

2-27-2025

The Perspective of African American Single Mothers in Birmingham, Alabama on the Criminalization of African American Male Adolescents

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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Jessica Ruth Whiteside

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Walden University
2025

Abstract

The Perspective of African American Single Mothers in Birmingham, Alabama on the
Criminalization of African American Male Adolescents

by

Jessica Ruth Whiteside

MA, Faulkner University, 2019

BS, Faulkner University, 2017

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Criminal Justice

Walden University

February 2025

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of single African American mothers raising males and their association with criminal behavior. The nature of this research was phenomenological. This cross-sectional study, informed by the general strain theory, explored the effects of stress and strain from adversity and systematic racism on the criminality of African American male adolescents. The key research question was: In what ways do African American single mothers view their part and the part of their socio-economic context as contributing to the criminalization of their sons? A phenomenological research approach was used, and the said participants were African American single mothers; seven participants were interviewed. The interviews were conducted through Zoom platform. Once the data was collected, it was analyzed using NVIVO. The findings related to this study identified the difficulty and burden that African American single mothers experience while raising their sons. Based on the results, it can be deduced that mothers are always stressed because of being the primary caregiver of their male adolescent, especially given the numerous socioeconomic and system challenges that can lead to their sons becoming involved in crimes. The potential for a positive social change could result in a more nurturing environment for African American mothers raising males. It concerns how these mothers understanding their roles and surroundings can help mothers guide their sons from a life of criminalization.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this to my Oldest son LaDarius Whiteside whose life was taken away at the tender age of nineteen. I would also like to dedicate this to my other children Timea And Roderick, your support throughout this journey meant everything to me. Continue to reach for the stars and let nothing come in your way. I hope I made you all proud. Jeremiah 29:11

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank God for walking with me through this journey; without you, it could not have been possible. I would like to thank my family and friends for your unconditional mental, financial, and emotional support. I would like to personally acknowledge my chair Dr. Derrick Jones, and second committee member Dr. Lois V. Woods, for always encouraging me to finish this journey. Finally, JoAnne Wallace, my school sister, it was not a day that went by when you did not reach out to keep me motivated. I am forever grateful for everyone who supported me.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Young male African American men are often faced with negative stereotypes that portray them as aggressive, unmotivated, and dangerous, which can affect them significantly throughout their lives (Grant, 2019). Many of these young males are raised in single-mother households, living below the poverty line (Baker & O'Connell, 2022). As a result, a lot of these males may have limited opportunities, and society's strong historical associations with slavery also affect how people view African American males today (Carey, 2019). Many people continue to hold racist and discriminatory beliefs about African American males, and many treat them unfavourably when it comes to finding educational or employment opportunities (Coaston, 2019). Many continue to be oppressed by law enforcement and police officers who hold the same discriminatory views about young African American males (Harris & Kruger, 2022). As many of them come from single-mother households, their opportunities for change are even more decreased due to the lack of available resources (Perkins, 2020). The widespread stereotypes, prejudice, racism, and discrimination do not offer a lot of opportunities for change for a lot of these males.

The current study needs to be conducted, as the existing literature highlights the prevalence of the negative stereotypes surrounding African American males, which can harm both them and their families for a chance for a better life. There continues to be a strong association between a young African American male and crime (Harris & Kruger, 2022). These harmful stereotypes continue to affect the ability of young African

Americans to change their life and reach more opportunities, which continues to harm the development of African American communities (Baker & O'Connell, 2022). This study was important because it was designed to understand the perception of single African American mothers raising African American adolescent males and understand what barriers the mothers face due to a lack of resources that could lead their sons to choose a criminal path.

This chapter is structured as follows. The background to the problem and the problem statement are presented. The purpose of this study is outlined. This will follow with the research questions that will guide this research. The theoretical framework is presented. Next, the nature of the study is described. The study's assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance are discussed. The chapter will finish with a summary of the main points from this chapter.

Background

In this research, the information gathered showed current statistics of African American single mothers living in Birmingham, Alabama, and the connection to criminalization while raising African American males. This study focused not on the crimes committed but on the resources available to the single mother, the area the mother and child reside in, and whether education or the lack thereof impacts the home. The primary contribution will be to help mothers raising children alone in the future. One program in general is the Jeremiah Program, which was founded in 1993; its mission is to disrupt the cycle of poverty for single mothers and their children, two generations at a time. When a mother invests simultaneously in her personal and professional goals and

her children's education, she can re-author her family outcome and act as a change within her community. This research showed how access to the right resources can not only deter African American males from crime but also empower women to be confident in all of their actions, not to be ashamed of their situation, and be open and available for assistance, not just inside their community but from other agencies who can assist the needs of their family. Most mothers are substantial pillars in the lives of their sons. Therefore, using their influence, they can shape the lives of their son for the better (Mutsoli, 2021).

Problem Statement

The situation or issue that prompted me to search literature is that the stereotyping of African Americans, particularly males, has harmed African American families and communities. For instance, the belief that African Americans are unintelligent, lazy, violent, and criminals has affected the educational outcomes, employment opportunities, socioeconomic status, and the dismantling of African American families and communities (Taylor et al., 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the lived experiences of single African American mothers raising males and their association with criminal behavior. The nature of this research will be phenomenological. A phenomenology study is a qualitative research approach that is designed to seek and explain the nature and meaning of things through the way people experience them. I interviewed seven individuals; all participants were single African-American mothers. This research design involved

collecting data through in-person and Zoom interviews. This study aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of a particular situation: how male adolescents are perceived living in the homes of single African American females and how crime relates to future criminality. I gained knowledge from peers regarding ways to conduct the framework and relationship between single-parent homes and the criminal justice system based on sociological theories. The first step is to identify the ideas that could explain the relationship between single-parent homes and the criminal justice system social control theory. This theory posits that individuals with strong bonds with society (e.g., through family, school, or work) are less likely to commit crimes. In the context of single-parent homes, one might hypothesize that children from these homes have weaker bonds with society, which could make them more likely to engage with the criminal justice system. Strain theory suggests that people engage in crime when they cannot achieve societal goals through legitimate means (Thompson, 2016). Children from single-parent homes might face more obstacles to achieving societal goals (e.g., due to financial strain or lack of parental supervision), which could increase their likelihood of turning to crime. Social disorganization theory argues that crime is more likely in communities with weak social institutions within family structures and schools (Social Disorganization Theory, n.d.). Single-parent homes signify social disorganization, potentially leading to higher crime rates. By developing hypotheses based on these theories, one can develop specific hypotheses to test. For example, one might hypothesize that children from single-parent homes are more likely to be arrested or convicted of a crime. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the lived experiences of African American males raised in

single-parent households and their association with criminal behavior. Although we know there is a lack of resources for single-parent homes, limited studies have focused on the lived experiences of males and how the lack of resources impacts the children. By better understanding personal experiences, this research will address how resources and structure affect criminal behavior.

Research Question

How do the perceptions of African American single mothers rank the roles of single motherhood as the major contributor to the criminalization of adolescent African American males?

Theoretical Framework for the Study

A theoretical framework is a conceptual structure that guides the research process by providing a theoretical basis for the study. It is a system of interconnected ideas that help researchers to organize and interpret data. In qualitative research, the theoretical framework guides data collection and analysis. Interpret the results using an established ideas framework. I chose the grounded theory because this theory is based on the comparison of people with similar experiences. This research study's participants are single African American mothers who are raising African American males. General strain theory explains when people cannot achieve their goals or what they think society says they should achieve; therefore, a strain is imposed, thus possibly causing them to commit crimes to achieve what they think they should. According to GST, the experience of strain or stress tends to generate negative emotions such as anger, frustration, depression,

and despair. These negative emotions, in tune, are said to create pressure for corrective action, with crime or delinquency being one possible response (Brezina, 2017).

Nature of the Study

To address the research question in this qualitative study, the specific research design included in-depth research and interviews. The interviews were conducted via Zoom platform. There were a series of 11 questions, and the interviews lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes.

Assumptions

Examining the perception of why crime is committed more by African American males raised in a single-parent household than by African American males raised in a home where both parents are present. I was raised in a single-family home and lived in a community where most of the homes did not have a father present. I am in the criminal justice field now and learning that studies show children in single-parent homes are far worse than those with two parents. During the research, it should be shown that the problem is not so much the absent parent but numerous factors such as culture, lifestyle, and poverty. Being a single parent has pros and cons; the pro is an accomplishment, and raising a child alone cannot be justified in monetary terms. The major concern is the economic factor; household expenses can be a burden when it comes to managing a family.

Scope and Delimitations

The study focused on the views of African American single mothers from Birmingham, Alabama, about the criminalization of Black male adolescents. This focus is

selected because of the historical and present-day systemic racism, poverty, and lack of resources that are characteristic of this population (Baker & O Connell, 2022; Carey, 2019). The study's target population is African American single mothers with male adolescents living in Birmingham, Alabama. This target group is selected to ascertain this peculiar demographic's difficulties and outlooks. The sample excludes single mothers from other racial origins, single fathers, and other African American single mothers in different regions. This exclusion assists in keeping the direction narrow on what individuals in the target population in Birmingham go through (Mutsoli, 2021). Although the study uses the GST to examine the effects of stress and strain on crime, other theories, like the social control theory and the social disorganization theory, are not fully considered. The conclusions drawn from this undertaking may hold significance for comparable urban contexts in the United States where African American single mothers encounter comparable socio-economic adversities. However, it is critical to consider the city's specific, historical, and cultural differences as a word of caution when generalizing our findings to other cities like Birmingham, Alabama. The generalization of the results is restricted by the subjects selected and the geographical context of the study; nonetheless, it provides valuable information that can be used while designing programs and policies for specific communities (Harris & Kruger, 2022; Taylor et al., 2019).

