**African American Single Mothers**

There has been a critical change in demographics for the number of African American children reared by single parents (Battle & Coates, 2004). This statistic is illustrated in the following quote:
In 1960, 20 percent of black children lived with their mothers, but not with their fathers; by 2010, 53 percent of all black children lived in such families. The share of white children living with their mothers but not with their fathers climbed to 20 percent in 2010 and increased from 6 percent in 1960 (Acs, Braswell, Sorensen, & Turner, 2013, p. 4).

It is important to understand children are affected by a single-parent family (Amato, Patterson, & Beattie, 2015; Amato & Patterson, 2017; Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Howard, 2003). The 2017 U.S. Census Bureau has reported approximately 12 million single-parent families have children under the age of 18, with over 80% headed by single mothers. This number has increased from 6.4 million since the 1970s (Fontenot, Semega, & Kollar, 2018).

Over 60% of African American children will live in families headed by a woman at some point in their lives (Battle & Coates, 2004; Mishel, Bernstein, & Schmitt, 2016; U.S. Census, 2016). Socioeconomic status (SES) appears to be one of the best indicators of educational outcomes for students, particularly for children experiencing poverty (Battle & Coates, 2004; Johnson, 1992; Scott-Jones, 1984). Onyenuforo (2001) believed that when single mothers raise children alone, the young girls are limited in their ability to develop satisfactory heterosexual relationships, have healthy self-esteem, and form stable family units of their own. Furthermore, teenage pregnancy is a major reason why female students in high school dropout (Domenico & Jones, 2007). Previous research shows that there is great anxiety in households where fathers are absent, which contributes to increased school drop-out rates and failures, alcohol, and drug abuse (Domenico & Jones, 2007).

There have been several arguments and discussions about the structure of African American families. Researchers have grown increasingly serious about investigating the impact
of having African American children reared by their mothers without their fathers’ presence (Battle & Coates, 2004; Collins, 1993; Dickerson, 1995). Yet, much of the research has focused on African American male children and adolescents and neglected the experiences of females (Battle & Coates, 2004).

**Expectations**

Maternal attitudes and values are the most substantial predictors of academic achievement. As an example, research suggested parents’ aspirations for their children are prerequisites for effective parent involvement, resulting in improved student achievement (Bettler, Burns, & Strother, 2005).

As a mother, it would be difficult to believe other mothers who have birthed children, especially daughters, would not expect anything but the best and hold high expectations for the well-being and future of their children. In a study where parental influences on achievement, attitudes, and beliefs were examined, Parsons, Adler, and Kaczala (1982) studied how parents communicated their expectations concerning their children’s abilities according to the parent educational experiences. A questionnaire was developed and administered to students and parents about each of their attitudes and beliefs on achievement. One of the relevant findings of this study revealed that parental beliefs and expectations significantly influenced the child’s performances and experiences.

Additionally, a large study conducted with 14 to 18-year-olds over multiple years revealed: “three measures of authoritative parenting practices were positively associated with school engagement and achievement, and parental involvement was more effective in promoting school success with the context of authoritative parenting” (Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994, p. 757).
Beliefs

Halle, Kurtz-Costes, and Mahoney (1997) studied economically disadvantaged African American youth and their parents concerning the achievement-related beliefs and behaviors, and the relationships among parental factors and children’s academic self-concept and achievement. The results of the study suggested there were significant relationships between parental beliefs and behavior in connection with their children’s success. In particular, the African American youth demonstrated resiliency when their parents were able to associate their high expectations for their children’s academic achievement with behaviors that advocate success.

Harris (1999) conducted a study designed to “explore the parental relationship between Black mothers and their children and the implications this has for the development of their respective achievement levels” (p. iii). The results of the study explained how Black mothers’ parenting beliefs influenced the achievement levels of their sons and daughters in a single-parent home. Specifically, Black mothers positively affected their children’s achievement levels by openly interacting with their children about the value of education and communicating their beliefs about how their child would perform in school.

In a related study, Nolen (2002) discussed the research findings on how student academic achievement is directly related to the value parents placed on education and their level of educational accomplishment. When parents communicated to their children, the benefits and outcomes of education, success was achieved. Nolen described the actual ways that were found effective: parental involvement in school, homework support from parents, and discussions on college pathways and opportunities. Nolen also suggested there was limited research regarding whether African American mothers’ parenting styles were related to strong achievement levels.
for their sons and daughters. The researcher concluded that there was a need for further research that would focus on African American mothers and their daughters.

Huang and Mason (2008) also conducted related research describing how parents’ attitudes, behaviors, and school-related activities influence the educational and learning success of children. The outcome of the study determined further research is warranted to investigate African American parents’ motivation for involvement in their children’s education. Moreover, “by establishing and confirming high expectations, monitoring behavior, and remaining highly involved and supportive, parents can continue to influence adolescent behaviors” (Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009, p. 5).

Verduzco-Baker (2017) led a study that addressed parenting perceptions and practices of African American and White low-income mothers who were unmarried. The study also addressed how the selected mothers supported their children’s future level of success. As a result of the study, it revealed mothers who treated their children with respect, encouragement, and established a trustworthy relationship with them helped their children become disciplined, self-directed, and accomplished.

**Parental Involvement**

From my perspective, parents are their child’s first teacher, and they play a dynamic role in the developmental process throughout their existence. Unlike school leaders and instructional personnel, parents “serve as a continual, persistent, and stable resource for their children throughout their lifespan” (Trask-Tate & Cunningham, 2010, p. 139). Hickman, Greenwood, and Miller (1995) conducted a study that illustrated the most effective ways parental involvement affects adolescents’ academic outcomes. Seven dimensions were examined; however, the study concluded the dimension that best-supported adolescent grades were home-
based involvement (Hickman et al., 1995). Researchers in the study defined *home-based involvement* as students being assisted directly with their school assignments, course selection, and future career plans (Hickman et al., 1995).

In another study, Henderson and Mapp (2002) analyzed 80 studies on parental involvement. The study revealed, “family involvement was likely to increase student achievement when that involvement was connected to academic learning” (p. 23). Furthermore, the study also identified that establishing courteous, caring relationships and creating a constructive relationship between home and the teacher/school was vital. Similarly, the Council of Urban Boards of Education surveyed more than 100 schools and uncovered that parents who visited their child’s school and viewed the environment for themselves seemed to be more pleased than accepting their child’s perspective as the primary source of information (Perkins-Gough, 2008). Moreover, parents who support their children and teachers by visiting the school as often as possible demonstrate that their child’s education is an “important pursuit” (Solo, 1997). Children with parents who model this behavior have a far greater chance of succeeding because of the two-way lines of communication between home and school.

The relationship between the academic success of African American students and parental involvement cannot be overstated (Epstein, 2002; Hill & Craft, 2003; Nettles, Scatton, Steinberg, & Tyler, 2011). Because of the insensitivity to cultural backgrounds in many schools, some African American parents are discouraged from fully participating in their child’s academic experiences (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2008). Unfortunately, school personnel often look at African American parents as being unqualified and, as a result, interact with them in a discouraging manner (Lareau & Horvat, 1999).
It is important to have positive relationships between schools and homes when families are raising children. Empirical research has revealed that parental involvement in the construct of school to home communication is not only beneficial to schools’ strategic planning processes, but it creates an influential connection between student achievement and parent involvement. As Epstein and Jansorn (2004) argued, “Students who succeed in school are almost always supported by their families, while other students struggle without support from home… involving parents in ways that increase student success requires new ways of thinking about family and community involvement” (p. 19).

Gutman and McLloyd (2000) performed a study that found parents of high-performing African American students used diverse strategies to support their children at home. Strategies they found included tutoring, extra homework, and a routine schedule for homework while parents closely monitored their activity. Additional findings revealed parents held high expectations for their children’s academic performance, as well as sustained contact with school personnel (Gutman & McLloyd, 2000). African American parents play a vital role in their children’s academic identity; therefore, forging amicable relationships between African American parents and schools is paramount to increased academic achievement (Troutman, 2001).

**School/Community Support**

Dyer (2001) sought to distinguish important factors within the school environment that influenced the lives of African American females in terms of contributing to or lessening their opportunity to complete high school after entering as 9th graders. The study examined 16 African American female students placing a laser focus on their perceptions of what factors influenced their decision to complete high school. The qualitative study investigated academic
performance and faculty relationships. The study revealed support systems for the female seniors upon graduating were both external and within the school. As an example, academic support for African American female seniors from counselors and teachers was recognizably evident. However, the seniors identified the strongest support systems came from their mothers and grandmothers, or they took personal credit for their determination to complete high school.

Additional research concerning the topic of resiliency in African American youth in female single-parent homes revealed the importance of internal and external support systems in the lives of African American female high school students. Davis (2008) found that the nine participants in her study confirmed social networks such as family members and friends were a part of support systems that reassured and strengthened the development of resilience and self-esteem, specifically, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and ministers. In relation to external supports, teachers, and coaches were identified in two of the nine cases as positive supports in that they “challenged” the child to perform well in school and life. This outcome confirms what prior researcher have also shown; that when students know parent figures like coaches, teachers, and counselors communicate high expectations and show they care, student success increases (Davies, 2000; Bettler, Burns, & Strother, 2005; Depalnty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007).

In a related qualitative study, Love and Kruger (2005) explored student success correlates with an internal support system such as an extended family. The research suggests African American students may learn at their optimal levels when their support comes from a personal and relational setting where there are high expectations and that extended family as an internal support system aids student e success of students. Love and Kruger found the extended family was a successful teacher in the lives of African American students. This entity assists them in developing a “new knowledge based on life experiences, …and those successful teachers who
create an environment of learners much like an extended family...having high expectations for the success of all students” (Love & Kruger, 2005, p. 87).

In urban school settings, school personnel need to recruit effective staff and community partners as support systems that promote academic achievement in urban schools (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Similarly, further research discussed various attempts districts employed to strengthen systems of support in urban schools but was unsuccessful due to financial constraints leaving school staff wondering how to move their mindset and abilities (Haberman, 1996). Because of this, many school systems and districts have formed an alliance of support systems with social service agencies. Prior research reports discovered that after partnering with 55 external support programs, it helped to create a school-home agency triad that addressed student dropout, parent and family issues, life skills, life skills, drug abuse services, etc. As a result of establishing an external support system with social agencies, Wang and Kovach (1996) determined the best way to address the diverse needs of students in promoting their success is by incorporating “school-linked, coordinated, comprehensive services” (p. 9).

**Transformational Leadership**

Throughout my leadership experience as an administrator, I have learned something similar to the following quote from Burns (1978): “leadership is morally purposeful. All leadership is goal-orientated. The failure to set goals is a sign of faltering leadership. Successful leadership points in a direction; it is also the vehicle of continuing and achieving purpose” (p. 455). It is also my belief that leaders who recognize strong leadership do not come in a single form, transactional versus transformational. Instead, each leadership style compliments one another in certain situations. True leaders are authentic in sharing a clear vision and an
established understanding that each daily school situation, whether successful or not, creates a powerful bond with followers, demonstrating poise, dedication, and creative problem-solving.

Transformational leadership is grounded in the principle that leaders and the led can encourage one another to reach greater heights toward motivation and morality. Lunenburg and Ornstein (1996) agree:

Transformational leaders…motivate their subordinates to do more than they originally expected to do. They accomplish this…by raising followers’ levels of consciousness about the importance and value of designated outcomes and ways of reaching them by getting followers to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the team, organization, or larger polity. (p. 13)

When school leaders accept a leadership role, it is important to understand the students they serve, particularly African American female students who are lagging behind the general population of students (Cataldi, & KewalRamani, 2009; Aud et al. 2011). Dufour and Marzano (2011) believe, “Every person who enters the field of education has both an opportunity and an obligation to be a leader” (p. 1). A transformational leader understands that to work toward the success of students; a strategy is needed where the capacity of an organization is assessed through examining strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (S.W.O.T.).

Additionally, transformational leaders are committed to human relations. “The heart of transformational leadership is the leader’s desire and ability to raise the consciousness of others by appealing to powerful moral values and ideals” (Burns, 1978, p. 1). They show by their attitudes and actions how everyone else should behave. Transformational leaders also make continued efforts to motivate and rally their followers and constantly do the rounds, listening, soothing, and enthusing.
Whether you are a teacher or building principal, it remains an important factor to build positive relationships between school personnel, students, and their parents for student success. Scherer (2008) explains many educators are inclined as professionals to be positive about their teaching positions and the students they vow to help; however, “truly positive teaching is complicated and comes in different guises” (p. 7). For this reason, Scherer discussed in her article, “Ode to Positive Teachers,” how a novice teacher learned to avoid the necessary stresses of teaching: “Whatever it takes, build relationships. Don’t make students your enemy, or they’ll win” (p. 7). Scherer also acknowledged Whitman’s (2008) theory that many productive inner-city schools take on the mantra that to connect with students and families, they must have the “paternalistic attitude” (p. 7).

Denton (2008) suggests a teacher’s language can accelerate and create a positive relationship between the teacher and student. Similarly, students constantly scrutinize teachers’ tone of voice and how their words are relayed. “When students know that you believe in them, they will interpret even harsh sounding comments as statements of care” (Bondy & Ross, 2008, p. 56).

For this study, Mathews’ (2006) research supports the conceptual framework of the Epstein’s theory, which suggests students are commonly able to succeed when there are encouraging and productive relationships between home and school. As my study investigated the lived experiences of African American mothers in single-headed households with daughters who graduate in four years, establishing clear expectations and sound relationships is important between school leaders, teachers, African American single mothers, and their daughters. For instance, Davies (2000) and Mathews (2006) have both inclusive and beneficial prescriptions for improving parent-school relationships that result in developing expectations and partnerships that
support student success. Davies suggests five recommendations to help families and schools build better relationships that promote student success:

1. Teachers offer guidance to families by establishing realistic expectations.
2. Seek teacher input.
4. Reach into your community. Schools and parents must reach out to those in the community.
5. Hold the school, family, and community accountable (Davies, 2000, pp. 32-34).

Similarly, Mathews (2006), like Davies (2000), offers suggestions from what he calls “both sides of the discussion” (p. A08). Both perspectives from Matthews and Davies are vital to parent-school expectations and relationships that support student success, especially African American females being raised in a single-headed household by their African American mothers. Matthews’ 10 recommendations were designed to demonstrate the strength in relationships and expectations between educators and parents while encouraging student success. Out of the ten recommendations, six specific suggestions are relevant for this study:

6. Ask parents to showcase their abilities and knowledge.
7. Welcome parents to advocate for their students.
8. Seek parent volunteers. Invite parents to help out at school.
9. Offer educational activities for parents and students.
10. Get parents to observe classes.
11. Provide courses for parents. Parent workshops can include drug awareness, new state mandates, and graduation requirements (Matthews, 2006, pp. 1-3).
Home to School Communication

There are ample concerns that plague the educational system in the United States. However, the most complex issue that remains is the level of communication families and schools must establish to promote student achievement. Hayes (2011) described at-home involvement as an exchange between parent and child that is centered on the child’s education, while at-school involvement is described as parent’s capability to initiate or be available for contact with school personnel. Additionally, Hayes has commented:

Involvement at home, particularly with parents discussing school activities, has the strongest effect on academic achievement. If home involvement is a better predictor of achievement for urban adolescents, more research in this area is needed. Many teachers often assume minority and low SES parents do not care about their children if they do not engage in direct forms of school involvement.

(p. 155)

While parents may be their children’s first teacher and learning begins at home, a stronger relationship must establish that fosters home-to-school support and decreases parent alienation (Depalnty et al., 2007; Parker, & Ascher, 1987). Researchers such as Trask-Tate and Cunningham (2010) noted the level of academic achievement in an adolescent’s life could largely be associated with the relationship between school support, community, and the connection to the school environment.

Home to school communication can be defined as how a parent communicates or engages with the school in a multifaceted way. For instance, direct engagement for a parent might include volunteering at school, emailing, responding to school messenger alerts, attending school parent conferences, and reading school newsletters and updates on websites. Other means of sharing
information can include involving parents in conveying educational expectations for their children and discussing indirect hidden behaviors of children’s home and school issues with school leaders (Hayes, 2011). School leaders must understand there is a great need to create strong communication alliances between home and school. “Close communication between schools and their communities establishes shared goals and thus builds public support for and commitment to the school and their educational objectives” (Cattermole & Robinson, 1985, p. 48).

In two different studies conducted by Sloan (1973) with parents from Toledo, Ohio and Abbotsford, British Columbia, the studies revealed the most effective ways of communication are direct and personal. For example, typically, all schools schedule parent conferences, produce school newsletters, and organize parent expos, meet and greets, or open houses. However, in the study conducted by Cattermole and Robinson with Toledo’s parents, the most useful forms of home to school communication discovered were parents are more appreciative of first-hand sources of information given directly from their children, their children’s teachers, and through report cards or school newsletters. With most schools across the country today, efforts to build home to school communications are systematically organized for each particular school’s environment. The initial study also identified other favorable direct forms of communication were messages that:

The school direct specifically to them, i.e., report cards and teachers’ notes or phone calls. Also, they highly value those ways of gaining information about the schools that involve face-to-face interactions, parent/teacher conferences, personal visits to the school, friendships with educators in the school districts,
'meet the teacher’ nights, and school open houses. (Cattermole et al., 1985, pp. 48–49)

Similarly, the second study with the Abbotsford parents uncovered the most effective home to school communication results mirrored one another when a direct approach by phone or in-person and a parent/teacher conference was utilized (Sloan, 1973). Each group of parents from the study acknowledged similar preferences with communication. Both groups wanted direct, personal contact with schools. As a result, regardless of the diverse groups of parents representing two different districts and regions of the world, parents have the same expectations from schools: “parents are content to let school authorities make the major decisions related to school life. They ask only that they be kept informed” (Cattermole et al., 1985, p. 50).

One can argue that if school leaders want to include parents in children’s education and not treat them like strangers but more like partners or collaborators, educators have to continue to encourage parents to actively contribute to their child as a learner at home and school. “Because parents connect with their children in personal ways across time, they can play a special role in helping teachers understand how their children relate…” (Lazar & Weisberg, 1996, p. 229). In the abovementioned information, Hayes (2011) commented indirect communication from home to school helps promote student achievement when involving parents more with school activities, as well as understand other issues that might affect students’ ability to perform well. Likewise, McIntyre, Kyle, Moore, Sweazy, and Greer (2001) agreed that learning more about students and their family circumstances and lives “enable us to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between home and school. . .” (p. 265). “The message that schools and homes communicate should not contradict one another” (McIntyre et al., 2001, p. 271). As a result, open
communication, involvement from home, and working together with the school can and will produce better results toward student achievement.

**Chapter II Summary**

This chapter provided a review of literature related to the purpose of this study. First, the historical background of African American families was explored. This exploration included a discussion of important legal and policy decisions affecting African American female students. Next, pertinent characteristics of African American mothers were explored, including research on expectations, parental involvement, and support systems. The review ends with a discussion of school leadership. In the next chapter, Methodology of Study, I provide an overview of the design that was used to conduct this study, describing the process for collecting, analyzing the data, and make meaning of the data collected.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experiences of African American mothers in single-headed households with daughters who graduate in four years from an urban high school district in the Midwest region of the United States. My interest in the study rests with establishing an in-depth, focused understanding of the African American single mothers’ lived experiences with their daughters who have succeeded by graduating from high school during the state’s prescribed time limitations. The overarching question that this study addresses: What expectations and beliefs do African American mothers of single-headed households have for their daughters that contribute to their high school completion in four years? The sub-questions guiding this study are:

1. What goals and expectations do mothers have for their daughters regarding the completion of high school?

2. How do African American mothers describe their parenting style that supported their daughters in high school?

3. How do African American mothers describe their school involvement during their daughters’ high school experience?

4. Describe any school or community programs African American mothers participated in that supported their daughters’ education and social development while completing high school?

The specific sections of this chapter are as follows: (a) Setting, Subjects and Sampling, (b) Recruitment, Selection and Consent Procedures, (c) Data Collection, (d) Data Analysis, (e) Delimitations of Study, (f) Role of Researcher and (g) Chapter III Summary.
Setting and Subjects

Setting

For this study, the setting included two Midwestern urban communities. The first community is located on the eastside of a Midwestern state, which consists of approximately 49,000 residents with roughly the annual median household income of $46,000, nearly 5,300 female headed households with no husband, and about 22,000 African American residents. The second community is established on the westside of a Midwestern state, which is comprised of almost 200,000 residents with an annual median household income of nearly $40,000, with almost 12,000 female heading households with no husband, and around 39,000 African American residents (World Population Review, 2018). Within each community, several high schools include 9 – 12 grades, with approximately 5,000 to 10,000 students.

I recruited 13 African American female mothers who are the single head they’re of household with African American daughters who have graduated from high school. Participating respondents were limited to those mothers whose daughters had graduated from high schools during the suggested four-year time-period from an urban high school district in the Midwest region of the United States. I had chosen these two community settings as a result of the accessibility, convenience, and my knowledge of the African American mothers due to my having lived and worked as an administrator in these two urban school communities. The steps taken were to determine which subjects were eligible to participate in an interview, along with a time and place for data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Subjects and Sampling

I began by compiling a list of African American single mothers from local hair salons, churches, interactions with family and friends, Greek-letter organizations, and professional
organizations. The mothers’ ages ranged from 35 to 65 years, and they had daughters who graduated during the suggested four-year time period. This initial group involved approximately 20 African American single mothers gathered via a purposeful sampling process. This type of sampling was deliberately employed because selected participants could provide the most relevant and plentiful data given to this topic of study (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2011).

Creswell (2007) recommends three to 10 participants for a phenomenological study, but no more than 25. Creswell (2008) describes a qualitative sampling that characterizes various perspectives of individuals to represent the intricacies of the lived experience. Homogenous sampling was used for the present study. This type of sampling uses items in the sample with identical and defining traits such as gender, age of children, or education. The researcher purposefully analyzes cases, individuals, or sites based on membership in a subgroup that has similar characteristics, which in my study was being an African American single head of household, who had a daughter who had graduated from high school within the four-year time period.

Recruitment, Selection, and Consent Procedures

Recruitment

As mentioned above, I used contacts from local community social groups (e.g., churches, masonic temples, neighborhood block clubs, professional organizations, and Greek-letter organizations) to gain access to single African American mothers with African American daughters who had graduated from two urban school districts in a Midwestern community. This recruitment included personal contacts, flyer distributions (see Appendices A, B, and C), emails, phone calls, and social media (see Appendix D). The goal was to recruit up to 20 African
American mothers and have at least 13 of the mothers participate in a personal interview with the researcher. Eligible mothers were given a flyer informing them of the study, and they were encouraged to share the flyer with other potential participants who met the study’s requirements.

**Selection**

The criteria used to select participants sought “to obtain the broadest range of information and perspectives on the subjects involved in this study” (Yin, 2009, p. 88). As an example, in selecting participants, the process sought out subjects with diverse views related to the topic of study indicated by their diverse backgrounds (e.g., high school and non-high school graduates; employed and non-employed mothers; college and non-college graduates).

**Consent Procedures**

Permission to collect the data was obtained from the Human Subject Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) at Western Michigan University before conducting the study (see Appendix E). HSIRB approval issues related to the consent and confidentiality of the participants were addressed before and during this study. The specific consent process was as follows. An invitation was extended to mothers via email, in-person, phone calls, social media, or through the United States Postal Service, introducing the researcher and providing an overview of the study’s purpose and data collection processes (see Appendix F). Potential participants were assured that proper steps were taken to ensure the confidentiality of their responses and that no names of individuals would be reported or otherwise communicated. Once participants were selected, they were given a consent document describing the study and asking for a signature indicating consent (see Appendix G). This letter encouraged participants to contact the investigator’s advisor, Dr. Walter L. Burt, Associate Professor Emeritus at Western Michigan University, or an HSIRB official if they have any questions or issues about this study. Numbers were issued to the
participants to maintain their anonymity. A hardcopy of the letter was made available to participants.

**Data Collection**

Prior to this research, a pilot study with focus questions had been conducted with multiple participants from various socio-economic and educational backgrounds who met the criteria for the present study. The pilot study was designed to obtain feedback from pilot participants to determine whether they understood the proposed interview questions posed, and equally important, whether they had suggestions for improving the wording of the questions. In addition to this pilot, participants were also asked to provide suggestions for other questions that probe for more information and explore in-depth content revealing elaborate information (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 2009). Based on this pilot feedback, I crafted the interview questions, which were used in the larger research study.

From the main research study, I began the data collection process with a demographic questionnaire. The demographics collected included the mothers’ age, mothers’ level of education, the daughters’ academic standing, extra-curricular involvement, graduation year, and the number of additional children in the household. The questionnaire was issued to each participant allowing me, as the researcher, to establish whether there are noteworthy commonalities, or differences, in the demographics provided.

The primary method of data collection included an in-depth interview process. This process was organized in a semi-structured format involving audio-recorded, face-to-face interviews with African American mothers from a single-headed household with daughters 17 years of age, or older, who have graduated from high school within the four-year time period. According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), “qualitative researchers look to the following four
methods for gathering data: (1) participate in the setting; (2) observe directly; (3) interview in-depth; (4) analyze documents and material culture” (pp. 2-3).

The process for collecting data began with a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix H), and an interview protocol (see Appendix I), with one in-depth face-to-face interview taking place with each African American mother. The interviews were conducted in a quiet, partially private, community setting near the vicinity where participants live.

The protocol consisted of interview questions (see Appendix I) that may directly contributed to understanding the perspectives of African American mothers from single-headed homes. More specifically, the protocol attempted to collect and describe the challenges participants encountered while rearing their African American daughters as they worked to complete high school. The interview questions were closely aligned with my four research questions. With the semi-structured interview protocol, the potentially daunting task of reviewing, organizing, and analyzing the data was manageable.

The abovementioned protocol process utilized an interview guide approach (Locke, Spirdusco, & Silverman, 2007). I was allowed, as the researcher, to investigate freely, and if interview responses were unclear or an unexpected issue arose, I addressed the discrepancies (Locke et al., 2007). For each participant, field notes or reflective journals were organized and maintained by me. Reflective journals are recognized as a valuable tool because they provide vital reflective data about the interview process. They also serve as documentation for me in identifying any biases before, during, and after the interview (Yin, 2011).

Transcribing the data was a meticulous process, assisted by a professional transcriber approved by Western Michigan University (see Appendix K). I reviewed transcripts using the Microsoft Word color-coding option to identify key themes and words from the interview.
When determining the accuracy of qualitative findings, member checking was employed, which involved reviewing portions of the findings from the transcripts, such as themes, or cultural descriptions with participants in a follow-up interview, allowing participants to respond to the results. This process is proposed as theme development.

**Confidentiality of Data**

Each participant’s response data was confidentially maintained at all times. The principal investigator and student investigator are the only ones that have access to all audio recordings, notes, and any other documentation except during the transcription process. During the process of transcribing, files were saved to an external hard drive and kept securely in a locked file cabinet in my home office. After completion of the study, the principal investigator will keep the interview transcripts in a locked file cabinet in his office and for a minimum of 3 years.

**Data Analysis**

Before analyzing the data, there were several steps I took to ensure the accuracy of the data, including but not limited to, aggregating demographic questions into summary statements of participating respondents. Semi-structured questions were aggregated into summary statements to identify potential themes. My field notes were entered into my journal so that I could record my reflections, thoughts, and observations.

After transcribing each interview, I returned them to the participants for review. The process of member-checking helped to ensure the accuracy of participants’ responses in phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2008). Ten of the 13 respondents returned the transcripts with no additions or suggested changes. However, three participants made changes to the transcript. After reviewing the suggested changes, I incorporated the suggestions made by each participant.
I carefully read and reviewed each of the 13 transcripts at least four times. Also, I took copious notes during the interview sessions and referred to these notes as I read and listened to each transcript. While reading the transcripts, significant statements, quotations, and words were highlighted, coded, and compiled in my journal. Additionally, listening to the playback of each audio-recording led me to make additional notes, when and where necessary. This arduous task enabled me to create a list in Microsoft Word/Excel that produced themes and subthemes. The participants’ rich and detailed interview responses were summarized to understand the phenomenon under investigation and ensure the structure of the phenomenological analysis process.

Following the interview and before analyzing the data, I requested feedback from participants regarding the transcription of the interview through the member checking process. This process was designed to safeguard accuracy in capturing the interpretation of each participant’s lived experiences (Creswell, 2008). Each participant was asked to review their transcript. Member checking allows participants involved in the study to expound on their individual stories, adding or clarifying any information relevant to the interview.

Creswell (2009) suggested several steps to data analysis, which is an ongoing process. During the study, the data for each interview was collected and analyzed immediately to understand its meaning thoroughly. The interviews and field notes we transferred to Microsoft Word to allow the researcher to “track and organize data, including notes, key documents, tabular materials, narratives, and audio files” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 554). The process used to organize the data was conducted through the coding process. This process generated categories, such as settings, people, or themes for analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). It is important to understand, data analysis is cyclic, involving not only reading interview responses, coding, or
reducing of data, but also interpreting what was captured and sharing this with the participants to make meaning of the data (Creswell, 2009).

**Delimitations of Study**

I delimited the study to single African American mothers who head their households and had daughters, who had graduated or were slated to graduate within four years. No inferences or generalizations were made to other ethnic groups with similar demographic characteristics.

The findings of this research are therefore delimitated to the mothers who participated in the study and cannot be generalized to other populations. I recognize the potential weakness of the study with such a small sample of participants.

**Role of the Researcher**

I am an African American woman who graduated from an urban high school and was the daughter of a woman who was single and the head of the household. During high school, I attended an urban high school, where I later served as a teacher for over 13 years and performed the leadership and instructional duties of an assistant principal for three years. Additionally, I was actively involved in local churches, a Greek-letter sorority, social, and other educational professional organizations. As the researcher, I am experienced in the role of a community member, church member, Greek-letter organization member, school principal, former teacher, and a student. Because of my experiences, I conducted a qualitative study in two urban communities in a Midwestern state.

My role as the key data collection instrument and data analyst is a source of bias, expectations, and personal values identified, according to Creswell (2009). These contributions provided constructive results yet may be damaging to the research environment. My personal experience with the research topic allows for first-hand knowledge. Throughout the data
collection and analysis processes, all efforts were made to remain objective, but biases can shape my perspective and interpretations. As the researcher, the goal was to provide participants with a feeling of trustworthiness and confidence in the study.