Limitations

Several limitations are associated with this study, the first being that the interviewee's perspectives and experiences may differ from facts, causing biased opinions. The second possible limitation is currently accessible data to support stats and,

finally, accessing individuals to complete the interviews in a timely manner. After research was completed, the limitations proved to be minimal.

Significance

This study is significant in that it was designed to understand the perception of single African American mothers raising African American adolescent males and why they are more likely to commit crimes, be involved in criminal activity, and understand what barriers the mothers face due to lack of resources. Upon data being collected and results shown, it was acknowledged that the lack of a male figure in the home plays a significant role in how the male adolescent reacts to his surroundings.

Summary

This chapter highlighted the issue of stereotypes surrounding African Americans, particularly young males, which continues to harm African American families and communities. The goal of this qualitative study is to explore the lived experiences of single African American mothers raising males and their association with criminal behavior. This study focused on the resources available to single African American mothers, which can affect their ability to raise their children away from crime. While there are programs available to support single-mother households, this study determined whether African American mothers feel that it is making a difference in their lives. Only with access to the right resources can African American mothers turn their lives around and change the lives of their children.

The nature of the current study is the qualitative phenomenological approach. Additionally, the grounded theory and GST guided the current research. The main

research question guiding this study is: “How do the perceptions of African American single mothers rank the roles of single motherhood as the major contributor to the criminalization of adolescent African American males?” The data were collected via in-depth interviews via Zoom or in person at a location of the interviewee's choice. There was a series of 11 questions, and the interviews lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes. In this study, a sample size of 10-15 participants was proposed. Data analysis for the proposed study was carried out using qualitative thematic analysis via NVivo. The next chapter, Chapter 2, will provide more insight into the existing literature on the societal stereotypes and criminalization of African American male adolescents and the perspectives of single African American mothers raising them and a summary of the views and experiences of African American single mothers in Birmingham, Alabama, both positive and negative.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

One of the greatest obstacles to greater equality among races and the end of racism and prejudice in the United States is the persistent stereotype of African American men as criminals. A lot of African American children adopt this criminal reputation and grow up to believe that being a criminal is the norm for them. Adedoyin (2019) argued that how people think about African male adolescents affects how they are likely to act. The idea that African American male adolescents are violent, stupid, lazy, and criminal has had a significant impact on many areas of their lives, including their finances, educational chances, job prospects, and the breakdown of their communities. Educators, businesses, and the police often support these preconceived ideas about African American male adolescents. People usually connect stereotypes with bias, discrimination, and systematic discrimination (Aizpurua et al., 2020). African American male adolescents have a big part in breaking up with their families because they have many problems with school performance, getting jobs, being overrepresented in the criminal justice system, and being victims of crime.

On the other hand, African American single mothers' lives and experiences are a distinct and often-discussed topic. This research aimed to analyze many studies to portray the subject matter from her perspective: the life and experiences of African American single mothers in the Birmingham, Alabama, society. Since family seems to be a pressing topic in American society, the story of an African American single mother's life has been deemed significant. The term "family values" is set off a heated national discussion over

the nature of the family. The literature on African American single mothers has solely included distant, outsider-looking perspectives. While it is widely accepted that single mothers should be provided with aid in various aspects, including housing, food, transportation, employment opportunities, and free education for their children, in determining their eligibility for such support, it is crucial to consider the rationale behind their unique circumstance. At the same time, single mothers, whether by choice or by having a child outside of wedlock, are more likely to face prejudice and a scarcity of support. An analogous opinion was established between this result and what Kim and Kim (2020) termed a "hierarchy of single mothers" in their article concerning single parenthood. Numerous authors have noted that individuals who have lost a spouse are met with greater public sympathy. Moreover, unexpected situations, such as the termination of marriage, place specific single mothers in this challenging position.

This chapter is divided into two sections: 1) a literature review on the perspective of African American single mothers in Birmingham, Alabama, and 2) the societal stereotypes and criminalization of African American male adolescents. The first section focuses on research concerning both positive and negative perspectives of single mothers in Birmingham, Alabama, and the self-perspectives of single mothers in Birmingham, Alabama. The second section of the literature focuses on the societal stereotypes and criminalization of African American male adolescents.

Literature Search Strategy

To gather more information on this topic, I used Google Scholar, the Alabama Library, and Ebsco to access resources. The search terms used include the *perspective of*

African American single mothers in the Birmingham, Alabama, the positive perspective of African American single mothers in the Birmingham, Alabama, the positive self-perspective of African American single mothers in the Birmingham, Alabama, the negative perspective of African American single mothers in the Birmingham, Alabama, the societal stereotypes and criminalization of African American male Adolescents, and the role of media on societal stereotypes and criminalization of African American male Adolescents. The other search terms involve the theory used in describing societal stereotypes of African American male adolescents and the perspective of African American single mothers.

Theoretical Foundation

The major concepts in this study are the African American single mothers, who can be defined as women of African origin who take care of their children in the Birmingham, Alabama, areas. This responsibility is not easy for them as they encounter many challenges in achieving their goals, such as better child health, better education, and a good lifestyle. Societal stereotypes refer to the general assumptions towards African American people in society. These stereotypes are mainly linked to African American male adolescents, and they play a major role in how they are perceived and treated in society. The last concept is the criminalization of African American male adolescents. This concept generally links to the inappropriate inclusion of African American male adolescents in the criminal justice system based on biased decisions and judicial policies.

Birmingham, Alabama, situated in the United States, ranks second among cities with a population of 100,000 or greater concerning the percentage of children reared by a single parent. According to a study completed by Haven Life, an internet-based term life insurance provider, a majority of households (72.1%) in Birmingham, Alabama consist of a single parent. According to the study, 65.8% of single-family households are headed by a single mother, whereas 7.9% are headed by a single father (Patel et al., 2022). In Birmingham, Alabama, African American single mothers constitute a demographically and socioeconomically diverse group. The educational achievement of this cohort is heterogeneous, with some members holding a baccalaureate degree, others having completed secondary school, and still others having pursued a less structured curriculum. While the majority of African American single mothers in Birmingham are gainfully employed, a subset of them may encounter difficulties in obtaining stable and lucrative employment. Many single mothers of Color in Alabama areas struggle to establish financial stability due to the challenging barriers they face in their pursuit of income. There is a higher likelihood of poverty among minority single mothers, as opposed to white mothers who do the same or reside in two-parent households. Research done by Tamba (2021) found that in 2010, the poverty rate among African American mothers in Alabama areas was 47.1%, which was significantly higher than the national poverty rate of 15.1%.

Histological demographic factors such as racism, economic inequalities, and the lasting perspectives of slavery have greatly impacted the familial dynamics within African American communities residing in Birmingham. Adedoyin (2019) concluded that

the societal negative views of African American male adolescents come from the long-lasting effects of slavery. These long-lasting views came from the philosophy of White supremacy, which was put into practice through unfair and harsh laws that pushed a particular way of behaving as an enslaved person. Carey (2019) echoed the findings above and argued that white enslavers formed ideas that are the current societal stereotypes to keep their political, social, and economic power. White nationalists assumed that mistreating enslaved people was a way to show that they were better than everyone else and stop any rebellion. Because of this, enslaved people were treated less like people, given specific jobs to do, and forced only to do things that were important to their masters. Enslaved people's lives were controlled by society, which affected their behavior and the ties they had with their families. People who were enslaved, for example, had to give up their cultural practices and values to follow what their owners wanted. State and federal judges backed up the violent and degrading actions, saw them as a way to support White supremacy, and they finally became the norm (Carey, 2019).

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

The Perspective of African American Single Mothers in Birmingham, Alabama

In Birmingham, Alabama, the number of children raised by a single mother has increased significantly during the last several decades. Particularly for children from low-income homes, these heightened rates have prompted mixed reactions from the general public regarding how these families deal with their problems. Baker and O'Connell (2022) recognized that an increasing number of children in Alabama live in households headed by a single mother, which contributes significantly to the state's high child

poverty rate. According to the state's census data, about one-third of Alabama families in 2018 were headed by a single parent. The mother is the primary caretaker for the majority of these youngsters. Divorce, the end of a common-law partnership, loss, or the choice to parent alone are some of the life circumstances that might leave a woman with no husband. Most Alabama women are now self-sufficient financially because they work outside the home. Because of this, the divorce rate has risen to disturbing new heights in recent years (Baker & O'Connell, 2022). Divorce occurs at a later age for approximately 40% of Alabama married couples, and the rate is even greater for consecutive marriages (Berger & Carlson, 2020). Another factor contributing to the rising number of households headed by single mothers is relationships that do not result in marriage. An increasing number of non-traditional families, meaning families without a biological father or mother, have emerged in Western communities, such as the United States, due to a combination of cultural influences and the acceptance of new cultural changes. Regardless of the path that leads to single motherhood, the status of being a single mother can be viewed from several angles. Many people in Birmingham view African American single mothers through both a positive and negative viewpoint.