Chapter III Summary

Chapter III explained the procedures and data analysis used in conducting this phenomenological study. The focus of the research was to determine from the lived experiences of African American mothers’ in single-headed households what factors contributed to the completion of high school by their daughters in an urban school district. Additionally, the role and responsibilities of the researcher were discussed. The study sought to reveal results of the research from the African American mothers’ lived experiences, as well as allow participants to communicate their involvement, views, and other factors that might have supported their daughters. Chapter IV next offers the results from my study.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experiences of single African American mothers who were the head of their households during the time they had a daughter in high school. This study was designed to describe the steps mothers took to ensure their daughters’ high school completion, particularly within the state’s suggested period for completing graduation requirements. Thirteen African American mothers meeting this criterion were selected to participate in this study. As mentioned in Chapter III, Creswell (2007) recommends three to 10 participants as it relates to a phenomenological study, but no more than 25.

My study utilized a phenomenological approach to investigate the lived experiences of single African American mothers for the sole purpose of gathering a deeper understanding of their experiences. In addition to this, I wanted to hear, in their own voices about how they were able to lead and support their daughters through the successful completion of high school. Equally important, I wanted to learn from these mothers about salient characteristics they employed, which may help explain how they were able to get desired results from their daughters despite the social, emotional, and economic challenges they faced as they reared their daughters in a single-headed household.

This study should provide valuable insight into this phenomenon that previous studies have failed to investigate, particularly as it relates to African American females that rear their daughters in single-headed households.
Participants

Before the initial interview session, the 13 participants were given a copy of the interview packet via email. However, as I hand-delivered the interview packet to the individual respondent to ensure they received the information and that they understood the questions that would be asked of them. The demographic profile, and corresponding interview questions, were then provided to participants so that they could review each item carefully before the interview. These steps allowed participants to pose any questions or concerns they may have encountered before their interview. Each of the 13 participants met with the investigator and was asked if they would be willing to participate in an interview session. For participants who agreed to participate in the study, they were asked to read and sign a consent form indicating their willingness to participate in this study and their right to withdraw from the study at any time they felt compelled to do so.

After providing information about the study and obtaining the signed consent form, I began to establish convenient times to meet with each participating respondent. Once a convenient time had been established, the investigator met with participants to begin the interview process. Single African American mothers were asked eight essential questions that would enable the investigator to obtain information regarding the lived experiences of participants, along with questions regarding methods and beliefs they held for their daughters that would lead to the successful completion of high school.

Table 2 provides information regarding each participating respondent. In each case, pseudonyms are provident for the purpose of ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of each participating respondent.
Table 2

**Participants’ Demographic Profile**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th>Involvement in School/Community Activities</th>
<th>Daughters’ Siblings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Eiland</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>College Degree</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Branch</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Younger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Curren</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Younger &amp; Older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Winne</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>College Degree</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Holiday</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>College Degree</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Gregory</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Younger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Blackman</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>College Degree</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Jones</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>College Degree</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Middleton</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>College Degree</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Older &amp; Younger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Valentine</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Currently in College</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. DeVine</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>College Degree</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Cook</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>College Degree</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Younger &amp; Older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Davies</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>College Degree</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Younger</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Characteristics of the Communities from which Participants were Selected**

The 13 selected African American mothers resided in two different Midwest urban school districts. These two districts were selected because they had a significant population of African American mothers and children. The mothers met the study’s criteria of being African
American, single, the head of their household, having a daughter 17 years of age or older, and their daughter graduated from a high school within a Midwestern state’s recommended timeframe to complete high school.

Table 3 provides a descriptive overview of the communities from which these single African American mothers lived. The table provides a comparison of these two urban communities according to the following schema: size of the community, annual median income of residents, number of female-headed households, number of African American residents, number of high schools within the community, number of students enrolled within each high school, and the number of African American mothers participating in this study.

Table 3

Community Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Characteristic</th>
<th>Eastside District</th>
<th>Westside District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Residents in the Community</td>
<td>49,000</td>
<td>200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Median Income of Residents</td>
<td>$46,000/yr.</td>
<td>$40,000/yr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Female-Headed Households (No Husbands)</td>
<td>5,300</td>
<td>12,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of African American Residents</td>
<td>22,000 (44%) of the total population of residents</td>
<td>39,000 (19%) of the total population of residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Students in the High Schools</td>
<td>1,433</td>
<td>3,477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Participants in this Study</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 illustrates that the Eastside Community District had 10 individuals who agreed to participate in this study, as compared to three participants from the Westside community, respectively.

After reviewing the demographic make-up of participants, along with their previous work-experiences, my 18 years of work in the Eastside District likely contributed to these individuals’ willingness to participate in this research study as compared to my rather limited involvement in this Westside Community District. There was also a preponderance of respondents, particularly single heads of household females with college degrees than their corresponding counterparts who had a high school diploma or less. It is possible, however, that the group of college-educated mothers were more inclined to participate in this study than their corresponding counterparts because of the experiences they had as a result of attaining a college degree. Notwithstanding, given the limited timeline this student researcher had to collect the data, I decided to move forward with the 13 respondents who had met the study’s criteria for participation.

These questions were designed to investigate the prevailing conditions that resulted in the overall success of African American females in the two large metropolitan high schools in this Midwestern state. Data were collected to examine the perception of African American mothers concerning traits, conditions, and other factors that may have contributed to the successful outcome of their daughters graduating from high school in the state’s suggested four-year timeframe for high school graduation.

**Participants’ Responses Organized by Research Questions**

Each research question in this study had corresponding interview questions with responses from each of the 13 participants. This process enabled me to develop tables, with
emerging themes, and summative discussion comments and observations. To make meaning of the data collected, this subsection lists each research question and then summarizes the responses from each participant in this study.

**Research Question #1: What goals and expectations did mothers have for their daughters regarding the completion of high school?**

Ms. Eiland is a 54-year-old single mother with a college degree in Social Work. She has two daughters and worked full-time while rearing her children on the east side of this Midwestern state. When asked to share her thoughts about her experiences regarding the goals and expectations she held for her daughter regarding completing high school, she replied in the following manner:

I emphasized education. Education was emphasized to me. I passed it on even from elementary school all the way up to high school. So, when she was in high school, she knew what my expectations were . . . She didn’t have the option to take lower-level math when I know you could do Algebra II or Algebra III . . . I made sure I was on it. My expectations were very high. Having a post-secondary education was the expectation I held for her. I often said to her; you’re going to go to college. You are going to pay for it with scholarships, and Mommy can do some of the extras.

Ms. Branch is a 62-year-old single mother with two daughters. She lived on the Eastside of this Midwestern state and worked full-time. This parent received her Associate degree after rearing her children. She confirmed her high expectations for her daughter by making this observation:

The goal was that she would always be the best that she could possibly become. Good grades, an excellent student… being always at the point where she was ‘Miss Goody two
shoes,’ but if it wasn’t ‘Miss Goody two shoes, it was so that she wasn’t the class clown and things of that nature.’ I just always wanted the best for her . . . There was always a conversation at the end of the day or the end of the night that we always shared, and I wanted to make sure that she knew what my expectation was for her… She maintained a certain GPA to make sure that she did not disrespect her teachers, and that I did not have to come to the school in order for me NOT (emphasis added) to be my best self.

Ms. Curren is a 64-year-old single mother who worked full-time with three daughters and two sons. She received some college education while rearing her children on the east side of this Midwestern state. The expectations she held for her daughter are expressed below.

Some of the expectations I held for my daughter were just to go to school, get your lessons, and be respectful. Do what the teachers ask you to do. Mostly that was it. Just go to school and get your lesson, and I would take care of everything else, you know. Just go to school.

Ms. Winne is a 58-year-old single mother who earned a college degree before her daughter’s birth. She has one daughter and worked full-time while rearing her. Regarding goals and expectations:

I wanted to set an example for my daughter. Routine... set schedules... The good news is that I decided to do another Master’s when she got in 9th grade online, and I think that’s what really set the academic expectation because she always knew she was going to college. I think that really set the tone that she “kinda” knew what college was about.

Ms. Holiday is a 53-year-old single mother who earned a college degree before her daughter’s birth. She has one daughter and raised her by herself while working full-time. Ms.
Holiday’s accounting of the goals and expectations she held for her daughter is illustrated below in the following statement:

The goals and expectations I held for my daughter are that you will do well in school, you will earn A’s and B’s, and you will need to start thinking about what it is you want to do after high school. My daughter was always interested in math and science, and I think that stemmed from even when she was in elementary. So, we focused on that. I focused on that. I said, let’s start looking at careers in those areas where you, as an African American young lady, could focus on that in school. So, I think by you having that foundation and by us talking about it, and by you going to school every single day. Those were some of the goals and expectations I held for her. You will graduate, you will go to college too, and because I attended college, and my mother, her grandmother, attended college and has a college degree. I even told her; you’ll be the third-generation person that will graduate from college. I think that was something that stuck with her.

Ms. Gregory is a 37-year-old single mother with two daughters. She is gainfully employed on a full-time basis and is currently pursuing a college degree. She also expressed her thoughts on goals and expectations for her daughter after graduating from high school. Her thoughts are captured in the statement below:

The goals I held for my oldest daughter were to finish high school without getting pregnant and to try to maintain a good grade point average where she could get into college for free...Just in case she wanted to go to college to play sports, you would have that good grade point average and test scores to where you can go to college for free, and she knew I expected her to try to go to school every day and get her work in and don’t get behind. I also set goals for her to join clubs and play sports, and be active in school.
Ms. Blackman is a 43-year-old single mother with one daughter who earned her college degree while rearing her only daughter and working full-time. Ms. Blackman shared her account of the goals and expectations she held for her daughter. The following statement below describes the sentiments of this mother:

My expectation was that my daughter would graduate on time, go to college, and learn some autonomy. I am an educator, so I held high expectations for my daughter. Also, she had to learn some ‘hands-on skills.’ I talked to her about some of the things that we could possibly do. So, she ended up going part-time to school. She ended up enrolling at a CTE school for dentistry... I wanted her to get some experience in a career, or a field, where I felt she could grow, or be successful in. So, the expectation was don’t just go to school, or feel like what’s the purpose? So, when she started going through that program, she really enjoyed it. I just wanted to provide support whenever, or wherever, she needed it.

Ms. Jones is a 49-year-old single mother with two other daughters. She earned her college degree while rearing her two daughters and maintaining a full-time job. She recalled her experience while raising her daughters and the goals and expectations she held for them, and particularly the eldest daughter that was attending high school. The sum of her thinking is described in the following statement:

When I grew up, our neighborhood was a caring neighborhood, and the teachers were caring. So that kind of support put a footprint on my life if you will, and I tried to instill this in my daughter as I raised her, mirroring what I experienced, which was a good upbringing …very strong and structured, environment... and education was at the top of the list. It was important. So, as I raised my daughter to be excellent. One of the things
that I would always tell her is that she is not average. And for me, average was not acceptable, you are not an average child, so I don’t expect average from you. You need to do what is above average. Also, I instilled in my daughter, at a young age, the importance of an education. I exposed her to reading at an early age. I aimed high with her.

Ms. Middleton is a 43-year-old single mother of three children who earned a college degree. While rearing her daughter, she managed to work full-time. Ms. Middleton acknowledged her beliefs regarding the goals and expectations she held for her daughter. She reflected upon her earlier expectations and made the following observations:

Throughout school, we weren’t allowed to miss school. I mean, if we were sick, we still had to get up and go to school unless it was serious, and we had to go to the hospital. So, that was one thing I did as well … Throughout school, my daughter was not allowed to miss school. She had to get up, or whatever you have to do, but get up and go to school. I always told her education was first. Boys come and go. Her grades were important… I never, ever, allowed my child to bring a C into the house because I felt like if she got a C that was average. So, I told her to always try for A’s. If you got a B here and there, you know that’s okay.

Ms. Valentine is a 46-year-old single mother with two children. She is currently earning a college degree and said that she always worked full-time while rearing her daughter. She confirmed the goals and expectations she held for her daughter. She noted the following:

I believe what you have at home, you apply it to your children as well, or you should anyway. . . . I was very hands-on and still very hands-on with my daughter. At school, I was always present. I built a rapport with teachers and counselors, and they had access to
my email and my cell phone . . . even the campus officers . . . I’ve been holding, setting, and creating expectations for my daughter since her birth. However, the one thing that I made sure was that her goals [course assignments] were always completed by at least 7:15 p.m. The homework, or whatever assignment. It had to be completed by that time so you can be prepared for tomorrow. Relax your brain and get some proper sleep. I was very adamant about this and am still a supporter of this process to this day. She’s still in college.

Ms. DeVine is a 51-year-old single mother with one daughter. She holds a college degree and has worked full-time while rearing her daughter. The thoughts of Ms. DeVine are reflected in her feelings expressed below:

No Cs . . . Strive for excellence… It was never a question about whether she was going to school. She clearly had to be on her death bed, or whatever. This practice just became eminent with her because she didn’t like to catch up. She didn’t like to miss a test. It was just phenomenal how she just didn’t want to miss school. She went to school every day, and I don’t know that she wanted to go to school every time, but her focus was just not to get behind. So, yeah, that was clearly my expectation . . . I wanted better for her than I had for myself. I just wanted some consistency concerning her education.

Ms. Cook is a 42-year-old single mother with two daughters and two sons. She earned a college degree before rearing her daughter. This parent always worked full-time. Ms. Cook discussed her experiences regarding the goals and expectations she held for her daughter concerning post-secondary education in this manner:

The expectations I held for my daughter while attending high school were to be ‘drama-free’, as much as possible, self-sufficient and motivated. . . I’m not the parent you know
when you get to a certain point it is for you to monitor your grades. I’m not going to ask you. I’m not getting on the computer and logging in and checking. It’s for you. It’s yours. You own it. And so, the expectation was that you stay on top of things and whatever you need, you let me know in advance, and you know you keep me posted . . . stay focused. So, I guess the main expectations [for her] would be to stay focused and self-motivated.

Ms. Davies is a 50-year-old single mother with two daughters. She earned her college degree and worked a full-time job while raising her family. Ms. Davies recalled the thoughts about the goals and expectations she held for her daughter while attending high school. These sentiments are expressed below:

I didn’t sugar-coat nothing. I talked to her about everything: sex, everything. Boys, everything. I didn’t sugar-coat anything. . . But, as for parenting her with discipline, you do respect your elders no matter who they are. I wanted my daughter to be herself. Be a leader. Don’t worry about being popular because you’re going to be popular without even trying to be popular. . . Just make friends with anybody. She did good in school. . . I never degraded her about her grades. . . In high school, there’s enough pressure as it is.

Research Question #2: How did African American mothers describe their parenting styles that supported their daughters while in high school?

Ms. Eiland shared her parenting style that supported her daughter in high school. In this regard, she mentioned the following:

It was strict. It was thorough. It was purposeful, and it was in love because I knew what she [Melissa] had the capacity to do. She was able to rise to that occasion. When she graduated from high school, Melissa had four full-ride opportunities that she could go to...
college. . . I put my life on hold, so to speak, and gave up some things. . . The majority of my time was structured so that I could be available to my daughter so that she could concentrate on her academics and extracurricular activities.

Ms. Branch expressed the parenting style that supported her daughter while in high school. She identified several activities that were important to her. They included the following:

I think she, Meeka, had a fun experience. The fun of it is that I wanted her to make sure that each following year she experienced something that you wouldn’t normally experience when you were in high school. . . I wanted to make sure that she had fun with her peers and did some of the same things that I did growing up. These things included being a member of a social club, or part of a sporting event, or something that would make her have a memorable experience.

Ms. Curren expressed the parenting style she incorporated that supported her daughter’s high school experience. She cited the following activities:

Just believing and depending on God was my style. He’ll get you through. So, when you think about religion, you think about her respecting her teachers and working hard, and choosing friends wisely. . . Looking back and thinking, just following those steps I just mentioned, were important. That’s half the battle right there. That’s gonna definitely impact your parenting style.

Ms. Winne talked about the parenting style that she supported while her daughter was in high school. She cited the following examples:

I wanted her [Val] to have a good self-image. . . Because my mom had me on a diet since I was in 4th grade. I said I wanted Val to have a good image of herself, because if you feel good about yourself, then you will do well. I have always been that type of person that
thought well. . . So, first, I wanted Val to never ever have the thought there’s nothing that she couldn’t do.

Ms. Holiday recalled her parenting style that supported her daughter in high school. She cited several examples to describe her approach. They were:

I believe that my parenting had a serious impact on her [Amanda] because she thought I was the meanest person in the world, but also because I think for me when she was participating in some of her youth groups, or activities, or even sporting events at school. She knew that I was the only person that would come pick her up from school. . . I was the only person she could depend upon, so she knew that I had her best interest at heart, and she wanted to do well. I think she wanted to please me and her grandmother too.

Ms. Gregory recanted her parenting style while her daughter was attending high school: Boys can wait! I think that advice I gave her really got to Laiyne because she was able to focus more, and was more active in school. . . I think like giving her advice also made her active in her community. She knew that she didn’t need a boyfriend to be successful, and her main priority was getting her education and graduating from high school. So, the advice I gave her was ‘books before boys.’ I truly believe this really had an impact on her.

Ms. Blackman reflected on her parenting style that supported her daughter while in high school. She recanted the following:

My parenting beliefs of ‘lead by example’ impacted her [Egypt] in a positive way because when she sat in those classes. It wasn’t a sprint. It was a marathon. She knew she was working towards a goal, and the ultimate goal was to finish high school. Egypt
had the support that I provided her and various people in the family that we're able to support her. I believe she didn’t want to let family members and herself down.

Ms. Jones recanted her parenting style in this particular manner, as stated by her following observation:

I don’t want to say strict when it comes to education, but being in a school setting, and behaving in a certain way was not negotiable to me. . . I was like a no-nonsense mom. . . Respect was one thing. Respect your educators, respect yourself, and just …perform! Do well. Have fun. Do well…I believe in structure and discipline. That’s how I ran my household. When you get home from school, the first thing you do is to do your homework. I think that as Karen got more involved in different activities, things became a little different. The main goal for her was for her to finish her homework and study. So, structure and discipline, along with love, was the parenting style I employed.

Ms. Middleton expressed her parenting style in this manner:

She [Dee Dee] always talked about furthering her education. So, instilling in her that she had to, of course, get good grades in order to go to college because you have to get accepted . . . letting her know that she could be whatever she wanted to be . . . maintaining good attendance in school, good grades. I was always pushing her. It was like she cared more about her grades, so I didn’t even have to ask for progress reports any longer. She was bringing them to me. I think it was embedded in her.

Ms. Valentine had somewhat of a different parenting style than the previously mentioned single African American mothers. She expressed her style in this way:

My daughter’s safety comes to mind. . . she [Jessica] knows she’s safe. She knows someone is caring for her physical well-being, her mental being, and her spiritual being.
She’s doesn’t have to wonder if I’m coming or if someone’s going to be there to support her. She always knows that she’s covered in the parenting area whether it’s by me, her father, or a friend, or anyone from church. . . I always think that a strong spiritual connection also helps kids. Well, in this case, my daughter, in her high and low days, she came out all right due to my support values and support system.

Ms. Devine expressed her parenting style in this manner:

I was constantly on her [Elise]. Initially, in the 9th grade, she was like, ‘all right, mom; all right, mom!’ But as time progressed in high school, she realized that my persistence was important for her to get good grades. She not only got them in 9th grade, she continued them through the 12th grade. She told me, ‘I’m doing this for me now.’ So, the lightbulb came on early. . . She just realized. ‘I have to do this. There’s nothing else out here for me. We already have two strikes against us. I’m Black, and I’m a minority, so you know that I have to prove whatever other people are thinking, prove them wrong, and prove them different. We have to succeed at all costs.’

Ms. Cook discussed her parenting style that supported her daughter in high school. Be advised, however, that the philosophy of this mother appears to be somewhat influenced by the movie, “The Help” (2011), where the Black nanny whispers to this small White child with disabilities these words of encouragement, “You is kind, yου is smart, you is important.” So, Ms. Cook’s advice to her daughter was this:

As situations would come up, as they do, whether it is with girls, drama, or boyfriends, or teacher situations, I would use the words, ‘You are brave, you are strong, you are intelligent.’ I wouldn’t give her the answer or answer right away or tell her what I think she should do. I would always ask her questions. Well, how are you going to handle this?
Or, how does that make you feel? Sometimes I would ask, ‘am I hearing you say this?’ Just posing questions helped to guide her. I guess that was a belief as a parent, that you can do anything you put your mind to because you are brave, you are strong, and you are intelligent.

Ms. Davies reflected on her parenting style. She recounted the following event pertaining to her daughter:

There was a situation where my daughter was being bullied. She came and told me, and I was like, ‘you know what, Nicole, not that I want you to get into it, but here’s what I want you to do. Tell one of your friends about the situation. Tell them this stuff is bothering you. I said you ask for help. . . You want to stand with your friend, or you want to stand alone in your moment? A lot of friends you thought were your friend don’t have your back. They don’t support you. They walked away, but that one friend.’

Research Question #3: How did African American mothers describe their school involvement during their daughters’ high school experience?

This research question was specifically designed to determine how these single African American mothers were involved in their daughters’ school-related activities, e.g., curricula or extra-curricular activities. Parents were asked to describe what they felt were their daughters’ involvement in curricular and extra-curricular activities. The sentiments of participating respondents regarding their daughters’ involvement in school-related activities are discussed in this subsection:

Ms. Eiland described her involvement in school in this manner:

I was available in high school. I assisted my daughter in selecting her courses. I wanted to make sure that these courses would be challenging . . . I attended parent-teacher
conferences, attended all school events. I attended all of her extra-curricular activities ranging from cheerleading to dance; everything that she was involved in. I was involved in just making sure that I continued that foundation that I laid from an early age when she was born, basically. Just being one of those parents that is involved in all aspects . . .

Ms. Branch confirmed her school involvement during her daughter’s high school experience by citing the following examples:

I worked the majority of the time she was in school. I was not able to attend curriculum activities because that was the time that I had to go to work, usually from 6:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. So, I did not get a chance to participate in or support her. There was nothing that she didn’t come home to tell me that she wanted to be involved in that I didn’t support her . . . I attended Honor Roll ceremonies and any other recognition ceremonies. When they came up, I was there. . . I was always there for track and field, the volleyball ceremonies because she got honors and accolades in these areas.

Ms. Curren noted her school involvement included such activities as assemblies, honor roll, merit roll, and other recognition programs:

. . . I really had some smart kids, and they still are. I’m very proud of my daughter, in general . . . As for extra-curricular activities, she was in Honor Society . . . She also participated in sports such as softball, volleyball, and basketball, sports banquet, etc. Yep, lots of different banquets, and I was always there.

Ms. Winne stated her school involvement included such activities as the following:

I did the recognition ceremonies. She stayed on the Honor Roll, nine through 12. During her whole four years of high school, she participated in the Appelette Youth Group under the MKMs. They had a lot of fundraisers to support scholarship programs. Often, they
would ask parents to put on luncheons for the Appelettes. I would always participate in these requests.

Ms. Holiday acknowledged her school involvement in many different ways during her daughter’s high school experience. For example, she cited the following examples:

I definitely attended all of her parent-teacher conferences. I attended her junior and senior year National Honor Society ceremonies. When she was a senior, I attended an award scholarship ceremony. I attended her volleyball games. I remember when she was in the ninth grade and was on the track and field teams. I went to one of the Track and Field events. She was a cheerleader, and I went to some of the basketball games to see her cheer . . . She was a member of a school youth group.

Ms. Gregory shared that her school involvement included the following activities: I always volunteered to serve lunch. I would run the store at sporting events. I would volunteer to bring food up there when they had events . . . I participated in cleaning up the neighborhood as my daughter would want me to come along with her and volunteer. I can’t tell you how many times I sold chocolate for school fundraisers . . . Another one of the ceremonies I supported her was basketball. They had a Seniors’ Night, where she was awarded for three record-breaking block shots in basketball.

Ms. Blackman recalled her daughter’s experiences in high school while also reflecting upon the role she played in supporting her daughter as she participated in numerous curricular and extra-curricular activities. She cited several activities that her daughter was involved in high school:

She always made the Honor Roll. She was student of the month, so I was always at these events -all the time. I was there for every marking period, or end of semester event.
Treece was also a member of the tennis team, swim team, and she also did Power and also HULSA.

Ms. Jones displayed a lot of enthusiasm and support for her daughter’s education. She indicated she had a great degree of involvement in her daughter’s high school experience. In reflection, she made the following assertions:

For curriculum events, I participated in any and all types of academic activities that she had, such as awards and honor programs. I definitely made a point to show my presence. I feel my presence helped to motivate her to continue them and to excel. I was more into academic activities. I also attended as many sports activities of my daughter that I could. These activities included such events as basketball, volleyball, cheerleading.

Ms. Middleton cited numerous activities that her daughter was involved in. She indicated that she was involved in many of her daughter’s curricular and extra-curricular activities. She noted the following:

My daughter was an athlete, so I was more active in her extra-curricular activities than the curricular ones. However, when she was in her junior and senior years, she was chosen to be a youth leader. Sherie participated in this class where they went to East Hill State University monthly. There were only two students from the district that were chosen to participate in this program. My daughter was one of them.

Ms. Valentine recalled that while her daughter was in high school, she had the opportunity to participate in several school-related activities. She mentioned such activities that included the following:

The things that I supported my daughter was in the Business Club and the Lawyer Legal Club . . . I was not only involved physically but also monetarily. If they needed
something, I would contribute to this worthy cause. If they needed a shirt, or a function like a car wash, anything, I would always try and lend my time.

Ms. DeVine discussed her school involvement during her daughter’s high school experience. This included the following:

Okay. I was always involved. I always wanted to know what was going on. I stayed abreast of her . . . Regarding parent-teacher conferences, whether I was there or not, I participated in fundraisers, or whatever function was needed. My daughter was in a choir ensemble where students had to try out for a position. In addition, she ran track. I was, always, ‘Oh yeah!’ there and didn’t miss any of her track meets. I was her personal cheerleader, so my involvement was always wanting to be there to let the other parents know I was involved in my daughter’s education, and her extra activities aside from the academics.

Ms. Cook shared her school involvement during her daughter’s high school experience. She wanted to share the information that is illustrated below:

Regarding my daughter’s curricular matters, she was on the Principal’s Advisory Committee. She was a member of the School Law Club, The Educator’s Club, and the National Honor Society. There was a lot of work they did with the water crisis in Flint. I was at every program, every induction, every whatever what do you call these ‘academic and awards assemblies’? I was there at everything that she did.

Ms. Davies talked about how she supported her daughter while she was in high school. Her involvement was described in this manner:

I attended numerous ceremonies, but my daughter didn’t really care for them. When we would go, we didn’t go to all of them, she’d be like mom, ‘I don’t really care. It’s just a
She played AAU Volleyball. I took her to all her practices and went to her tournaments games.

**Research Question #4: Describe any school or community programs African American mothers participated in that supported their daughters’ education and social development while completing high school?**

My fourth research question was designed to determine whether African American mothers participated in school, or community, programs that supported their daughter’s education and social development while attending high school. The comments obtained from parents were varied and informative. Their voices are discussed below.

Ms. Eiland indicated that she participated in various school and community programs while her daughter was in high school. She cited the following examples:

While in high school, I supported my daughter when she was the President of the National Honor Society. I showed up for her and participated whenever I was available.

. . . When it comes to community groups, my daughter enjoyed being involved with the youth group at church. I liked having a youth minister who you knew how to talk about some of those things that she didn’t feel real comfortable talking to me about like healthy relationships and what to expect as well as keeping God first and foremost in all your decisions. It was important getting and seeking wisdom from other adults and not necessarily your peers . . . Another group, the Applette youth group, a part of the MKM sorority, helped my daughter foster togetherness . . . all of those. I attended their events and supported them.

Ms. Branch mentioned the school or community programs that she participated in during her daughter’s high school experience. They included the following programs:
I participated in ceremonies and the athletic scholarships programs . . . She was very motivated. She wanted to always be busy and active in things that were in the community and being part of those basketball teams, volleyball teams, and track teams. I was there when I could be if I didn’t have to work.

Ms. Curren recalled that the school, or community programs, that she participated in during her daughter’s high school experience included the following:

- I was there participating during Homecoming and National Honors Society programs.
- There also was a Class Advisor, Junior Achievement, or even sports coaches. These individuals were helpful in shaping and molding children. Our church’s Sunday school teachers were always there to support my daughter and other children.

Ms. Winne reflected on the school or community programs that she participated in during her daughter’s high school experience. She mentioned the following:

- Basketball taught her leadership, and I was on the sidelines cheering her on at games . . . I enjoyed watching how church programs and the experiences that she received helped [in school] taught her about values and life. I volunteered with her during community service activities with the Appelette youth group.

Ms. Holiday noted that she participated in various community programs and services during her daughter’s high school experience. She mentioned the following activities:

- I attended ceremonies of the National Honor Society . . . I saw the academic ceremonies and programs, like dual enrollment, helped her to focus academically because she wanted to go to college, and these programs would prepare her for that” . . . I was also proud to support her as an Appelette Community Youth Group member. This group played a major part in her leadership role in terms of holding the role of secretary.
Ms. Gregory indicated that she participated in various community programs and services during her daughter’s high school experience. She mentioned the following:

My daughter received a lot of support from her dad, her AAU Coach, and me too. I took her to bible group studies, volunteered for fundraisers at her school, and her dad and coaches gave her advice . . . I was happy to do my part wherever.

Ms. Blackman stated that she participated in various school and community programs during her daughter’s tenure in high school. She noted the following:

Taking her to swim meets and watching her swim. She was on the Sharks’ Team at the YMCA. She also had Power, the community leadership program, where she developed relationships with individuals that were in the East Hill Community Foundation group. I would talk to her and be amazed at her experience being a teen on a community foundation team.

Ms. Jones added that the school or community programs that she participated in during her daughter’s high school experience were somewhat varied. She noted the following:

I was very active in supporting my daughter when she served as a Student Ambassador for the school district. The community group, called ‘Act One’ focused on making the community aware of how important it is….to continue to have their school in this community’ open and not closed/dissolved . . . My daughter took on a leadership role where she and other students researched, studied, and presented their fact-findings to the Board of Education. I thought that kind of experience helped to hone her leadership skills. I really enjoyed going to the meetings to watch and listen to the presentations at the Board of Education meetings.
Ms. Middleton talked about her participation in various school or community groups while her daughter was attending high school. This experience included the following activities:

I cheered my daughter on at her Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) Basketball games. AAU really taught her sisterhood, working together, and life skills. I was around putting in time for the team’s movie nights, carwash fundraisers, and dinner sales. As a team member, I saw my daughter grow as a communicator and begin talking to others from different ethnic backgrounds.

Ms. Valentine shared the school or community programs that she participated in during her daughter’s high school experience. She recalled the following:

I can say that the most important group I experienced and worked with was the church youth group. They hold you accountable and expect you to be on time . . . It’s all about time management, and it’s family-oriented. You don’t have to worry or stress yourself out as a single mother, especially a single, African American mother. I didn’t worry about who’s going to drop my daughter off, or, who’s going to pick her up, and when there were occasions when I had to work that day or didn’t have the money to take that day off. I made sure my schedule was always set-up around her schedule because I’m a mother and believe that my daughter will be safe even when there are days that I am unable to attend a function.