Positive Perspective of Single Mothers in Birmingham, Alabama

The “good mother” stereotype, which dictates that a mother should prioritize the needs of her children and dedicate the majority of her time to them, continues to be the primary factor contributing to the restricted favorable public perceptions of single mothers, notwithstanding the findings of a few encouraging studies (Golombok et al.,

2020). Moreover, the "myth of motherhood" established by Radcliffe et al. (2021) significantly influences the categorization of mothers as either exemplary (e.g., affectionate, considerate, patient) or awful (e.g., distant, unwelcoming, authoritarian). This aspect holds particular significance for single mothers, as they may encounter dual humiliation for deviating from conventional gender norms and for carrying out the traditional responsibilities associated with the "mother" title, such as household duties.

In Birmingham, Lichtenstein et al. (2021) conducted a study in which school officials, including principals, teachers, and staff, praised single mothers who managed to flourish and provide for their children despite difficult circumstances. Additionally, single mothers in Alabama strategically used their support networks and developed their plans for success while balancing work and family obligations (Radcliffe et al., 2021). Further, societal perceptions of single mothers were not predicated exclusively on their parental status (Lichtenstein et al., 2021). This perception implies that single mothers who have never been married extended their recognition and appreciation for other sides of their lives, apart from being predicated on their single-parent status.

In the limited body of literature concerning the advantages of single parenthood in Alabama, Anand and Mitra (2021) examined 42 such households by applying five indicators frequently referenced in family literature as indicators of stable, two-parent households. Better health outcomes were associated with positive parent-child communication and broader social support networks. Additionally, the author acknowledged that children who had single mothers reported having comparatively high levels of physical and mental well-being.

Furthermore, Anand and Mitra (2021) examined the assets of Birmingham households headed by a single mother using a qualitative methodology. She found that these mothers possessed exceptional networking skills and recognized the importance of cultivating supportive relationships with other parents. Research examining society's positive perception of single mothers consistently reinforces that these women exhibit complex networking capabilities. Immediate effects of the relationship between parents and children, such as intimacy and attachment between mother and child, were identified as defining characteristics of single mothers. In contrast, the literature indicates that family structure is less critical (Li et al., 2010).

The research conducted by Hurst (2022) and Anand and Mitra (2021) surveyed 20 voluntary single mothers from Alabama regarding their favorable familial encounters. Based on the mothers' adherence to stringent domestic regulations and expectations, as well as their evaluation of the quality of their relationship with their children, the researcher may have erred in assuming that children of single mothers experience a more significant number of negative interactions compared to those from intact families with two parents. Although Azcarraga (2019) did not discover any evidence of oppression against single-parent families, some participants did recognize the positive attributes that characterized this group. Nevertheless, the researchers should have disclosed the precise qualities that the participants identified. This discovery contributes to the favorable attitudes towards single mothers. Researchers further asserted that the challenges encountered by single-mother households are not intrinsically defective but rather stem from societal norms that favor nuclear families.

Negative Perspective of Single Mothers in Birmingham, Alabama

Despite the increasing prevalence of single-parent households, offensive stereotypes continue to endure. Chasson and Taubman (2020) analyzed representations of divorced and never-married single mothers in Alabama. They discovered that although negative depictions of the previous have declined since the turn of the century, negative portrayals of the latter appear to be as prevalent today as they were in the early 1900s. Moreover, research has consistently demonstrated that the perception of single mothers is predominantly unfavorable. Comparisons have been made between single mothers and other parent groups, including intact nuclear families, married parents, members of marginalized communities such as people of Color, low-income parents, and gay and lesbian parents.

Single mothers have become familiar with the social disapproval that Alabama culture directed to them. The single mothers encountered such hostility from acquaintances and even members of their own families. This view pertains to the cultural notion that enjoyed widespread acceptance among the Birmingham communities. This finding proved that stigmatization may stem from an individual's limited cognitive understanding of another. For example, a study by Azcarraga (2019) found that Birmingham single mothers without a marital status were perceived as less favorably across four dimensions: parental satisfaction, stability, personal attributes, and security, and in their investigation of undergraduates' perspectives regarding five distinct categories of mothers—single, divorced, married, stepmothers, never-married, and childless single mothers. The prevailing viewpoint among the students was that

unmarried single mothers possessed the least practical parenting skills and had the most strained family relationships.

State-based prejudice is discrimination directed at a particular demographic or minority (Coates et al., 2019). Chavda and Nisarga (2023) argued that due to the stigma associated with these identities, schools were hesitant to engage with families that have undergone a divorce or consist of single mothers. Religious or other firmly held principles could potentially contribute to the development of such prejudice. Richards and Schmiege (2023) echoed this finding and acknowledged that due to the high tendency for schools to be more traditional or religious, religious schools exhibited prejudice against students whose parents are unmarried. Moreover, irrespective of their religious affiliations, individuals who have never been married or have personally suffered a tragic loss, such as a widow's demise, may have a greater capacity to sympathize with the challenges of being a single parent. Consequently, viable alternatives to discrimination based on positive or negative tastes exist within the educational environment.

Research by Hughes (2019) indicated that perceptions of single mothers differ depending on the circumstances surrounding their status. In general, divorced parents are perceived more positively than unmarried single mothers. In their study, Radcliffe et al. (2021) examined the depiction of single-parent families and provided persuasive evidence to substantiate this assertion. The present study investigates the societal perceptions and attitudes towards single mothers rearing children. I discovered that depictions of single-motherhood households resulting from divorce were relatively less

harmful in the 20th century, in contrast to representations of single-motherhood households headed by unmarried individuals. Periodicals and magazine articles focusing on single-parent households where the parents were never married demonstrated an equivalent inclination for doubt by the end of the 20th century compared to the beginning. According to Radcliffe et al., these inclinations reflect Americans' actual and theoretical perspectives regarding single-parent households.

In the 1990s, society considered the family a moral and political issue because there were more and more single mothers. (Richards & Schmiede, 2023) Individuals argued that the rise of single-mother-headed families keeps people poor and at a disadvantage and is one of the main reasons why Alabama's "underclass" is growing. According to Hughes (2019), society views boys raised by single moms and says that young men who don't have dads around all the time have a hard time picturing themselves working. The author adds that single mothers can't be good role models for their boys by making the same mistake twice. The disproportionately high number of single-mother households among African American people has many adverse effects, such as stress, the internalized stigma of being unemployed, financial hardship for African American mothers who are raising their children alone and for the boys raised by these mothers, have problems with gender identity and expression, homelessness, incarceration, exclusion from school, and an overrepresentation in mental institutions (Hughes 2019).

Among single parenthood, gender disparity has been indicated to favor single fathers. Wasayf (2019) stated that while society adores single fathers similar to martyrs,

single mothers who bear the financial burden of supporting their families are stigmatized. A social hierarchy exists among single mothers, predicated on respectability, in which specific individuals receive commendation while others are regarded with pity. The formation of this hierarchy is frequently impacted by socioeconomic status and race (Lu et al., 2019). This social structure is determined by factors including socioeconomic status, ethnic background, and, most significantly, the circumstances that lead to single motherhood. As indicated by the gradient rating, individuals who have been previously married, widowed, or divorced are frequently accorded recognition and approbation within patriarchal societies. This circumstance is beneficial for single fathers.

Richards and Schmiede (2023) argued that participants' perceptions of single fathers are more situational and tied to their circumstances. In contrast, their attitudes toward single mothers are typically subjective and contingent on the individuality of the latter. The authors suggested that societal approval of a single parent is conditional upon their gender, irrespective of the nature of that approval, which may be positive or negative (Richards & Schmiede, 2023). Golombok et al.'s (2020) assertion that gender biases reinforce public perceptions of single parents is accurate.

Aspects of concern include the school's stance on unmarried mothers, the prevalent prejudices associated with children raised in such households, and the possibility of reduced academic performance. According to a critical literature review by Hughes (2019), children from single-mother households perform worse on standardized tests and have lower cognitive functioning than those from two-parent families. In addition, their grade point averages are typically lower, and they complete fewer years of

formal education. Nevertheless, an alternative plausible situation within these academic surroundings corresponds with the contradictory results of research concerning attitudes toward single mothers. It implies that this specific cohort of parents is entitled to preferential treatment. Schools might perceive this family structure as more susceptible to various forms of vulnerability.

Chasson and Taubman (2020) acknowledged a correlation between single mothers and inferior levels of educational achievement. Twenty percent are African American single mothers in Birmingham, constituting the variety of women of Color among unmarried mothers with no high school diploma. Although single mothers participate in the labor force at a high rate, they are also more susceptible to unemployment. The challenges they face in obtaining full-time employment that offers higher salaries are primarily attributable to the financial obligations associated with child care and other forms of care (Coates et al., 2019). In addition, the majority of employed single mothers of Color are service sector workers, where they frequently receive reduced pay and fewer benefits. It is exceedingly challenging for single mothers of Color to provide for their families, as they experience disproportionately high rates of poverty and low median incomes compared to other demographic groups (Radcliffe et al., 2021).

Universally, both men and women must work toward attaining equality. Diverse forms of injustice and stigmatization are instilled in marginalized communities, including single mothers with low incomes. The most significant obstacles single mothers encounter in carrying out their societal responsibilities are social stigma and negative attitudes. According to Hartley (2019), mothers who are unmarried, bereaved, or

divorced are often judged negatively in comparison to their married counterparts, who are occasionally erroneously stigmatized as deviating from the norm. Furthermore, it is widely accepted that households headed by single mothers are at a greater vulnerability to experiencing dysfunction. As a result of the gendered societal norms and pressures placed upon mothers, unmarried mothers may encounter more significant psychological and social obstacles than their married counterparts.