Ms. DeVine discussed her school or community programs that she participated in during her daughter’s high school experience. They included the following:

It probably was her community involvement with a gospel sign language choir that I was impressed with being a part of her. She got community service hours, and I got to travel around town and the state to hear them sing and see them perform in sign language . . .
her involvement in AAU Track was a great time for me too. I saw my daughter compete and qualify for the Junior Olympics. I was always excited to sit in the stands at the track meets . . . Yes, it was phenomenal!

Ms. Cook talked about the school or community programs she participated in during her daughter’s high school experience. She mentioned the following:

I supported my daughter with the Principal’s Advisory Committee. She was involved in the Law club, Educator’s club, the National Honor Society, and a dance team that she created and recruited classmates to participate in. I even volunteered my time with local and statewide projects to show my support for my daughter and her school.

Ms. Davies recalled her school or community programs that she participated in while her daughter was attending high school. These activities included the following:

She was on the honor roll a couple of times. I think six times when she was in high school, six semesters. As mentioned earlier, she really didn’t care to be a part of the ceremonies at school because she felt it was just a certificate. I explained to her that I understood her thinking. Regardless, I would still attend the ceremonies, both high school and AAU volleyball games, to support my daughter and show her that I was a ‘proud mom.’

**Emerging Themes**

The meaning of themes is described as “attribute, descriptor, element, and concept . . . a group of repeating ideas” (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2015, p. 101). My phenomenological analysis produced eight major themes that occurred in this study. I established these themes when at least 9 of the 13 respondents indicated a shared experience. For instance, DeVault (2019) stresses the importance of data categories and how they should be
made internally consistent. Additionally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) expresses in their book, “Naturalistic Inquiry” that there are rules that must be established to designate category properties that justify the inclusion of each data bit.

As a result, each of the themes was supported by evidence provided by participating respondents. The eight themes that emerged from these participants included are:

1. Education is Key to Advancing Life Skills;
2. Being Raised in a Two-Parent Home is Helpful;
3. Daughters Were Expected to Attend School Daily;
4. Family Structure and Stability is Important;
5. Daughters’ Continuous School Attendance is Necessary;
6. Mothers Participated in School Curricular Activities;
7. Mothers Participated in Community Programs that Supported Student Achievement; and
8. Mothers Participated in Extracurricular Activities and Supportive School Programs.

Table 4 provides a graphical depiction of the eight themes that emerged from the response of African American mothers concerning the rearing of their daughters in a single-headed household. According to these parents, these parental guidelines, or support systems, were vitally important to their daughters’ eventual success in completing high school within a four-year time frame.
Emerging Themes from Mothers’ Lived Experiences and the Influences that Lead to the Successful Outcome for their Daughter’s High School Graduation

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Data obtained from participating African American mothers that reared their daughters in a single-headed household are provided below to expand upon the themes that emerged in this study.

**Theme 1.0: Education is Key to Advancing in Life**

The first theme that emerged from the eight respondents showed the importance African American mothers held for education. Ten of the 13 respondents indicated, to some degree, the relative importance of education to one’s success. Ms. Eiland observed that education was the
vehicle through which her daughter will be “provided a better life through education.” Ms. Holiday reminisced about early childhood and recalled how “hard her mother worked starting as a Teacher’s Aide to eventually going to college and becoming a certified classroom teacher.” She concluded her comments by expressing the following sentiment regarding the vision she had for her daughter, “wanting more for my daughter, persevering, and never giving up.”

Ms. DeVine commented on her parenting style in this manner, “I wanted better for my daughter. I did this by being consistent and expressing how important education is.” Ms. Cook spoke about her childhood experience and how it impacted her parenting style. “In my parents’ eyes, they always wanted something more, something greater. That’s why I’m always supporting her and her siblings.”

In summary, participants’ parenting style was highly reflective of their lived experiences and the dreams they had for their daughters. It was obvious, based on the responses of participants, that they have incorporated practices based on their lived experiences from their own parents. Participants reported that they are using similar practices while parenting their daughters, coupled with placing focus on education as a means of advancing their opportunities for future success.

**Theme 2.0: Being Raised in a Two-Parent Home is Helpful**

In each of the two interviews held with participants, they shared their stories about how they, as a single mother raised in a two-parent home, received support from their parents while rearing their daughters as they completed high school. Nine of the 13 participants described their childhood while growing up in a two-parent household.

Ms. Branch recounted the following:
I had a happy childhood growing up with five other siblings. We had a two-parent household that had both mother and father. I always felt that I was always going to have a two-parent household for my daughter, but that did not happen . . . It impacted me because I wanted better for my daughter than I had for myself. I didn’t want her to grow up as a statistic. As a mother, I nurtured and wanted her to know that she was growing up in the church and would grow up in a somewhat stable household with only one parent. I didn’t ever want her to feel like she was lost by not having a father.

Ms. Eiland talked about her early childhood. She voiced these comments about her early childhood:

My God-parents raised me. Neither one of them completed high school. In fact, I think the highest grade either one of them received was a 7th-grade education. When they adopted me, I think I was two years old. The one major topic they stressed to me was getting a good education. So, unless I was severely sick, I went to school faithfully every single day. This is one of the strong components as a parent that I emphasized while raising my daughter.

To add to the lived experiences, Ms. Curren discussed her childhood memory:

As I was growing up, I would always see my mother and father providing and working hard on my behalf. It seemed like it was always easy, but I’m sure they had their struggles. Also, they always provided for us. We always had shelter. We didn’t have to worry about anything. We always had shoes on our feet, although we had to share something with an older sister, or something like that, they were always great providers. So, we never wanted for anything.
While Misses Blackman, Jones, DeVine, and Cook were not raised in a two-parent home, the remaining participant, Ms. Winne, stated that by having both her parents live in the home while she was a single mother was a positive factor for her daughter:

It was different because my parents were my help. So, of course, I went off to my job. My parents got her [Val] to school, and my parents took care of all the homework and everything... My mother was always taking classes, and my dad was always taking classes. So, it almost became that same similar family unit I grew up in.

**Theme 3.0: Daughters were Expected to Attend School Daily**

With the third emerging theme, 8 of the 13 mothers felt they expected their daughters to attend school every day, no matter what happened! The goals and expectations Ms. Curren had for her daughter were to, “go to school, get your lessons, and be respectful... but mostly go to school, and I will take care of everything else.” Ms. Holiday voiced similar feelings, “Go to school every day... If I have to get up and go to work every day, you will get up and go to school.” Ms. Gregory’s expectations for her daughter were, “go to school every day, don’t get pregnant, do your homework, and do not get behind in your assignments.”

In summary, the comments obtained from African American mothers in single-headed households can be summarized in the following sentiments to their daughters: Attend school no matter what; books (education) before boys; set goals; be active; join clubs; play sports.

**Theme 4.0: Family Structure and Stability is Important**

Eight of the 13 responding single-headed household mothers mentioned the importance of structure/stability in the home. Ms. Eiland, for example, stated the following: “My biggest obligation was in the belief that from a Christian background, ‘you raise a child up in the way
they should go’ was one of my strong beliefs.” She continued by saying, “you were born to be
the very best you could. Know what your potential is and do not expect anything less than that.”

Ms. Middleton felt that structure and stability were important to her in the rearing of her
daughter in a single-headed household. She opined:

I never ever allowed my child to bring a C into the house. I felt like if she got a C, then
that was average . . . So, I told her to always try for A’s. What I did was this, I would
make her give progress reports every week. Sometimes it was every two weeks. If I saw
a B-. Then, I would remind her that a B- is almost a C, so do something about it ‘right
here, right now’ before it gets to a C.

Ms. Valentine made the following observation:

I’ve always instilled [in my daughter] to do her very best. But, if you get a C by chance,
you have to show me in every way what you did to get that C. Like, did you ask for
tutoring? Did you ask for help after class? Did you talk to me about what you were
struggling with so I could better assist you? You have to show me that you really made
every effort if you did get a C . . . I’m very big on grades.

Ms. Cook described her account of this phenomenon of structure/stability:

Drama-free, self-sufficient, and motivated. I’m that parent. I’ve never been the parent;
you know when you get to a certain point, it is for you to monitor your own grades. It is
for you to get on the computer and log in and check. It’s for you to do. It’s yours. You
have to own it.

Theme 5.0: Daughters Continuous School Attendance is Necessary

This fifth theme involved 8 of 13 participants. In this regard, African American mothers
were asked to explain their experience with their daughters’ daily attendance in school. These
parents expressed the importance of attending school every day, no matter the reason because attending college was the ultimate goal. Ms. Eiland shared her innermost feelings about enrolling her daughter into advanced or higher-level courses. The expectation was for her daughter to “finish high school, earn a full-ride scholarship, attend college, get scholarships to pay for these costs, and Mommy will pay for the extras. She did that!”

Ms. Branch expressed how she supported her daughter by instilling the importance of the following beliefs:

Earn good grades in high school to go to college because we don’t have the money to send you to college. Focus on going to school daily, maintain good grades, and play sports because they will get you to college.

Ms. Holiday expressed strong beliefs about the expectations she held for her daughter. She vividly expressed the expectations as described in this elocution:

You will do well in school. You will earn As and Bs. Begin to think about what you want to do after high school. Look into careers in the areas of math and science because you will graduate and go to college because your grandmother, my mother, went to college, and you will too. [My goal is to have] three generations [with college degrees].

Theme 6.0: Mothers Participated in Recognition/Awards Ceremonies

Thirteen of 13 participants described stories relating to their involvement in curricular activities that supported their daughters in high school, as well as extra-curricular activities. Specifically, 10 of 13 respondents participated in recognition award ceremonies that highlighted the success and accomplishments of their daughters. Ms. Branch mentioned the types of curricular activities she participated in regarding her daughter’s school recognition ceremonies. In this manner, the respondent expressed the following observation:
I worked a lot during the time of the academic events, but when I did attend, I was there for her Honor Roll Award programs, National Honor Society ceremonies, and any Student of the Month recognition programs. The ones I couldn’t make, she would share the excitement with me when she got home.

Ms. Jones described her involvement:

I was present at every awards program that involved academics and honor programs. I was there. I made sure I attended so that my daughter would continue to be motivated. When it comes to education, this was a non-negotiable. I always wanted her to have a fighting chance to succeed. Do better than me!

Ms. Middleton made the following observation:

I worked on my daughter feeling loved because of the relationship she had with her father. He was in and out of her life. So, I supported her. I showed up for her leadership programs at the local university where she was selected by her principal. I was at her Honor Roll ceremonies, her Senior, Academic scholarship Ceremony, and the program that showcased her as the Youth Leader of the Year Award for her graduating class. I was there supporting her.

Theme 7.0: Mothers Participated in Community Programs that Supported Student Achievement

With the seventh theme, Participation in Community Programs, 10 out of the 13 participants identified community youth groups, church youth groups, community sports, and clubs were pertinent to their daughters’ personal growth and academic achievement.

Ms. Jones recalled:

I always expected my daughter to be excellent. It came together for me that I was doing
what I was supposed to when she decided to participate in a community program organized by the Board of Education. She was selected to be a Student Ambassador. It focused on making the community aware of why her school shouldn’t be dissolved. My daughter invited me to participate in the audience one evening to listen to her research results because she and her classmates had to research and study facts, as well as present before the community their findings. This opportunity honed in on her leadership skills. She was exposed to different leaders in the community, presented her voice among her peers, and built confidence. . . Even with her involvement in sports like track, basketball, and volleyball, I supported her with getting to practices on time but really saw the lightbulb go off with the ‘As One’ Leadership Group.

Ms. DeVine expressed her experience in these words:

Once my daughter realized her capability and understood she was well-equipped against her classmates from other ethnic backgrounds, things began to flow smoothly. I noticed this when she became involved in a community Gospel Sign Language choir. I loved to travel and show up at her performances. She not only earned community service hours; she got the chance to travel across the town and state with peers her age 17 and younger. The opportunity set the tone for demeanor and thought process. It taught discipline. It kept her out of trouble like smoking and drinking. The Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) Track Team was also great for my daughter too. It also taught her discipline because she had to attend daily, which was fine with her. After all, her goal, and the team’s ultimate goal, was to win.

Ms. Valentine recalled:
My job was demanding, and it was difficult for me to make a lot of my daughter’s events, but I was hands-on and I made it the events when I could. I did encourage my daughter to be involved. She really loved dance and participated in a local dance company. I remember helping out being a backstage Mom one year during her recital. She was also involved at school, but the most supportive group she worked with was the church youth. I, and the church, encouraged time management, family-centered values, being on time, and accountability. With any activity, the expectation was always that grades had to be A’s or B’s, but I preferred A’s.

**Theme 8.0: Mothers Participated in Extracurricular and Supportive School Programs**

The final theme, Supportive School Programs, became apparent as 9 of the 13 participants (or 69.2%) identified numerous school programs that supported their daughters’ personal growth and academic achievement. These programs included the National Honor Society, International Baccalaureate Programming, and enrolling in advanced classes.

Ms. Eiland recalled her earlier recollection of these supportive school programs:

I advocated for my daughter when she was in high school. She was always in gifted and talented programs. I remember when she was enrolled in a class that I knew she would breeze through. I met with her counselor and had her class changed because it wasn’t challenging enough. The expectation was that she was going to college, so she had to have a strong academic schedule. When she wasn’t able to take any other classes at the high school level, I was able to set-up meetings and advocate for her to take advanced classes at the college level. Another difference was made with her being a part of the National Honor Society (NHS). Her Advisor was great at planting seeds of success. She was a teacher in the school who really showed a passion for kids and went above and
beyond, taking time with my daughter and other students about their future and goals. I recall attending parents meetings that explained what we parents needed to do to as far as volunteer activities that counted toward involvement hours for our students for NHS. I was there participating where I was needed.

Ms. Winne shared:

My daughter was a member of the National Honor Society, but her Honors English teacher was very important in her life. She recognized her love for writing. She was able to work on her writing, poetry, and speaking. My daughter actually was involved in a writing competition and I was so proud that day to be present and see her confidence level sky rocket. I was happy with my daughter’s International Baccalaureate program at her school. It supported me and family’s beliefs, ‘we try to teach you, but if you don’t know what your goals are gonna be, but if you’re gonna wash cars, take pride in it. Be the best; if college isn’t for you, so what? Whatever you do, be the best that you can be at it!

Ms. Blackman discussed her feelings:

While I worked to provide emotional support for my daughter, I wanted her to know she could do more than what society said she could as a black girl. There was a YMCA swim team, ‘the Sharks’ that my daughter worked with. When I would attend the swim meets, I saw how it gave her an outlet with her friends. They studied together, motivated, and encouraged each other. Sharks gave her ‘something to be a part of.’ There was also a community program she thrived in called ‘Force.’ I would help read some of her project work. I appreciated how the group leaders helped her with her self-esteem, pride in your community, and a sense of belonging for a greater cause.
Subthemes

Looking for themes during a phenomenological analysis usually involves working rigorously through texts and identifying connections. The more the same concept emerges, the more likely it is a theme. On the other hand, “techniques that apply to aggregate data such as word co-occurrences and metacoding are particularly good at identifying more abstract themes,” resulting in the development of subthemes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 19).