Single mothers encounter a more pronounced socioeconomic disadvantage in comparison to their married counterparts. According to research by Wasayf (2019), Individuals in this demographic demonstrate an increased vulnerability to low self-esteem, unemployment, poverty, and a shortage of domestic resources. Additionally, their salaries are typically lower, and they favor renting over property ownership. Single mothers are affected by economic insecurity as a result of their limited capabilities to earn a living, minimal chances to receive child support, and inadequate or no societal assistance. Furthermore, it is commonly perceived that single mothers utilize a strict and authoritative approach to parenthood. As a result of these views, they create a stereotyping environment around single mothers, which in turn disseminates the idea that single mothers and married mothers are different.

Social inequity is another consequence of the surroundings faced by unmarried mothers. Conversely, their classification as low-income single mothers adversely affected how society and appropriate assistance agencies perceived them. The findings of the work done by Azcarraga (2019) indicated that this demographic encountered unique social treatment because of their status as low-income single mothers. While Radcliffe et

al. (2021) did draw attention to the differential treatment of single mothers based on their social standing, other studies have concentrated on disparities related to income and gender. Once more, this discovery is associated with the cultural background of the Alabama population. Numerous individuals believed that single mothers were inferior in value to their offspring (Tambra, 2021).

The wage disparity becomes more pronounced when considering women of Color: single African American women earn 69.5% of the earnings of White males in Birmingham (Jeynes, 2020). The labor market treatment of unmarried mothers, who earn less than men, married women, and childless women, is similarly inequitable. The wage gap disproportionately impacts African American mothers who work alone to support their children. Research done by Jeynes (2020) indicated that single mothers responsible for rearing their children face significant barriers to wealth accumulation and are disproportionately likely to be impoverished. Families with reduced income have less disposable income to invest in asset and wealth accumulation strategies such as pension plans. Families can struggle to accumulate wealth through investing and saving when their incomes are modest. Additionally, retirement stability is impacted by wealth, which affects financial stability.

Single-parent households, especially those headed by single mothers, experience substantial repercussions in terms of various physical and mental health issues. (Lu et al., 2019) state that single mothers experience inferior emotional and physical health. Research on Korean households headed by a single parent comprised of a woman and one or more children. It was found that single-mother households exhibited considerably

diminished incomes compared to other single-parent households. Surprisingly, single mothers with lower levels of education and income were more likely to report worse subjective health conditions and depressive symptoms, according to Hartley (2019). An inquiry unveiled that the health condition of single mothers was inferior to that of mothers who were married. A lack of social assistance and financial pressure accompanied this disparity. An additional investigation revealed that single mothers' health was adversely impacted by variables including unemployment, poverty, and inadequate educational attainment (Chavda & Nisarga, 2023). Their reports indicate that prejudice against single mothers is more prevalent.

Single mothers participate in the labor force at a high rate, and they are susceptible to a higher rate of unemployment. The challenges they face in obtaining full-time employment that offers higher salaries primarily stem from the financial obligations associated with child care and other forms of care. In addition, most employed single mothers of Color are service sector workers, frequently receiving reduced pay and fewer benefits (Richards & Schmiede, 2023). It is exceedingly challenging for single mothers of Color to provide for their families, as they experience disproportionately high rates of destitution and low median incomes compared to other demographic groups (Hurst, 2022).

Positive Self-Perspective of Single Mothers in Birmingham, Alabama

Even though this study focuses on how society views single mothers in Birmingham, Alabama. The positive self-perceptions that single mothers report should not be disregarded. It may be due to the societal idealization of the two-parent, opposite-

sex family that research on single mothers is scarce. Research done by Jeynes (2020) concluded that unmarried mothers have managed to maintain positive self-perceptions despite the stigmatizing environment associated with this particular family structure. The author conversed with unmarried African American single mothers who were beneficiaries of assistance. They expressed that despite the stigma associated with childbearing outside of marriage, they believed they were capable of handling the responsibilities of mothers and caregivers without the assistance of a husband (Jeynes, 2020)

Dmitrii Sergeev (2023) argued that Birmingham's single mothers claimed that their social standing improved despite the stigmatizing environment due to their adeptness at navigating the numerous obstacles associated with being a single parent in an impoverished society. Positive self-perceptions regarding personal and ideological aspects are among the additional attributes noted regarding unmarried mothers. Significantly, these mothers demonstrate a substantial capacity for joy and a reduction in social stigma.

Furthermore, Sergeev (2023) stated that the single mothers in Alabama believed that their positive self-perception was influenced by consistent income, employment, and high self-esteem. Alongside these favorable perceptions of single mothers, Chasson and Taubman–BenzAri (2020) interviewed twenty-five divorced single mothers regarding their experiences as single parents. Each mother expressed a positive sentiment regarding her status as a single parent and believed that the emotional advantages outweighed the disadvantages. The participants elaborated on the favorable transformations in their

emotional welfare, encompassing enhanced independence, self-assurance, and gratitude toward their capacity to nurture their children independently. Qualitative interviews done by Locher et al. (2019) revealed that single mothers who perceived their community as a threat benefited significantly from having a weak psychological sense of community, in addition to the psychological advantages. Determining when support networks prove ineffective is thus a critical competency that single mothers must possess to establish enduring connections.

Harvey (2020) reported that compared to adolescents residing in other family structures, those raised in single-mother households tended to assume household responsibilities and reported greater autonomy. These findings suggest that the favorable self-perceptions children of single-mother households experience represent the entire family unit (Harvey, 2020). Autonomy development is paramount because of its significant value in Western societies and potential utility for single-breadwinner households as a survival skill.

Hartley (2019) examined the attributes that distinguish single parents and found that, as a collective, single-mother household experienced decreased levels of domestic conflict and stress due to the two adults no longer living together. According to their reports, families headed by single mothers tended to be more cohesive, adaptable, and resistant to change. Single mothers are actively working to redefine their position in society and resisting the stigma of being a single parent (Hartley, 2019). Given that economic status has a direct and positive correlation with the self-reported well-being of single mothers, there may be a substantial wage gap among this population. Mothers

parenting their children by themselves frequently praise the virtues of affection and intimacy they share with their offspring. Single mothers may, therefore, be less personally affected by these negative perceptions if they believe that society holds a favorable opinion of them (Ryan, 2021)

Societal Stereotypes and Criminalization of African American Male Adolescents

Abrams et al. (2021) acknowledged that people usually think of social stereotypes as mental models that include their assumptions, biases, and knowledge from the past about certain groups of people. Like other cognitive assumptions, these "pictures in the head" are mental images that help people who are not very smart to understand complicated information. In social cognition, this method is called theory-driven processing because it is based on stereotypes that significantly affect how people make important decisions (Aizpurua et al., 2020). Every part of understanding information is skewed by stereotypes, such as paying attention, retrieving information, and drawing conclusions (Abrams et al., 2021). When it comes to the link between race and crime, for example, people who make broad assumptions that African American male adolescents are "violent" or "hostile" are more likely to see the behavior of African American male teens as violent or criminal. They also pay more attention to and remember better times when these teens did illegal things, among other things.

Carey (2020) reported that there is a familiar image that describes African American male adolescents as stupid, violent, and likely to commit crimes. One problem with these stereotypes is that they keep some African American male adolescents from

reaching their full potential. The fact that bad ideas about African American male keep spreading leads to their oppression, which in turn causes poverty and other problems.

Grant (2019) reported that shooting and killing unarmed African American male adolescent people made societal security more acceptable while ignoring the health and safety of African American teenagers. Societies do not show evident racism by always being antagonistic toward African American male adolescents; instead, they only base their decisions on stereotypes when the situation fits with what they already think. Suppose they feel that stereotypes can help them make political decisions. In that case, there is a strong link between how they feel about crime, penalties, specific laws, and criminals and how they think about African American male teenagers. Much schooling research has looked at how many African American males graduate. Carey et al. (2021) found that only 16% of African American men who started college finished, while 32% of White men and 20% of African American women did. Wilder (2020) said that institutional racism might be a part of the difference in the completion rates. One thing that Wilder means by "institutional racism" is that institutions can't give people the right and skilled services because of their race, culture, or ethnicity. Tracking and grouping are two ways that abilities discrimination shows up. It was said by Webster and Knaus (2021) that because of ability grouping and tracking, African Americans were underrepresented in A.P. classes and overrepresented in practical studies.

Carey et al.'s (2021) study showed that adults who work with or volunteer with kids often have negative ideas about African American male teens of all ages. People of Color were found to have the worst views in every area. They were found to be lazy,

stupid, violent, and have bad habits. Adults were most likely to notice this bias, but kids ages newborn to 8 were also there. The way people thought about African American children was worse than how they felt about other race groups, except for Native Americans. But how people thought about African American adults was worse. It was about three times more common for young African American male teens to be blamed for being lazy than for white people. More than twice as many African American kids as white kids the same age were rated as either stupid or likely to be dangerous (Webster & Knaus, 2021). White people who worked with kids said some of the worst things about African American male teens who were subject to stereotypes. People said that African American teens were about ten times more likely to be slow than white adults. Adults and teens who were white were 1.5–2 times less likely to think that African American teens were dangerous and stupid. These results are very worrying because there is much scientific proof that racist views lead to poorer care and services, as well as differences in health, education, and social status. If people who work or volunteer with kids have bad attitudes toward kids as young as 0 to 8 years old, it could hurt their performance in the long run (Carey et al., 2021). To fight racial inequality, it is essential to get adults who work with kids to stop having negative ideas about people of Color and to protect kids from minority backgrounds from the harmful effects of those ideas.