In this study, two subthemes emerged after reviewing the data. Again, from the perspective of Lincoln and Guba (1985), after “devising rules that describe category properties,” the subthemes in this study represented less than 60% of the responses provided by the participants. The subthemes related to (1) parent-teacher conferences, and (2) completion of high school on time.

Table 5 provides a recapitulation of the subthemes found within my study that provide additional detailed and rich descriptions of how the participants shared their lived experiences regarding their daughters’ completion of high school on time.

Table 5

Emergence of Subthemes

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Mothers Attended Parent-Teacher Conferences

All 13 participants recalled attending Parent-Teacher conferences (PTC); however, 7 of the 13 participants shared that this was vitally important to their daughter’s success. Ms. Eiland, Ms. Branch, and Ms. Cook indicated that their attendance during Parent-Teacher conferences helped support their daughters while in high school. Ms. Eiland expressed:

Parent-Teacher conferences, school events . . . everything she was involved in I was involved in everything . . . I was one of those parents that was involved in all aspects to make sure that my daughter’s classes were challenging. I even met with her teachers, the principal, and even had to have some special consultation conferences to have her moved to higher level classes.

Ms. Branch also commented she attended Parent-Teacher conferences:

I worked a lot but I would meet with her teachers and talk about what I could do to support her and find out about how talkative she was in class but on track with her grades and assignments . . . I was always ‘in the know’ with what she was doing so conferences was where I learned about it.

Ms. Cook recalled:

I was at every conference, meeting, program, every induction . . . academic awards assemblies, any and everything that she did I was there. At Parent conferences is when I would find out about my daughter being selected to participate in certain school programs and recognized for her talents.

Mothers Expected their Daughters to Complete High School on Time

Each participant expressed positive, parental goals and expectations for their daughters. However, six of the responding 13 participants shared their personal experiences about the
expectations they held for their daughters regarding the completion of high school. For example, Ms. Gregory stated her goals and expectations for her daughter by “finishing high school without getting pregnant,” and “earning good grades where you can go to college for free . . . go to school every day and don’t get behind so you can graduate when you suppose to.” Ms. Blackman explained she held “high” expectations for her daughter. She wanted her to graduate on time, go to college, and enroll in a Career Technical Education (CTE) program for something like Dentistry so she could connect to a career opportunity for hands-on experiences.

**Chapter IV Summary**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experiences of single African American mothers who were the head of their households. This study identified strategies these single African American mothers took to ensure the successful completion of high school of their daughters in four years. Findings in this study suggested that participants conveyed many of the same ideals, parenting beliefs, challenges, goals, expectations, etc., that their own parents had instilled in them. Further, participants described the encouragement they provided to their daughters was to focus on education as an important goal for a better life, instilling their own positive childhood experiences they attained from their parents, and attending school every day. These attributes, according to the majority of participating parents, would help their chances of completing high school within four years and enhancing their likelihood for the “good life.”

The data from the interviews revealed that each participant came from similar yet diverse childhoods. Participants shared their stories about how they supported their daughters, all while being a single mother heading their household.
The next and final chapter, Chapter V, Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations for Further Study summarizes my findings and allows me to discuss the conclusions I derived from this study. I delineate how this study supports, refutes, and provides new findings that previous studies have failed to investigate. Finally, Chapter V provides recommendations for further studies.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The overall purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experiences of single African American mothers who served as the head of households, and secondly, describe methods and beliefs they held to ensure their daughters would complete high school within a four-year time period. To investigate this phenomenon, this study relied upon the voices of 13 single African American mothers who had daughters that graduated from two Midwestern high schools during the suggested four-year time period. This study also relied upon the conceptual framework of Epstein (2002).

The one overarching purpose, with four attending sub-purposes, served as the framework for providing answers to the questions posed in this study. Finally, the study concludes by providing recommendations for further study.

Summary of Findings and Connections to Other Research

This phenomenological study involved 13 African American mothers from single-headed households whose daughters were 17 years of age, or older, and who had graduated from two Midwestern urban high schools during the suggested four-year time period.

As the researcher, I developed an interview protocol designed to capture the voices and lived experiences of the 13 participants. Utilizing a qualitative analysis approach, I was able to organize and analyze the data into a manageable system that enabled me to track and organize the data collected (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The eight major themes that emerged from respondents were: (1) education is key to advancing life skills, (2) being raised in a two-parent home is important, (3) daughters were expected to attend school daily, (4) family structure and/or stability is important, (5) daughters’
continuous school attendance is necessary, (6) mothers participated in school-related curricular activities, (7) mothers participated in community programs that supported student achievement, finally, and (8) mothers participated in extra-curricular activities and supportive school programs.

The eight themes, and three sub-themes, captured the voices and experiences of single African American mothers. These themes helped to shed light on the beliefs these mothers held about conditions they needed to incorporate in their parenting responsibilities. According to participating mothers, these beliefs were crucial in helping to ensure their daughters’ successful completion of high school.

In my review of the extant research concerning the role African American mothers from single-headed households, it became obvious that the presence of African American mothers from single-headed households, and the efforts they took to support the education of their daughters, was woefully lacking. This finding supports the argument that more research was needed in this area. Much of the focus on the education of Black children have been limited, primarily, to Black male adolescents (Battle & Coates, 2004; Collins, 1994; Dickerson, 1995). Domenico and Jones (2007) had written about the great strains that are placed on households when there is no father in the home to provide support. In these instances, these mothers are left alone to raise the child single-handedly. This absence results in circumstances that place the child in “at-risk” circumstances that often result in school dropouts, reduced graduation rates, and social deviancy.

There is a plethora of research that supports the claim that mothers, or families, who rely on school and community programs help support high school completion. Wasley et al. (2000) found that when schools establish courteous, caring, constructive relationships and involvement
between home and school, they create an environment that increases student achievement. Other studies assert high expectations (e.g., maternal attitudes, and values) and are important factors that result in children’s success. Some of these factors relate to parents’ aspirations and effective parent involvement (Bettler, Burns, & Strother, 2005; Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997; Huang & Mason, 2008; Parsons, Adler, & Kaczala, 1982). Harris (1999) found that single African American mothers who verbally communicate and demonstrate their beliefs and support of their children’s ability positively impacted their children’s academic achievement. Furthermore, Nolen (2002) found a positive correlation between students’ academic achievement when parents communicate with their children about the value and benefits of education on their own educational outcomes. Additionally, Verduzco-Baker (2017) found when single African American mothers were taught to demonstrate respect, encouragement, and fostering a trustworthy relationship with their children, positive results were revealed in their children’s level of success.

Parental involvement serves as a constant and dynamic catalyst in a child’s life. Findings that support this sentiment have been illustrated in several studies. For example, Hickman, Greenwood & Miller, 1995; Trask-Tate & Cunningham, 2010; Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts & Dornbusch, 1994 concluded that the most effective way parents can support school success is by promoting school engagement, achievement, and authoritative parenting. Finally, Epstein’s six types of involvement show that student learning is enhanced when there is support from home, school, and the community, particularly when there is a focus on parental involvement, volunteering and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 2002; Gonzalez-DeHass, Williams, & Holbein, 2005).
In this final chapter regarding my summary of findings, I will re-state my research questions that categorize and summarize my findings. This chapter intends to provide findings that may help future educators and parents make more informed decisions about how they may help enhance the academic success of their daughters attending Midwestern urban high schools.

**Goals and Expectations**

During the interview of participants, it became increasingly obvious that these single African American mothers held great expectations for their daughters and eventual completion of high school. Participating respondents indicated that education was an extremely important part of their lives, as demonstrated by the illustrative comments: “…There was no option for lower levels of math,” stated Ms. Eiland; “…the goal was always to be the best,” recalled Ms. Branch; “…you will do well in school…earn all As and Bs, so you can think about college,” replied, Ms. Gregory; and “…graduate on time, go to college and learn some autonomy,” asserted Ms. Blackman. Another respondent, Ms. Cook, shared this opinion, “The expectations I held for my daughter while attending high school were to be drama-free…be self-sufficient and motivated…stay on top of things…”

These findings are supported by the research of Epstein (2002, 2009). In this regard, he suggested that internal and external support systems at home and in school, attribute to the increase in educational attainment among African American students (girls included) from single-headed households. These support systems included parental expectations and beliefs, parental involvement, extracurricular activities, and school support personnel. Epstein also asserted that the development of goals for children at each grade level, with home conditions in mind, should be recognized as important contributors to student learning. Gutman and McLloyd (2000) indicated African American parents who held high expectations for their children’s
academic performance, as well as sustained contact with school personnel, witnessed high academic performance (Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997).

Additionally, Floyd (1996) found in his study involving African American females that academic success was largely attributed to a supportive, nurturing family and home environment. Xia (2009) suggested factors that particularly contributed to student achievement for African Americans were related to parental expectations and beliefs, as well as the presence of disciplinary practices and parental involvement. Therefore, factors experienced in rearing African American female adolescents were likely to have a critical influence on student achievement and academic outcomes. Harris (1999) also supports this finding, whereby her earlier study found that parental attitudes and expectations between African American mothers and their children affect their development and are relative to their achievement levels.

**Parenting Style**

According to data collected, participants enthusiastically reflected on their own parenting style. Five of the 13 respondents reported that they provided their daughters with “motherly support” that impacted their parenting style. For instance, one respondent, Ms. Davies, shared thoughts about her daughters’ absent father and how it impacted her parenting style. This mother felt this unwelcome circumstance helped her to become more “balanced, strict, stern, and incorporate a supportive lifestyle.” Together, these attributes helped her to become “a positive figure and role model for her daughter.” Additionally, four of the 13 respondents recalled sharing similar parenting styles in the following manner: (a) lead by example (Ms. Winne), (b) encouraged daughters to stay focused on personal goals (Ms. Cook), (c) priority must be given to graduating from high school (Ms. Devine), and (d) maintaining structure and discipline in their lives (Ms. Valentine). Another respondent, Ms. Branch, voiced her parenting style in this
manner, “I was supportive because I knew she was going to do great things. I wanted my
daughter to be everything she desired . . . I supported her new experiences, whether it was school
clubs, sports, or anything different.” A third respondent (Ms. Winne) remembered her parenting
style experience as being a “routine and supportive mother. I believed in my daughter. I wanted
to work on her self-image and wanted her to feel good about herself.”

These findings support the earlier research of Merten and Henry (2011), who observed
the influence single African American mothers had regarding a strong “mothering presence” that
entailed “providing flexibility, support, and a sense of spirituality” (p. 181). These traits,
according to the authors, helped to develop healthy relationships and personal success in young
African American females. Additionally, Dishion and McMahon (1998) observed that parents
who have strong parenting practices that are authoritative (e.g., have parenting styles that are
affectionate, involved, controlled, and consistent), typically have children who experience
positive academic performances in school.

School Involvement

Responding participants indicated that their involvement included both curricular and
extracurricular activities. For instance, 10 of the 13 participants indicated that they attended both
curricular and extracurricular activities. With respect to curricular activities, responding parents
made their comments known about their level of participation by attending such activities as
awards and recognition ceremonies, parent-teacher activities, participating in various fundraising
functions, etc., as examples to demonstrate their support and involvement of the daughters while
they were in high school. One respondent, Ms. Devine, asserted that she attended all her
daughter’s events by suggesting, “everything that she was involved in.” This parent indicated
that she was involved in just making sure that she continued the foundation that was established
from an early age. Another respondent, Ms. Branch, commented that even though she was not able to attend a lot of her daughter’s events all the time; when the school activities took place, she would communicate with her daughter about the events and attend school activities whenever she could. This respondent recalled, “I worked the majority of the time when she was in school, and I missed the curricular activities. But there was nothing that she didn’t come home to tell me, and there was nothing I didn’t support her in.”

Thirteen respondents commented about attending parent-teacher conferences; however, seven respondents shared their active attendance. Additionally, all 13 respondents mentioned they enjoyed attending their daughters’ various athletic events and practices, while five respondents recalled they were actively involved in the school’s fundraising efforts. For example, one respondent, Ms. Gregory, noted that “anytime there was a special event, or my daughter needed me to help at school to raise funds such as at the store or sell candy, I would tell my employer, and I was at the school to support.” Another respondent, Ms. Valentine, shared her experience with fundraising efforts, “I would volunteer to bring food to the school for events to help raise money. I helped out a lot for community events like sell t-shirts, chocolate, or anything extra that would help-out with raising money. Another respondent, Ms. Winne, expressed:

I volunteered when my daughter’s youth group Advisors would ask parents to put together fundraiser luncheons and organize community events for senior citizens during Christmas. The fundraiser event was a big gathering for the local youth group, and advertisements were a major part of raising money for the group so, I was all in.

The research findings support the existing research of Hayes (2011). As the student researcher, I found in order to increase student achievement and cultivate positive school
environments in urban communities, there must be a focus on parental involvement or in relationship to home-to-school communication to include extracurricular activities and school support personnel. Furthermore, parent involvement has been considered a vital factor in school reform efforts that impact academic achievement (Desimone, 1999). Deplanty, Coulter-Kern, and Duchene (2007) conducted research utilizing focus groups, interviews, and surveys, which discovered teachers and students believed parental involvement was an important aspect of student academic achievement. Additionally, Allen (2008) conducted a study on parental involvement, and it revealed, “Family involvement was likely to increase student achievement when involvement was connected to academic learning” (p. 23).

**School or Community Program Participation**

Participants expressed that both curricular and extracurricular programs influenced their daughters’ educational and social development. Participants tended to mention such curricular activities as the National Honor Society, International Baccalaureate programs, and advanced placement classes. These extracurricular activities managed to be of greater importance than other extracurricular activities such as dance and music clubs, band, or Upward Bound/TRiO. Nine of the 13 respondents made comments in this area. However, one respondent, Ms. Blackman, recalled an instance relating to an extracurricular activity, which was quite notable. She stated the following:

While I worked to provide emotional support for my daughter, I wanted her to know she could do more than what society said she could as a black girl. There was a YMCA swim team, ‘the Sharks,’ that my daughter worked with. It gave her an outlet with friends who studied together, motivated and encouraged each other. Sharks gave her ‘something to be a part of.’ There was also a community program she thrived in called,
‘Force.’ The group leaders helped her with her self-esteem, pride in her community, and a sense of belonging for a greater cause.

Overall, this current study revealed new findings that add to the existing body of literature that previous studies have failed to investigate. This study vastly differs from previous research studies by involving daughters of African American mothers raised in single-headed households and who graduated from high school in the suggested four years. These new findings closely align with the eight themes gathered from 13 respondents who participated in this study.

The first theme, Education is key to Advancing in Life, provides responses from 10 of the 13 respondents that talked about the importance of education to one’s success. The second theme, Being in a Two-parent Home, is Important. Nine of the 13 participants described their childhood while growing up in a two-parent household. The third theme, Daughters were Expected to Attend School Daily, eight of the 13 African American mothers felt they expected their daughters to attend school every day, no matter what happened. The fourth theme, The Importance of Family Structure and/or Stability, found eight of the 13 responding single-headed household mothers talked about the importance of Structure/Stability in the home. The fifth theme, Daughters’ Continuous School Attendance, included eight of the 13 participants. African American mothers explained their experience with their daughters’ daily attendance in school. The sixth theme, Mothers Participated in Recognition/Awards Ceremonies, 10 of the 13 respondents said that they participated in recognition award ceremonies that emphasized the success and accomplishments of their daughters. The seventh theme, Mothers Participated in Community Programs that Supported student Achievement, had 10 of the 13 participants. In this regard, these respondents identified community youth groups, church youth groups, community sports, and clubs as being strongly connected to their daughters’ personal growth and academic
achievement. The final theme, Supportive School Programs, shows that nine of the 13 participants identified numerous school programs that supported their daughters’ personal growth and academic achievement.