This information adds to the proof that some police departments use racial profiling, which is when officers interact with people based on what they think about their race. There have been many examples of this over the last few years: these traffic stops can turn into deaths. Based on the numbers, it looks like their deaths are becoming

more common. In 2004, Jennifer Eberhardt and her colleagues did a study that was widely mentioned. They found that when people, including police officers, see black faces, they automatically think those faces are carrying weapons. Several studies of police officers found that officers were more likely to shoot African American suspects when they heard negative assumptions about Black people, especially those that linked Black people with guns (Gatwiri & Moran, 2022). A study led by Frank Edwards of Rutgers University's School of Criminal Justice showed that police kill 2.5 times as many black people as white people. That is one reason for sure.

There is a societal stereotype that African American male adolescents are more likely to be criminals. Research done by Carey (2020) showed that 27% of African 10-year-olds made up criminality stereotypes (like "Black people are always going to jail") and 43% made up violence stereotypes (like "They shoot and kill, fight and steal"). Also, African American male adolescents think they are unfairly portrayed as criminals and that they are supposed to be more likely to commit violent crimes (Carey, 2020). A qualitative study by Gatwiri and Moran (2022) found that Black youth in the survey felt like they were wrongly judged and put in danger when they encountered police because of the idea that they were criminals and moral failures. According to Carey (2020), a person feels a stereotype threat when they think they might be unfavorably stereotyped and that stereotyping is likely to happen in a particular place. This means that African American people might feel unsafe when they are around police officers.

People usually experience a range of physical, emotional, and mental responses when worrying about being judged or labeled because of their social identity. However,

these responses do not improve or change the stressful situation. According to Gilmore and Bettis (2021), when people try to keep an eye on and deal with a stressful situation, they may also try to control their responses on top of these automatic stress reactions. These things can cause stereotypic threats in feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. These effects can be felt on the inside, while others may hurt how others perceive an individual. Gilmore and Bettis acknowledged that when African American people deal with the police, they often have mental health issues. Stereotype threat may make them more likely to get harsh responses from cops. African American people's safety and well-being are affected by stereotype danger in more ways than one. Jilani and Smith (2020) argued that in America, a Black body is needed to find a crime because being African American is the same thing as being guilty. The author says it is because people think these acts cannot hurt white people. Since African American male adolescents are naturally Black, they cannot escape the criminal identity if an African American suspect is needed for a crime to be seen as correct.

Racist assumptions have a significant effect on how society thinks about crime, especially when the crimes are linked to the stereotyped idea of "Black crime." Research done by Harden (2019) found that the term "black crime" does not usually make people think of tax evasion or stealing from brokerage companies. African American male teenagers are more likely to be victims of serious crimes. When it comes to violent crimes, rather than minor ones, society's preconceived notions about African American male adolescents are likely to have a significant impact on how they judge African American people at large. Most societal stereotypes about African American male

adolescents are based on the idea that they are violent blue-collar people. This is because the media often shows African American people as dangerous thieves in stories about violent crimes. The worst negative opinion that most people have about African American male adolescents is that they are violent and aggressive. This knowledge is in line with the findings of research done by Grant (2019); the author argued that African American male adolescents are more likely to be involved in violent crimes like attacks than people of White male adolescents. It is important to note, though, that there is no strong link between African American male people and minor crimes. Also, some jurors are more likely to find people guilty of crimes that fit race stereotypes and think those people should be punished more harshly.

In the United States, the link between being an African American male adolescent and committing crimes is not a new one. Records from the past show that racist ideas, false beliefs, and stereotypes led to the creation of discriminatory laws and court decisions, which in turn led to more racial violence after Reconstruction (Gilmore and Bettis, 2021). Harden (2019) emphasized that many biases and stereotypes were spread through the media and other channels, such as the insulting term "brutes" for African American male adolescents. Today, the word "thug" is often used negatively to describe African American men, which is a traditional stereotype. In the past few years, police have killed African American male adolescents who were considered "suspects" or "persons of interest" in violent ways. To justify the illegal killings of these people, their crime records, physical traits, or wrongly perceived traits have been used as reasons.

In the United States, thug is a word that has become popular in recent years to describe African American male adolescents who do not follow the rules of society. This can be seen in how NFL player Richard Sherman was called a "thug" in his post-game talk after the 2014 NFC Championship (Grant, 2019). Sherman's tall, powerful voice and intimidating appearance were used to evoke the idea of "thuggery," even though he did not use foul language or act aggressively or illegally (Grant, 2019). This word has turned into a way to insult and dismiss African American people in a way that makes them seem less critical and keeps up a harmful and criminal connection. Additionally, the recent killings of innocent African American men have brought up the word "thug" and how it changes people's views of blacks, especially African American men (Harden, 2019).

Harris and Kruger's (2022) study on the link between race and crime showed that the idea of the "criminal Black man" comes from the fact that the criminal justice system is full of racial stereotypes. Harris and Kruger further reported that media portrayals of African American people as naturally criminal reinforce harmful racial stereotypes among African American male adolescents. People who were there when crimes happened often give skewed accounts because they think the criminals are African American, which is not valid. African American male adolescents are usually referred to as welfare kings and angry individuals. The "welfare king" stereotype says they are lazy and do not work hard, while the "angry African men" stereotype says they are violent, bossy, and irrational (Gatwiri & Moran, 2022).

Abrams et al. (2021) reported that as the 19th and early 20th centuries went on, negative images of African American male adolescents made people even more afraid.

The 1915 movie *Birth of a Nation* showed how horrible it is when African American men attempted to attack White women—putting out propaganda that makes the Ku Klux Klan look good and pledges their violent actions. Because of this, being an African American male adolescent was as equal to being a criminal. Since being black is illegal, White dominance has been able to blame African Americans for all problems, real or imagined (Adedoyin, 2019). In the second half of the 20th century, the establishment of the War on Drugs and stricter prison rules made society in the United States think that African American male adolescents' illegal behavior was wild and beyond control (Aizpurua et al., 2020). Because of these programs and stricter jail rules, the number of people in U.S. prisons rose by 700% (Carey, 2020).

Research done by Williams (2023) proposed that intelligence can be passed down through genes and that genes play a part in understanding differences in I.Q. between races. Billings (2020) found out that society has negative ideas about African American male students because they believe they are not as bright as White students in the United States. Teachers do not expect much from African American students because they believe stereotypes about them. Some teachers think wrongly that African American males are more violent, impulsive, hyper, and naive than African American girls. Another group of teachers sends African American children to special education when they do not need to because they think that cultural differences are the same thing as cognitive and behavioral disabilities.

According to Gatwiri and Moran's (2022) reports of behavior problems and social skills, African American male students are more likely to be in lower track and special

education classes, less likely to be in advanced courses, and more likely to be suspended or detained. The achievement gap between African American male students and white male students is still there. One reason could be that teachers put African American male students in remedial classes 2.4 times more often than they are in honors or advanced placement classes. Teachers make these decisions based on stereotypes about how bright African American male students are (Billings, 2020).

Hinton and Cook (2020) found a massive difference in how racial and ethnic groups are disciplined. For example, most African American students will be suspended at some point in their academic careers, while only a few white males will be suspended. It is well known that African American students are constantly punished more harshly than white male students. The difference in punishment rates between African American and White students in the United States is three times bigger. Carey (2019) reinforced these findings by stating that there are apparent differences in how kids are disciplined, even in preschool. For instance, a significantly higher number of African male preschoolers are sent home for misbehaving than their White peers. These gaps stay the same from kindergarten to twelfth grade.

Research done by Hubbard (2022) found that African American male students are punished more harshly than students of other ethnic groups. They are suspended and given different forms of school discipline at higher rates than their peers. Society thinks that African American male adolescents are naturally violent. Hinton and Cook (2020) discovered that African American male students are more likely to be suspended for violations that are judged negatively, such as disobedience or disrespect toward teachers.

Initial research shows that teachers' implicit biases are shaped by their preconceived ideas and societal biases. For example, a movie of kids walking was shown to 136 teachers from six different schools. Teachers thought African American male students who strolled (a typical cultural walking style) were more likely to be aggressive, have lower grades, and need special education services (Jilani & Smith, 2020). So, teachers' biases are likely affecting how they treat male students of African descent, resulting in different standards, higher suspension rates, and referrals to special education programs.

Most well-paying jobs in the country require at least a bachelor's degree or specialized training. This means that African American male adolescents who do not go to college have a significant impact on their families and communities. African American male adolescents drop out of school at a high rate (40%), which means that many of them will have difficulties earning a living wage. According to the U.S. Department of Labour's Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate for African American male adolescents over 20 was 17.5% in 2011. The rate for Caucasians was 7.9%. The U.S. Bureau of the Census found that 27.4% of African Americans were poor in 2010, while only 9.9% of Caucasians were (Jilani & Smith, 2020).

Implicit biases and opinions employers have against African American men during hiring are a factor (Falzone, 2021). Callbacks for similar resumes increased by 50% when the names were changed from European to African American. In this way, societal stereotypes make it harder for African Americans to get jobs. Falzone (2021) reported that African American men often have problems at work where white people are the majority because they are too loud, direct, and strong, among other things. African

American men face discrimination in the form of unequal pay and job rates, which can be explained by societal biases against these traits (Harris & Kruger, 2022).