Findings that Contradict the Current Literature

There is a paucity of research conducted on single African American mothers who serve as the heads of households. Extant research that has been conducted on African American populations are predominantly limited to African American males in single-headed households. The majority of these individuals tend to be reared by their mothers, or by other groups of individuals that are non-African American and reared in two-parent homes (Battles & Coates, 2004; Collins, 1993; Dickerson, 1995; McAdoo, 1988; Halle, Kurtz-Coates, & Mahoney, 1997; Slaughter & Epps, 1987).

One of my findings that contradicts earlier research studies is in the area about the impact of socio-economic status (SES) on student progress in school. Early research studies have primarily focused on the impact of socio-economic conditions on the gaps in student achievement, as well as this condition on “at-risk” factors that negatively influence student progress in school (Battle & Coates, 2004; Johnson, 1992; Onyenuforo, 2001; Scott-Jones, 1984).

The findings in my study were somewhat contrary to previous studies and findings. For instance, all 13 participants shared success stories of their daughters completing high school during the suggested four-year time period. Ten of the 13 participants overwhelmingly encouraged and ranted about the importance of attending school daily regardless of the weather, or daughters’ circumstances. The only way a daughter could miss a day of school was if she was gravely ill and had to go to the hospital’s emergency room.
Very little attention has been given to the academic achievement gaps in African American female students that were reared in single-parent households (Conchas, Gottfried, & Hinga, 2015; McDonough, 2015; Muhammad & Dixson, 2008; Rollock, 2007). Onyenuforo (2001) argued that when single mothers raise young girls alone, and without the presence of a father, they were more likely to experience issues related to low self-esteem, lack of healthy relationships, and experience an unstable life of their own. Contrary to this finding, the 13 voices of single-headed African Americans mothers were in direct contradiction of this researcher. In fact, the participants shared as single mothers it was quite difficult without the support of their daughters' fathers; however, they fought hard and worked even harder to overcome the odds of the findings of Onyenuforo. As examples, during interviews, eight of the 13 respondents described their experience of rearing their daughters in a stable, wholesome, and balanced environment despite the challenge of coping with single motherhood. As an example, one respondent recalled, “I wanted to nurture her and let her know that she was growing up in the church and growing up in a stable household with only one parent. I didn’t ever want her to feel like she was lost by not having her father around.” Another respondent shared her account of being a single parent even though her childhood looked and felt different from the life her daughter grew up in. “My childhood experience was a very stable experience. I came from a two-parent household, and I had my mother and my father in the household.” Due to this prior amicable home environment, this participant felt the need to work hard and provide balance and stability in her daughter’s upbringing. She felt that contributed to her daughter’s success and sense of worth.
Implications for Practice

This study provides valuable insights into single African American mothers who are the head of their households and are rearing children in this environment. These mothers strived to support their daughters as they sought to complete their high school education in two large urban Midwestern high schools within four years.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, specifically Title I of this Act, provides financial assistance to local education agencies (LEAs) for the purpose of providing funds to schools with large numbers of low-income students to increase the likelihood that affected students would graduate from high school (Coleman, 1975; Taylor, 2005). This Act was designed specifically to provide opportunities for low-income students that would help to ensure their eventual success in completing their high school education - up to and including post-secondary education.

Previous research is replete with information about the relative importance of having a high school diploma. High school diplomas have become progressively important in the United States because, without a high school diploma, the dropout rate becomes three times greater than graduates without a high school diploma (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008, Ehrenreich, Reeves, Corley, & Orpinas, 2012).

Since the inception of the Title I Act, there is ample evidence to support the claim that there have been relative improvements of students from low-SES environments graduating from secondary and post-secondary institutions (Dyer, 2001). Dyer’s (2001) findings also support the claim that African American female students showed improvements in their graduation rates after examining support systems received from school counselors, teachers, mothers, and grandmothers. The findings in this study helped to support this claim, as exemplified by the
comments of participating mothers. For example, one respondent, Ms. Gregory, expressed her expectations for her daughter’s high school completion. In this regard, Ms. Gregory admonished her daughter to, “Go to school daily . . . study those books, and boys were last on the list. . . You will graduate on time. . . Get your education, stay focused, and relationships will come later.” Another respondent, Ms. Blackman, encouraged her daughter in this fashion: “Graduate on time, go to college, learn different things and grow.” A third respondent, Ms. Jones, expressed her sincerest feelings in this fashion, “You’re not an average student . . . your education is important and non-negotiable. . . You will graduate and do better than I did.” Education is first. . . Education is a priority. . . Going to school every day is a must because you are going to college.”

The findings in this study raised a set of best practices that exuded, particularly, as it relates to preparing single African American mothers who are the head of their household for the awesome task of preparing their daughters for high school and its successful completion. The suggestions these respondents iterated included the following “pearls of wisdom”: (a) promote the beliefs and expectations they have for their daughters; (b) encourage school communication between home and school that support structure and discipline; (c) focus on daughters’ personal, academic goals; (e) parental involvement with school and community events are necessary, and (d) active involvement in social support programs, e.g., church youth groups, athletic coaches and leadership programs, is absolutely necessary.

Findings in this study regarding success factors and challenges that single African American mothers faced, which include suggestions for improving graduation completion and social support for their daughters, support the following contentions: (a) there are challenges raising daughters as a single parent, (b) create an environment of balance, (c) keep daughters safe from predators, (d) don’t allow negative influences from peer pressure, (e) help daughters with
self-worth, (f) don’t allow mothers’ job to affect the relationship they have with their daughters, and (g) do not allow a father’s absence to affect a daughter’s self-esteem.

Limitations of Study

This qualitative research study was limited to 13 African American mothers from single-headed households with daughters from two urban communities who attended schools in two urban school districts located in the Midwest. Respondents were limited to single African American mothers who were the head of household and who had daughters that had graduated from high school during the suggested four years.

Finally, this study utilized a phenomenological design, and the findings in this study cannot be generalized to the whole population of single African Americans that are the head of their households. Therefore, the findings are trustworthy only to the mothers, and their corresponding daughters, that participated in this study.

New Conceptual Framework

The initial conceptual framework developed in this study was guided by the premise that there is a relationship between home-to-school (involving single African American mothers), the mothers’ expectations and beliefs held for their daughters, and the resulting outcome from the interplay between these variables and eventual success in school. This relationship is evidenced by different findings in empirical studies regarding parental involvement, beliefs, expectations, home to school support, and school support relating to school success (Battle & Coates, 2004; Beckert, Strom, Daree, & Weed, 2008; Epstein, 2002, 2009; Floyd, 1996; Harris, 1999; Hayes, 2011; Johnson, 1992; Jones, 2006; Kober, 2010; Merten & Henry, 2011; Wasley et al., 2000; Xia, 2009).
After having interviewed the participants, I feel there are areas of congruence between Epstein’s findings and what I found in my study. My findings suggest there are noteworthy differences between the earlier findings of Epstein and findings in this study. For example, Epstein’s research did not address the certain nuances of single African American mothers who were rearing their daughters and supporting their educational advancement in a single-headed household. Consequently, in this study, I found that there were additional conditions that were not mentioned in Epstein’s earlier findings. In this regard, this study provides additional evidence about the role that single African American mothers who are the head of their household played in the successful outcome of their daughters’ high school completion.

Based on my findings, I felt it necessary to offer future researchers several needed modifications to Epstein’s earlier model that was displayed in Chapter 1. This newly modified conceptual framework expands upon and adds to the existing body of knowledge of Epstein by including the lived experiences of single African American mothers in areas related to school support, expectations and beliefs, and home-to-school support systems.

Figure 2 illustrates the revised conceptual framework that I am proposing. This revised framework is based upon the voices of at least nine, or more, of the participating 13 African American mothers. These voices of single African American mothers were firmly resolved in their opinions about certain conceptual principles and variables for their daughters’ successful completion of high school within the four years.
Figure 2. New conceptual framework (Johnson-Eaddy, 2020).

These conceptual principles are centered around the following variables: (1) recognizing the importance of education, (2) earning good grades, (3) daily school attendance, (4) participating in curricular activities, (5) involvement in extracurricular activities, (6) participating in school fundraising, (7) community events, and (8) attendance at recognition ceremonies. To better understand the alignment between the principles and variables, Figure 3 provides an added visual of the connectivity between the principles and variables.
Figure 3. Expanded conceptual framework (Johnson-Eaddy, 2020).

Recommendations for Further Study

There is a paucity of research associated with investigating the success of African American females reared in homes headed by single mothers in urban high schools. Past and extant research findings document the lack of research concerning the conditions of African American females, particularly African American females from single-headed households, incur
as these individuals strive to support their daughters’ efforts to complete their high school education.

There is the need for further research in investigating conditions that may help to support single African American mothers, and their corresponding daughters, to determine how their particular needs can be addressed. Our social service institutions have failed to address these needs. Additionally, further research is needed on how schools and school personnel; social service institutions, and community and philanthropic organizations can support single African American mothers in their continuing pursuit to secure the most amicable ways to support these mothers to provide the best educational opportunities for their children.

This study aptly demonstrated that each mother had high expectations for their daughters and appeared to have had a positive communication channel between mothers and their daughters’ teachers and other school personnel. These mothers also had a high degree of participation in the education of their daughters, including extracurricular activities.

As I conducted this study, it became obvious to me that there was a strong and positive relationship between mothers and daughters. Each of these mothers exhibited behaviors that emphasized respect for themselves, their peers, teachers, other school personnel, and a strong belief in God. It was quite noticeable that there was a preponderance of single-headed African American mothers that had not only graduated from high school but also had post-secondary degrees.

It is highly plausible that these parents may have been “incentivized” to participate in this study because of their prior success in high school and college. Their prior success, and the current success they are having with their daughters, may have influenced their willingness to “tell their story,” leading to a population of participating mothers that may not be representative
of single African American mothers who are rearing and supporting the successful educational outcomes of their daughters. As many of these participating mothers recanted, “. . . You will take advance courses. You will make good grades. . . You will participate in extra-curricular activities so that you could get a scholarship. . . You will go to college. . . You will have a career, etc.”

The stories of these mothers may help to explain why there was a predominant number of mothers that had a post-secondary education degree. This student investigator provides recommendations to future researchers who wish to explore phenomena in this area. Therefore, I make the following recommendations:

1. First of all, it is recommended that this study be replicated. It is suggested that future studies include a quantitative design. This design should include a population that is representative of single African American mothers that are the heads of households in Midwestern communities. This study should provide information to determine whether significant differences exist between the perception of single African American mothers who head their households from other geographical areas (i.e., suburban, urban, rural) pertaining to the methods they took, as well as the beliefs they held concerning strategies used to ensure the successful outcomes of their daughters in school and successful completion of high school within the suggested four years.

2. It is recommended that future studies involve local education agencies (LEA) to review and determine whether they have extant policies and procedures in place that may support the needs of African American mothers from single-headed households. Local education agencies may find that there are existing policies, programs,
and services that may help to support school districts and individual schools.

3. It is further recommended that future studies consider the role that other professional educational organizations could play in the development of learning opportunities for this particular population of parents and students.

4. Finally, it is recommended that future studies consider the influence of mothers’ educational attainment that may impact their daughters’ success in completing high school in the four-year time period.

Concluding Remarks

Education has long been considered as ways in which the American promise of equality of opportunity can be fulfilled. By far, education has been seen as the vehicle which the newly freed slaves impacted by the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, as well as the newly arrived immigrants impoverished from European nations, have been able to join the American mainstream. These single African American mothers in this study, similar to the newly freed slaves and immigrants from European nations, saw education as the vehicle for economic mobility and social integration (Anderson, 1998; DuBois, 1935).

The participants in this study shared their voices and lived experiences of African American mothers of single-headed households. These individuals resided in single-headed households and shared the views they took to support their daughters in their efforts to complete high school in a four-year time frame. Participating parents held strong expectations for their daughters in ways such as: getting good grades, high attendance in school, participation in extracurricular activities being respectful to both staff and students, etc. In addition to this, responding parents also held themselves accountable for the following matters: actively participating in their daughter’s education and extra-curricular activities, attendance at school-
related activities such as recognition and Honor Roll ceremonies, and other school and community programs that provided leadership opportunities, as well as a sense of contributing to their community.

In reviewing the responses of participating mothers, it became quite apparent that these respondents felt their children’s education could be vastly improved by students, and parents, participating in school social networks (e.g., parent conferences, volunteering in school clubs and activities), and participating in school “booster” clubs (Bettler, Burns, & Strother, 2005; Davies, 2000; Depalnty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007; Dyer, 2001; Love & Kruger, 2005).
REFERENCES


Appendix A

Participant Research Flyer
What's Your Story?

Are you an African American Single mother? Supermom? Do you Have a Daughter that has graduated from high school in 4 years?

This is a research study conducted by Western Michigan University Doctoral Candidate, Lametria Johnson-Eaddy. I need participants to interview and share their story about how and why their daughter(s) is/are academically successfully graduating from high school in 4 years. The requirements must include:

♦ African American single mother who is the head of their household with a daughter 17 years of age, or older;
♦ African American daughter who has graduated high school in a four-year time period from a Midwest region in the U.S. in an urban school community.

I would like to hear your story. If you are an African American mother who is or was single and has raised a daughter that graduated high school in 4 years, I would like to hear your story.

Please use the contact information below

989.992.9759
or
Lametria.a.johnson-eaddy@wmich.edu
Western Michigan University

If you choose to participate, your identity will be hidden.
A participation number will be issued to each participant.
Appendix B

Email Script
Email Script
Western Michigan University
Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology

Principal Investigator: Dr. Walter L. Burt
Student Investigator: Lametria A. Johnson-Eaddy
Title of Study: The Voices of Single-headed Household African American Mothers Concerning the High School Completion of Their Daughters

Date: ____________________

Dear: ____________________

Hello:

My name is Lametria A. Johnson-Eaddy. I am a doctoral candidate at Western Michigan University in the College of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology. My dissertation study is entitled “The Voices of Single-headed Household African American Mothers Concerning the High School Completion of Their Daughters.”

I am reaching out to you for your support with my research study. The purpose of this study is to identify and describe factors related to academic success from the perspective of African American female mothers who are head of their households with African American daughters who have graduated high school during the suggested 4-year time period. The participants will be selected from two, urban Midwest regions of the United States. In order to collect my data, I must conduct interviews with participants who meet the following criteria:

- Must be a single African American mother who is the head of their household with a daughter 17 years of age or older.
- This single African American mother must have an African American daughter who graduated from an urban high school in a Midwestern state involved in the study.

I am asking for your support through your participation, as well as your help with identifying one or two individuals that may meet these criteria. I have included copies of a flyer for the study. Please give this flyer to the individuals you recommend. If you or individuals interested in learning more about participating in this research study, please contact me at lametria.a.johnson-eaddy@wmich.edu or 989-992-9759. For questions, feel to contact me for clarification.

Please note the interview process will last approximately 45-60 minutes or less with a demographic questionnaire that might take approximately 30 minutes to complete. All participants will have confidentiality during the entire process. I will issue participant numbers to protect their identity because the interviews will be audio recorded.