As part of their 2020 study, Milkman and Brabaw (2020) looked at hundreds of low-paying job applications from African American and European people. Their resumes were the same; their race was the only thing that made them different. The study found that African American males who applied for jobs had a lower chance of being called in for an interview. This means they have fewer chances to connect with the company and show off their skills. Also, hiring managers are only half as likely to look at African American applicants as White men. According to Milkman and Brabaw, the White people who took part also had less trouble with crime charges. White men who said they had just been freed from jail were asked to come in for a second interview at the same time as African American men who had never been in trouble with the law. Only 14% of African American men without criminal records got callbacks, compared to 34% of White men without criminal records. It was 17% better for white men with crime records to be treated than for African American men without records (14% better). It is hard for African men who have been convicted to get their records cleared because their convictions reinforce bad ideas about race and the criminal justice system (Jilani & Smith, 2020).

Stereotypes also significantly affect how people are evaluated and promoted at work. Research (Webster & Knaus, 2021) found that people have ideas about what qualities and actions make an excellent business boss before they see them. Many people think that a White person should be in charge of a business. This bias leads to unfair

criticism of minority directors, mainly African men, who are often seen as unmotivated and unqualified (Webster & Knaus, 2021). Because of these general ideas about what a good leader should be like, it is not surprising that White leaders are seen as more innovative and successful than African American leaders (Webster & Knaus, 2021). Some workers think that African American men do not have the proper knowledge and skills for senior positions, which could be because of racial stereotypes.

There are a lot of societal stereotypes in the criminal justice system about African American male adolescents. Police shootings of African American male adolescents who are not armed are common occurrences that happen at an alarming rate. Because African men were enslaved people in the past, hurtful ideas about them are still around (Parham-Payne, 2021). Studies have shown that White people are more likely to give tough advice to African American male suspects than to White suspects themselves and that their fear of crime grows when they are with African American men (Parham-Payne, 2021). African American male adolescents are five times more likely to be locked up and 2.5 times more likely to be checked during police stops than European peers. African American men make up only 12% of the U.S. population, but they are responsible for 40% of all arrests for drugs and 34% of all incarcerations (Hubbard, 2022). This is strong proof that societal stereotypes play a role in the decision-making process for the death penalty.

Relationship Between Self-Perception, Societal Stereotype, and Criminalization of African American Male Adolescents

People who are constantly made to feel bad about themselves tend to believe the negative stereotypes of them and take it on as their own. As cited by Muhammad (2022), the author reported that internalized oppression happens when the oppressed group takes on the beliefs of the dominating group and sees its inferior status as usual, deserved, and unavoidable. A lot of African male adolescents have identity crises because they take on board what the dominant society thinks about them. Najdowski (2023) showed the children a Black and White doll and asked them questions to get unique answers from the dolls. The author concluded that young people of both races liked the White doll more than the Black one. Many people thought the Black doll was mean, stupid, ugly, and cruel. Over the past 60 years, these doll tests have been repeated many times and produced the same results (Milkman & Brabaw, 2020). At a young age, many African American children are exposed to negative racial and ethnic stereotypes that hurt them. The media show a lot of African Americans, primarily African American male adolescents, in a bad light, calling them stupid, lazy, drug users, and criminals (Carey, 2020). It is a chain reaction: When kids believe these terrible thoughts about themselves, they do worse in school, which impacts their future job prospects, income, neighborhood, and family life.

The traditional idea that African American males are criminals is still around today because of the social and psychological effects of slavery. In the early years of the United States' colonial past, slave codes were used to keep the social, political, and

economic order (Najdowski, 2023). People who were black and wanted to escape the cruel system of chattel slavery were seen as violent rebels (Grant, 2019). On the other hand, people who were African American and free were seen as dishonest and possibly abandoning the cause (Abrams et al., 2021). During the enslavement era, these laws made it illegal for African American male adolescents and adults to be orphaned, homeless, or jobless, among other social situations.

For this reason, these people were forced to work as "offenders" for the government or private companies (Falzone, 2021). Later, Jim Crow laws kept racial groups apart and reinforced the caste system by making it illegal for people of different races to marry and by purposely segregating public places. Both formal legal systems and extrajudicial lynching punished people who broke these laws. Even though civil rights made much progress in the 1950s and 1960s, the government's War on Crime gave police more power and presence in cities where African American individuals lived to silence criticism and keep power.

The War on Drugs, the "tough on crime" laws that followed, and constant proactive enforcement methods all led to the growth of police and their powers, including the militarization of the police (McGlynn-Wright et al., 2020). Because of this, African American male adolescents in the United States have been criminalized, policed harshly and brutally, and watched over unfairly for hundreds of years because of laws, rules, and enforcement practices. Societal stereotypes, not a natural disproportionate tendency toward crime, are primarily to blame for the fact that African American people have been overrepresented in police contacts, arrests, convictions, and jail time in the past and

present (Gilmore & Bettis, 2021). According to McGlynn-Wright et al. (2020), those numbers have been used to make African people and their race look bad.

Role of Media in Promoting Societal Stereotype and Criminalization of African Male Adolescents

The things that people are constantly exposed to significantly impact how they see society. Daily viewing of shows like *Crime Stoppers*, *Love and Hip Hop*, and others is changing how people think about each other. According to the cultivation theory, people become more involved in the battle to tell the difference between media and truth after being exposed to it for a long time. A study by Edwards (2019) found that seeing violent African American men in the media makes people think the world is more dangerous than it is and focuses their fears on one race group. Associative priming theory by Monell and Muhammad (2022) says primed thoughts and beliefs affect how people think about and understand later knowledge. Associative priming is a way for people to connect what they already believe about violent media with what they see on T.V. Law officials deal with the two types of crime in different ways. The vast majority of crimes shown on T.V. news, according to Edwards (2019), could be called "blue-collar crimes." Blue-collar crime is more likely to be portrayed by African male criminals on T.V. because people of Color are less likely to be able to vote and have equal access to economic opportunities based on race. "White-collar crime" is typically committed by White, male, wealthy, and politically powerful offenders. Many people think that suit crime is not as important as street crime.

A study by Perkins (2020) found that 28% of stories about White people were about crime, while 69% of stories about African male adolescents were about crime. They also found that minorities were not reported as crime victims enough, while African American perpetrators were reported too much. They say that this makes white people even less likely to commit crimes because white people are presented as victims more often and are left out of the criminal justice system more often (Whaley & McQueen, 2019).

Rosbach's (2020) study showed that while police officers are overrepresented in the news, criminals are underrepresented in the same group. One study looked at news reports from Los Angeles and Orange County and found that African male adolescents were almost four times more likely to be shown as suspects than police officers. Three times as many African American people were shown as criminals than as police officers, and over twice as many Black people were shown as White people when it came to crimes (Rosbach, 2020). They say that television news outlets reinforce negative ideas about racial and ethnic minorities as murderers by linking African American male adolescents to crime.

According to Essien and Wood (2022), when the media talked about this legendary Black beast, they used the same flawed anthropological and biological assumptions that Jefferson and other thinkers from the Enlightenment had used in their early science writings. In this case, the idea that African Americans are naturally more likely to be violent and aggressive was at stake. Galán et al. (2022) argued that an African male adolescent is the most horrible, cruel, and heartless person in the world. This story

about violence and abuse was aimed at White women. As stories about the scary Black Beast spread, the number of lynching's also rose. African American males were always afraid because lynching, an illegal punishment, was done regularly (Galán et al., 2022). Most of the claims were against African male adolescents who were said to have raped or sexually assaulted White women. People in whole villages would hear this claim. No matter what proof or facts were available, white mobs would lynch African American defendants or attack black neighborhoods out of anger.

There is an excellent correlation between the news portraying African American men as dangerous criminals and the fact that these stereotypes still exist. Reality T.V. shows say that white police officers are more likely to use force against African American suspects than against White suspects themselves (Taylor et al., 2019). Even though the media often shows African American male adolescents in a biased light, these reality T.V. recordings show what many groups in the U.S. go through. The fact that cops target African American males more than other men of different ethnicities shows that racial bias helps dangerous stereotypes stay alive (Taylor et al., 2019)

African American actors and actresses are playing more and more lead parts in movies and T.V. shows, but many still play low-class roles like maids and gangsters (Galán et al., 2022). Even though they won Oscars awards for acting, directing, music production, and other things, these parts keep coming up, which shows how important it is for African Americans to keep fighting for suitable roles in movies and T.V. shows. Movies and T.V. shows like *The Wire* and *Training Day* have a lot of African American male actors playing criminals like drug sellers, pimps, con artists, and more. A racial

stereotype that is strengthened by the large number of African American actors who play villains in Hollywood is that Black men are naturally violent and likely to commit crimes (Carey et al., 2021). There is not much social background in these media stories about the high number of African American men who end up in prison or jail. They do not look at how racial and economic inequality makes it easier for young African American males to get locked up and how stop-and-frisk and racial profiling make African American men targets of the police (Wilder, 2020). Also, these works do not answer the question of whether African American men are more likely to commit crimes because of the way society is set up or because this is just how they are.

Because of the long past of slavery in the United States, it is not surprising that the domestic worker stereotype of African American people showed up early on in movies and T.V. shows. In the early 1900s, movies and T.V. shows like *Gone with the Wind* and *Beulah* took advantage of the idea of the "mammy." Recent films like *The Help* and *Driving Miss Daisy* have African American characters who work as housekeepers. There is still much disagreement about how Hollywood portrays African American homemakers, even though Latina women are more likely to be cast in these roles these days. Many people did not like *The Help* because the lives of the African American workers did not change at all, even though they helped the White main character do great things. In movies, African American women, like *The Magical Negro* and *The Black Best Friend*, mainly help and guide the White main characters (Wilder, 2020).

Wilder (2020) argued that the way the media portrays African American people and Blackness helps keep stereotypical ideas and actions alive in the criminal justice

system, even among police officers. This negative outlook has led to "disputed and wrongful convictions" of African American male adolescents, which Wilder says is based on incorrect and unscientific media portrayals of Blackness. Essien and Wood (2022) studied racism and the death sentence. This study shows more bias against African American male adolescents. Their analysis showed that white juries are biased and that they prefer the death penalty for African American defendants and think that African American male adolescents should be locked up more often. McGlynn-Wright et al. (2020) argued that the media's constant portrayal of African American male adolescents living in poor cities without suitable social structures has kept up the false idea of how African Americans behave.

McGlynn-Wright et al. (2020) attested that Hollywood has always greatly affected American idealism. The author affirms that one of the many things' movies do is bring attention to critical social problems or send a message. Najdowski (2023) found that movies like *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* and *Do the Right Thing* helped bring people from different backgrounds together by showing scenes with other racial groups. Despite this, movies often excessively show traits of many races and ethnicities. Because of this, people have offensive stereotypes about different groups (Najdowski, 2023). Such an example is how African men were presented in *Birth of a Nation*: as cruel, illiterate predators who preyed on helpless white women. It gave African American male adolescents such a bad image that the shame that comes with that image still affects Black people today (McGlynn-Wright et al., 2020).

There are too many stereotypical African American male characters in movies, like thugs, pimps, and thieves (Taylor et al., 2019). This makes African American individuals and their culture more likely to be criminalized. Monell and Muhammad (2022) found that although African American male characters had the same screen time as white characters, viewers liked white characters more. In addition, these people usually have a history of crime that stays with them (Monell & Muhammad, 2022). This makes the white majority's biases and long-held beliefs that African American male adolescents are naturally criminals. A general lack of trust in African Americans is due to the United States' complicated past with the idea of Blackness and movies that have reinforced negative stereotypes (Wilder, 2020). Harden (2019) said that this misunderstanding of black people comes from the time of the American slave trade when African Americans were seen as nothing more than a burden on the country. A rising number of enslaved people came to America to help with farming. This spread the idea that white people were better than African American people, and African Americans were seen more and more as property instead of people (Harden, 2019).

Summary

The research explored the views and experiences of African American single mothers in Birmingham, Alabama, both positive and negative. This study discusses how the number of single-parent households in Alabama is increasing, the challenges single mothers face, how society perceives them, and how this impacts the children involved. Some advantages include the fact that single mothers are strong, adept at creating connections, and have strong bonds with their children (Chasson & Taubman, 2020).

Research have found that children raised by single mothers perform better in school and are healthier overall than children reared by two parents. However, the overwhelming amount of negative views leads to bias, discrimination, and difficulty accessing aid and resources (Coaston, 2019). Single mothers face significant challenges, such as a lack of financial resources, exclusion from social groups, and unrealistic expectations about their parenting abilities. The report also noted that the effects are exacerbated for African American single mothers, who confront several social and economic challenges, and their children suffer negative consequences.

African American male teenagers and young adults are frequently impacted by negative views that portray them as aggressive, criminal, and lacking desire, which has a significant impact on many aspects of their lives. Slavery and other historical injustices continue to have an impact on society (Baker & O'Connell, 2022). This has resulted in the continuance of racist beliefs and practices in a variety of settings, including employment, education, and law enforcement. Prejudicial attitudes and behaviors, such as racial profiling, exacerbate the situation for African male teenagers who are treated unfairly and suffer negative consequences (Harris & Kruger, 2022). Furthermore, this research expands on what is already known by outlining the benefits and drawbacks and emphasizing how critical it is for everyone to understand and support single mothers properly. Future research could investigate the complex ways in which racial identity, socioeconomic position, and cultural elements influence the lives of African American single moms and their children (Perkins, 2020). To enable African American single mothers and their children in Birmingham, Alabama, to feel included, treated fairly, and

empowered, it is critical to clear up misconceptions, provide a wide range of support services, and aggressively advocate for legal changes.

This research demonstrated that few studies have been conducted on single mothers, particularly African American single mothers in Birmingham, Alabama. This shows that people do not clearly understand the complex challenges that African American male teenagers experience, particularly how their perceptions about society and institutions influence how they deal with various aspects of it. The main objective of this study was to examine how bias impacts African American teenage boys, emphasizing the need for more advanced strategies to combat stereotypes and improve the growth environment for these individuals.

Conclusion

The literature review allowed examination of the intricate cultural views and problems inherent in the experience of Single and African American mothers in Birmingham, Alabama. The study showed the confidence aspect of single mothers in Birmingham, who can care for and show their children how they make them feel safe and loved. Single mothers who are never married have broadened their vision and expressed gratitude for other activities, except for being declared to be put on the line in the single-parenting status. As the research suggests, the study also outlines the society's view, in which the circumstances of economic inequality, discrimination, and continued social rejection are some of the factors that have to be dealt with by these mothers. Additionally, the research deals with the issue of how stereotypes affect African American male youths and how single mothers can cope with a positive self-image in a

society that is not so understanding and kind. The single mothers from Birmingham, Alabama, asserted that their respect in the community grew despite the hostile atmosphere since they were skilled at overcoming the many obstacles of being a single parent in a poor area. Besides the advantageous elements of personal and ideological entities, the self-confidence of unmarried mothers is also valued as one of the additional attributes. More importantly, these mothers demonstrate an excellent capability to be happy and a decline in social stumbling blocks. The research explored the views and experiences of African American single mothers in Birmingham, Alabama, both positive and negative. This study discusses how the number of single-parent households in Alabama is increasing, the challenges single mothers face, how society perceives them, and how this impacts the children involved. Some advantages include the fact that single mothers are strong, adept at creating connections, and have strong bonds with their children. The overwhelming amount of negative views leads to bias, discrimination, and difficulty accessing aid and resources. Single mothers face significant challenges, such as a lack of financial resources, exclusion from social groups, and unrealistic expectations about their parenting abilities. The report also notes that the effects are exacerbated for African American single mothers, who confront several social and economic challenges, and their children suffer negative consequences.

African American male teenagers and young adults are frequently impacted by negative views that portray them as aggressive, criminal, and lacking desire, which has a significant impact on many aspects of their lives. Slavery and other historical injustices continue to have an impact on society. This has resulted in the continuance of racist

beliefs and practices in a variety of settings, including employment, education, and law enforcement. Prejudicial attitudes and behaviors, such as racial profiling, exacerbate the situation for African male teenagers who are treated unfairly and suffer negative consequences. Furthermore, this research expands on what is already known by outlining the benefits and drawbacks and emphasizing how critical it is for everyone to understand and support single mothers properly. Future research could investigate the complex ways in which racial identity, socioeconomic position, and cultural elements influence the lives of African American single moms and their children. To enable African American single mothers and their children in Birmingham, Alabama, to feel included, treated fairly, and empowered, it is critical to clear up misconceptions, provide a wide range of support services, and aggressively advocate for legal changes.

This research demonstrates that few studies have been conducted on single mothers, particularly African American single mothers in Birmingham, Alabama. This shows that people do not clearly understand the complex challenges that African American male teenagers experience, particularly how their perceptions about society and institutions influence how they deal with various aspects of it. The main objective of this study was to examine how bias impacts African American teenage boys, emphasizing the need for more advanced strategies to combat stereotypes and improve the growth environment for these individuals. The literature review allows examination of the intricate cultural views and problems inherent in the experience of Single and African American mothers in Birmingham, Alabama. The study showed the confidence aspect of single mothers in Birmingham, who can care for and show their children how

they make them feel safe and loved. Single mothers who are never married have broadened their vision and expressed gratitude for other activities, except for being declared to be put on the line in the single-parenting status. As the research suggests, the study also outlines the society's view, in which the circumstances of economic inequality, discrimination, and continued social rejection are some of the factors that have to be dealt with by these mothers. Additionally, the research deals with the issue of how stereotypes affect African American male youths and how single mothers can cope with a positive self-image in a society that is not so understanding and kind. The single mothers from Birmingham, Alabama, asserted that their respect in the community grew despite the hostile atmosphere since they were skilled at overcoming the many obstacles of being a single parent in a poor area. Besides the advantageous elements of personal and ideological entities, the self-confidence of unmarried mothers is also valued as one of the additional attributes. More importantly, these mothers demonstrate an excellent capability to be happy and a decline in social stumbling blocks which was discussed in chapter 3. In chapter 3 the research methods by which the proposed study was conducted following a detailed discussion of the qualitative research design and the phenomenological research design. The role of the researcher was defined, the participants for the study are detailed, followed by the instrumentation through which data was collected.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of the proposed qualitative phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of African American males raised in single-parent households and their association with criminal behavior. In Chapter 2, the literature underlying the study was detailed. Now in Chapter 3, the research methods by which the proposed study will be conducted are detailed. Chapter 3 begins with a discussion of the qualitative research design and the phenomenological research design. Second, the role of the researcher is discussed. Finally, the participants for the study are detailed, followed by the instrumentation through which data were collected. Next, the recruitment and data collection procedures are discussed, along with the data analysis plan. Chapter 3 concludes with trustworthiness, research ethics, and a summary of key points.