Your participation and support are greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Lametria A. Johnson-Eaddy,
Doctoral Candidate, Western Michigan University
Appendix C

Phone Script
Phone Script  
Western Michigan University  
Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology

Principal Investigator: Dr. Walter L. Burt  
Student Investigator: Lametria A. Johnson-Eaddy  
Title of Study: The Voices of Single-headed Household African American Mothers Concerning the High School Completion of Their Daughters

Hello:

My name is Lametria A. Johnson-Eaddy. I am a doctoral candidate at Western Michigan University in the College of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology. My dissertation study is entitled “The Voices of Single-headed Household African American Mothers Concerning the High School Completion of Their Daughters.”

I was hoping you would be interested in participating in a research study about African American single mothers who head their households and have a daughter(s) who have completed an urban high school in a 4-year time frame.

Your participation will involve a demographic questionnaire and an interview that may take approximately total of one and a half hours or less. The purpose of this study is to identify and describe factors related to academic success from the perspective of African American female mothers who are head of their households with African American daughters who have graduated high school during the suggested 4-year time period. The participants will be selected from two, urban Midwest regions of the United States. In order to collect my data, I must conduct interviews with participants who meet the following criteria:

- Must be a single African American mother who is the head of their household with a daughter 17 years of age or older.
- This single African American mother must have an African American daughter who graduated from an urban high school in a Midwestern state involved in the study.

Please note the interview process will last approximately 45-60 minutes or less with a demographic questionnaire that might take approximately 30 minutes to complete. All participants will have confidentiality during the entire process. I will issue participant numbers to protect their identity because the interviews will be audio recorded.

If you or other individuals are interested in learning more about participating in this research study, please contact me at lametria.a.johnson-eaddy@wmich.edu or 989-992-9759. For future questions, feel to contact me for clarification.

All participants will have confidentiality during the entire process. I will issue participant numbers to protect their identity because the interviews will be audio recorded.

Your participation and support are greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Lametria A. Johnson-Eaddy,  
Doctoral Candidate  
Western Michigan University
Appendix D

Social Media Post
Social Media Post
Western Michigan University
Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology

Principal Investigator: Dr. Walter L. Burt
Student Investigator: Lametria A. Johnson-Eaddy
Title of Study: The Voices of Single-headed Household African American Mothers Concerning the High School Completion of Their Daughters

Hey ‘Bookers & IG Contacts ~ Research Participants Needed!!!
Student Investigator: Lametria Johnson-Eaddy,
Doctoral Candidate, Western Michigan University

Purpose of the study:
The purpose of this study is to identify and describe factors related to academic success from the perspective of African American female mothers who are head of their households with African American daughters who have graduated high school during the suggested 4-year time period.

You may participate if you are:
• Must be a single African American mother who is the head of their household with a daughter 17 years of age or older.
• This single African American mother must have an African American daughter who graduated from an urban high school in a Midwestern state involved in the study.

How much time will be involved?
The interview process will last approximately 45-60 minutes or less with a demographic questionnaire that might take approximately 30 minutes to complete. All participants will have confidentiality during the entire process. I will issue participant numbers to protect their identity because the interviews will be audio recorded.

If interested, who do you contact?
If you or other individuals are interested in learning more about participating in this research study, please contact me at lametria.a.johnson-eaddy@wmich.edu or 989-992-9759.
Appendix E

HSRIB Approval Letter
Date: January 17, 2019

To: Walter Burt, Principal Investigator
    Lametria Johnson-Eaddy, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: IRB Project Number 19-01-09

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “The Voices of Single-Headed Household African-American Mothers Concerning the High School Completion of Their Daughters” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes to this project (e.g., you must request a post-approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under “Number of subjects you want to complete the study”). Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the IRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: January 16, 2020
Appendix F

Participation Invitation Letter
Participation Letter
Western Michigan University
Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Walter L. Burt  
**Student Investigator:** Lametria A. Johnson-Eaddy  
**Title of Study:** The Voices of Single-headed Household African American Mothers Concerning the High School Completion of Their Daughters

Dear Participant:

My name is Lametria A. Johnson-Eaddy. I am a doctoral candidate at Western Michigan University in the College of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology. My dissertation study is entitled “The Voices of Single-headed Household African American Mothers Concerning the High School Completion of Their Daughters.”

The purpose of this study is to identify and describe factors related to academic success from the perspective of African American female mothers who are head of their households with African American daughters who have graduated high school during the suggested 4-year time period. The participants will be selected from two, urban Midwest regions of the United States. In order to collect my data, I must conduct interviews with participants who meet the following criteria:

- Must be a single African American mother who is the head of their household with a daughter 17 years of age or older.
- This single African American mother must have an African American daughter who graduated from an urban high school in a Midwestern state involved in the study.

I am asking for your support through your participation, as well as your help with identifying one or two individuals that may meet these criteria. I have included copies of a flyer for the study. Please give this flyer to the individuals you recommend. If you or other individuals are interested in learning more about participating in this research study, please contact me at lametria.a.johnson-eaddy@wmich.edu or 989-992-9759. For questions, feel to contact me for clarification.

Please note the interview process will last approximately 45-60 minutes or less with a demographic questionnaire that might take approximately 30 minutes to complete. All participants will have confidentiality during the entire process. I will issue participant numbers to protect their identity because the interviews will be audio recorded.

Your participation and support are greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Lametria A. Johnson-Eaddy,  
Doctoral Candidate  
Western Michigan University
Appendix G

Informed Consent Form
Informed Consent Form  
Western Michigan University  
Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Walter L. Burt  
**Student Investigator:** Lametria A. Johnson-Eaddy  
**Title of Study:** The Voices of Single-headed Household African American Mothers Concerning the High School Completion of Their Daughters

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled “The Voices of Single-headed Household African American Mothers Concerning the High School Completion of Their Daughters.” This project will serve as Lametria A. Johnson-Eaddy’s research project for the requirements of the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Western Michigan University’s College of Education and Human Development. This consent document explains the purpose of this research project, and reviews the time commitments, procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely, and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

**What are we trying to find out in this study?**
The purpose of this phenomenological study is to investigate the lived experiences of single African American mothers concerning the high school completion of their daughters during the four-year time period. The purpose of the study is to seek a deeper understanding of the contributing factors that are experienced by single African American mothers that support the successful completion of high school in two, urban Midwest regions of the United States. Please note, the identity of the communities will not be published. A fictitious name and participant number will be assigned to each entity involved.

**Who can participate in this study?**
African American single mother who head their households with African American daughters who have graduated from a Midwestern, urban high school in the traditional 4 years.

**Where will this study take place?**
For individuals who agree to participate in this study, the Main Library conference room or a setting the participant is comfortable with will be suggested because private and respective places to meet will allow participants to feel they have anonymity.

**What is the time commitment for participating in this study?**
The total participation time for participants will be approximately one hour and a half with a 30-minute demographic questionnaire, a one-hour eight question interview and possibly a non-mandatory follow-up activity for clarifying information if necessary.

**What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?**
Participants will be asked to meet with me, the student investigator, for the interview process at the Main Library conference room or a neutral location. The site selected by the participant will be the most convenient and accessible. Two important activities will occur. The first will be for
the participants to complete a demographic questionnaire and then engage in an interview process. Each activity will involve various questions regarding their personal profile and their lived experience with raising their daughter while in high school upon graduating. The interview process may last from 45-60 minutes or less. After the completion of the interview process, the subsequent steps will be to transcribe the notes, schedule a follow-up with the participants and provide them with a written copy of interview to review, and/or correct any necessary changes to the transcriptions for accuracy purposes.

A demographic questionnaire will be provided to participants to acquire general information. The information gathered will assist me with details about participants involved. The information collected will not disclose the identity of any participants or members of their family.

The interview will consist of about eight questions based on your lived experiences in relation to your beliefs and expectations African American mothers of single-headed households have for their daughters that contribute to their success in completing high school. If there is not enough information obtained from the interview responses, additional questions will be asked. It is expected that the interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes or less. Audio recordings of the interview and transccribing will occur during and after this process. An invitation to follow-up and review the transcription of the interview will be communicated. This activity will follow to ensure accuracy and possibly provide any additional information for clarification if needed. The time frame of this follow-up activity is not mandatory and may take approximately 45 minutes.

**What information is being measured during the study?**
The study will explore the lived experiences of African American mothers and choices they made that lead to their daughters’ obtaining a high school diploma in the suggested four-year timeframe through interviews.

**What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?**
There are no known risks associated with participating in the study; however, they might be certain interview questions that may cause some discomfort when answering. The risks will be minimized by the student investigator reminding the participants that trust and confidentiality is important throughout the study.

**What are the benefits of participating in this study?**
The benefits of this may study include: (1) Increased knowledge of what influences contribute to single African American mothers heading households whose daughters successfully graduate, (2) Pedagogical insight for research on African American female students who have not succumbed to the negative views with being raised in a single-headed home, (3) Rich understanding of the lived experiences of these mothers and daughters, and (4) Providing reasons and strategies from the mothers’ lived experiences that can be helpful to other mothers and daughters, school districts, policymakers, and educational stakeholders by reducing stress within the situation, identifying concerns before they arise, and developing programs and opportunities for single African American mothers who are heading households alone to create pathways for more success upon completing high school. The potential benefits to participants may involve them sharing their lived experiences that will add to the body of research that can assist African
American single mothers heading households who successfully graduate their daughters despite the opposing research.

**Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?**
To participate in the study, participants will spend their time and find transportation. Otherwise, there is no cost associated for participating in this study.

**Is there any compensation for participating in this study?**
There is no payment for participating in this study.

**Who will have access to the information collected during this study?**
The principal investigator, Walter L. Burt and the student investigator, Lametria Johnson-Eaddy and an approved transcriptionist from Western Michigan University’s Graduate College will have access to the data collected for the study. Additionally, this study will be shared with my dissertation committee and other appropriate members of Western Michigan University. There is a possibility that information from my study will be published in a professional or university journal. Please rest assured, any documentation, audio, and descriptions that may connect any participant will be removed concealing their identity due to confidentiality reasons.

After the data collection process has been completed, the transcriber and I will have access to the recordings and transcripts. Once the transcription has taken placed and no longer needed, the recordings will be deleted; however, written transcripts will be filed in a locked cabinet in my home until the study has been finished. When completed, Western Michigan University’s policy requires data collected in the study will be securely locked and stored in the Office of the Principal Investigator for a minimum of three years. As a result of the of study, which will be the dissertation, the findings will be published in a hard copy and safely stored in the library located in College of Education and Human Development at Western Michigan University.

**What if you want to stop participating in this study?**
You may choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study.

As the investigator, I can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator, Dr. Walter L. Burt at (616) 821-5539, the student investigator Lametria Johnson-Eaddy at (989) 992-9759, or lametria.a.johnson-eaddy@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of this study.

This consent document has been approved for use by the Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board (WMU IRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner.
I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

Please Print Your Name

____________________________  ____________________
Participant’s signature        Date
Appendix H

Demographic Questionnaire
Demographic Questionnaire
Western Michigan University
Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology

Principal Investigator: Dr. Walter L. Burt
Student Investigator: Lametria A. Johnson-Eaddy
Title of Study: The Voices of Single-headed Household African American Mothers Concerning the High School Completion of Their Daughters

Participant #_________ Date: __________ Daughter’s Graduation Year: ______

Participant Age: __________

Please place an [X] before each response that best describes you as a participant in this study.

**If an item doesn’t apply to you/your daughter, please write N/A for not applicable.

_____African American/Black _____Hispanic _____White _____Other

Daughter’s High School Grade Point average:

_____E - C 0.00 - 2.00 _____C – C+ 2.01 - 2.50 _____C+ - B 2.51 - 3.00
_____B - B+ 3.01 - 3.50 _____A - A-/A+ 3.51 - 4.00

Employment Status of Mother:

_____Full-time _____Part-Time _____Unemployed

Highest Degree Completed by Mother:

_____High School Diploma _____Currently in College _____Some College Courses

Taken _____College Degree

Events Mother Attended:

_____Parent-teacher conferences _____Sporting events

_____Parent meetings _____Volunteer in school _____Fundraisers for school
Parent Action Leader Member  Other  (Please describe)

School/Community Involvement/Extracurricular Activities of Daughter During High School

Sports: __________________________________________________________

Clubs: __________________________________________________________________

Youth Group: _________________________________________________________

Other: __________________________________________________________________

Siblings

# of Younger Siblings_______  # of Older Siblings _______
Appendix I

Interview Protocol
Interview Protocol
Western Michigan University
Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology

Principal Investigator: Dr. Walter L. Burt
Student Investigator: Lametria A. Johnson-Eaddy
Title of Study: The Voices of Single-headed Household African American Mothers Concerning the High School Completion of Their Daughters

Start Time of Interview: _________________________________________
End Time of Interview: ____________________________________________
Date of Interview: _______________________________________________
Location: _______________________________________________________
Interviewer: _____________________________________________________
Participant #: ___________________________________________________

I would like to thank you for consenting to participate in this study. With your permission, I would like to record the interview so the study can be as accurate as possible. At any time, you may request that the recorder be turned off during the interview.
Appendix J

Interview Questions
Interview of Single-headed Household Mothers

Participants in the study will be asked questions that include:

1. Describe your childhood experiences and how they impacted your parenting today?

2. Please share the most challenging situations you have encountered as a single African American mother raising a daughter.

3. Describe the goals and expectations you held for your daughter while in high school?

4. Describe your parenting beliefs that supported your daughter while in high school?

5. Please share your thoughts on how your parenting beliefs impacted your daughter’s high school experience?

6. Describe some of the curricular activities you participated in that supported your daughter while she attended high school? Extra-curricular?

7. What school and/or community programs cultivated your daughter’s personal growth and academic achievement while attending high school?

8. Tell me about any school and/or community groups that helped support your daughter while attending high school. Discuss the specific role each group played.
I appreciate you and your time. Thank you so much for your participation. The information you have provided is very important work. At this time, it is critical I explain the next step to this process. The data recorded will be transcribed. I have hired a transcriptionist for this and they have signed a confidentiality agreement and will not know who provided me with the information. The job will be to transcribe the recording verbatim as they were stated. Once the recordings are transcribed, I will contact you so you may review the transcription to ensure its accuracy and that it reflects what you have communicated. This process is completely voluntary. Your review of the transcription will help me validate the research and make it more credible and reliable. This process will take me approximately 2-3 months to complete. Are there any questions?

Thank You
Appendix K

Confidentiality Agreement-Data Collection Transcriptionist
Confidentiality Agreement Data Collection Transcriptionist
Western Michigan University
Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology

Principal Investigator: Dr. Walter L. Burt
Student Investigator: Lametria A. Johnson-Eaddy
Title of Study: The Voices of Single-headed Household African American Mothers Concerning the High School Completion of Their Daughters

I understand that I have been asked to transcribe interviews as part of a doctoral research study for the doctoral student listed above. This research has been approved by the Human Subject Institution Review Board (HSRIB) of Western Michigan University and is approved doctoral research project. I have been thoroughly trained in the transcription protocol and I will not deviate from the protocol as presented.

I, __________________________, transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentation received from Lametria A. Johnson-Eaddy related to her doctoral study. Furthermore, I agree:

• To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audiotaped interviews, or in any associated documents;
• To not make copies of any recordings or computerized files of the transcribed interview texts;
• To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession;
• To return all audiotapes and study-related documents to Lametria A. Johnson-Eaddy in a complete and timely manner.
• To transcribe the information collected verbatim to express the complete intent of the participant without adding any additional information, context, meaning or judgment.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the recordings and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber: __________________________   __________________________
                        Signature                      Date

Student Investigator: __________________________   __________________________
                        Signature                      Date