Research Design and Rationale

As per Chapter 1, the study was guided by a single qualitative research question:

RQ: How do the perceptions of African American single mothers rank the roles of single motherhood as the major contributor to the criminalization of adolescent African American males?

The central research phenomenon will be the role of single motherhood as the major contributor to the criminalization of adolescent African American males.

The research methodology for the proposed study is that of qualitative research. Qualitative inquiry is an open-ended and descriptive approach to conducting research (Liamputtong, 2020). When conducting a qualitative study, a researcher typically focuses

on the subjective experiences of the study participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). By exploring these experiences and perceptions, a qualitative researcher can gain a deeper understanding of the central research phenomenon (Liamputtong, 2020). Indeed, because qualitative research explores a topic through open-ended, descriptive accounts, qualitative inquiry typically involves a focus on a broad research phenomenon rather than on more specific or narrowly defined variables (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). A qualitative approach is therefore ideal for exploring topics about which not much is known, or those which are highly subjective (Liamputtong, 2020). Qualitative research is also a contextualizing methodology, as qualitative studies necessarily capture much of the context surrounding the central phenomenon in addition to the phenomenon itself (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

A qualitative methodology aligns with the proposed study for several reasons. Firstly, the study was exploratory in nature, with the research purpose being to explore the lived experiences of African American males raised in single-parent households and their association with criminal behavior. Secondly, the study addresses a deeply subjective topic, namely how single mothers perceive that their children being raised by a single mother may have contributed to criminality. Thirdly, the research addresses a broad phenomenon, namely the role of single motherhood as the major contributor to the criminalization of adolescent African American males, rather than specific variables. Finally, issues of single parent families and their effect on a person's life and decisions are deeply contextual, aligning with the contextual nature of qualitative inquiry.

Within the qualitative methodology exist a variety of specific research designs. The research design for the proposed study was that of phenomenology. A phenomenological design is deeply focused on lived experiences (Gallagher, 2022). While all qualitative research is subjective, a phenomenological design is especially subjective because of its focus on exploring the lived experiences of the participants (Engelland, 2020). A phenomenological study is richly descriptive, offering in-depth insight into the participants' experiences with the central phenomenon (Gallagher, 2022). Phenomenology also offers the most ability for the researcher to distance themselves from the study and ensure that the results reflect only what the participants themselves said of qualitative designs (Engelland, 2020).

A phenomenological design was appropriate to the proposed study for several important reasons. First and foremost, African American single mothers' experiences and perceptions of their sons' experiences with criminality and criminalization is deeply personal and subjective. Only an in-depth research design like phenomenology can accurately capture such sentiments and address them with respect as part of the research process (Gallagher, 2022). In addition, the topic is a complex one, lending itself well to the depth of a phenomenological study (Gallagher, 2022; Liamputtong, 2020). I also drew on the extra techniques afforded to a phenomenological researcher for distancing oneself from the study to ensure the participants' experiences are reported accurately because, as per the following section, I had a closeness to the topic that needed to be addressed to avoid bias.

Role of the Researcher

Overall, the role of the researcher in qualitative research is to act as the instrument of data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In practice, this meant that I needed to interact with the participants throughout the research process. I cultivated a positive and respectful relationship with each participant, beginning from the recruitment stage and persisting through the entire study. I also needed to collect the actual data, which involved direct interaction with participants in the form of interviews.

As an African American woman, I necessarily had expectations and biases pertaining to the research process that must be addressed. First, my own experiences are closely tied to aspects of this proposed research and cause me to have a personal interest in the topic. I was born into a single-mother household. I had an active male figure in my life growing up, but not a father who lived in the home. I had three siblings, a sister and two brothers. One brother became involved in crime and entered into the criminal justice system.

I was also not married when I had my oldest son. He is one of three, though they are all grown. The father was very active in my son's life. Since 2019, I have been a single mother and widow. However, I did not take government assistance, and I have always worked. Neither I, my husband, nor my children have ever had a criminal record. This reflects my own experiences growing up where my mother owned her own salon and refused government assistance even while caring for four children.

Both my husband and I are well educated. My husband attended college, while I have obtained two master's degrees and am working towards my PhD. Additionally, I have

taught classes as a college comprised of primarily African American students. Through my teaching, I have experienced firsthand how single mothers are often both the primary breadwinners and caregivers.

This study was specifically important to me for personal reasons. While I do not live in a high-crime area, I do live close to one. Due to the crime rate and risk factors for African American males, I wanted to obtain a deeper understanding of how single motherhood, and I do realize that my experiences and interest may bias the research process. These biases stem from general cultural exposure, and also from having friends who are in the same situation as the study participants. However, I had no preexisting relationship to any of the actual study participants. Researcher bias will be handled through the process of bracketing (Gallagher, 2022). Bracketing involves carefully reflecting on the researcher's biases and expectations. By being aware of these factors, the researcher can deliberately set biases and preconceptions aside in order to look at the data with new eyes. This bracketing process was applied prior to every case in which I worked with the data for the study.

Methodology

The study's methodology addresses its core aspects. These aspects include the participants, the instruments, the data collection, and the data analysis. Each of these aspects is addressed in the following sections.

Participant Selection Logic

A population is the broad group of people in whom a researcher is interested (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). In this study, the overall population of interest represents all

African American single mothers with criminally involved sons. Inside the general population, the target population is the specific group that the researcher is interested in recruiting from (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). For this study, the target population was African American single mothers with criminally involved sons. In the area of Birmingham, Alabama. The inclusion criteria for the study were (a) be African American, (b) be a single mother (defined as not in a long-term relationship with the father of their child), (c) have at least one son, and (d) have at least one son with a history of criminal involvement.

A sample is the specific group of participants who provide data to a given study (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). In this study, a preliminary sample size of 10-15 participants was proposed. Per Gallagher (2022), phenomenological sample sizes should be small so as to ensure that all participants have a voice in the results. However, the final sample size for a qualitative study is determined by saturation, or the point at which recruiting participants stops bringing new ideas (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). As such, the final sample size cannot be determined in advance. The sampling strategy was purposive sampling. In purposive sampling, participants are chosen for their ability to help answer the research questions (Campbell et al., 2020). Participants were recruited using social media groups for African American mothers in Birmingham, Alabama. Within this research, social media group administrators were contacted to confirm permission to post information about this study on the social media page. Once approval was granted, the recruitment post was posted on social media, and viewers of the social media pages were asked to contact me if interested in participating.

Instrumentation

The study involved a single instrument of data collection, namely qualitative, semi-structured interviews. Interviews are the only method of data collection typically employed in phenomenological research (Gallagher, 2022). An interview is ideal for collecting qualitative data because it offers a way for the researcher to explore the participants' opinions and perceptions of the research topic in their own words (Ruslin et al., 2021). Qualitative interviews are open-ended in nature, especially in phenomenology, ensuring that the full breadth of the participants' experiences is captured (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). This attribute also makes interviews the ideal vessel for collecting qualitative data.

Semi-structured interviews, in particular, are characterized by both structure and flexibility. In a semi-structured interview, the interview is structured through the use of an interview guide (Ruslin et al., 2021). The interview guide (see Appendix A) contains preliminary questions that were used in each interview to ensure a range of topics necessary for answering the research question are addressed. On the other hand, in a semi-structured interview, the researcher may also opt to ask clarifying or probing questions not on the interview guide (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). These additional questions serve to ensure that each response is clear and complete. The researcher may also opt to probe related ideas not directly addressed in the interview guide but which the participant's responses hinted might be relevant. As such, semi-structured interviews offer an ideal mix of structure and flexibility. To validate the interview guide, it was reviewed by a panel of three experts who were recruited from

within the university. The experts were also asked to participate in a brief field test to ensure that the interview guide yields the type and volume of data that were needed for the study.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Data collection for the study proceed as follows. First, prior to recruiting any participants, IRB approval to conduct the study was sought through the university. Once IRB approval was obtained, I sought site authorization. Site authorization was required from both the social media platforms, mainly Facebook, which were identified as recruitment sites, as well as the specific groups through which participants were sought. Recruitment began only once both IRB approval and site authorization had been obtained.

To recruit participants, a social media post was drafted. This post briefly summarized the study's purpose, who is eligible to participate, and how to participate. Prospective participants who were interested in the study were contacted by e-mail verifying that they meet the study's inclusion criteria. Once inclusion criteria have been validated, participants received informed consent information. Participants had the option of receiving a physical informed consent form or reviewing and electronically signing the informed consent form via DocuSign.

Once participants accepted the informed consent, an interview was scheduled. As with the informed consent, participants were given the option to participate in a face-to-face interview in a public location such as a restaurant or church or to participate in a

virtual interview over Zoom software. In either case, the interview was scheduled at a time convenient to the participant.

Each interview lasted approximately 10-30 minutes. Interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed. After I edited the transcript, a copy was e-mailed to the participants. Participants had 2 weeks to review their transcripts and, if desired, make any changes thereto. The final transcripts were loaded into NVivo software for analysis.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis was carried out using qualitative thematic analysis. NVivo qualitative data analysis software will be utilized to facilitate the analysis. The steps in the analysis were as follows. First, I needed to build familiarity (Braun & Clarke, 2022). For this step, I read and re-read each transcript at least twice or as many times as needed to develop familiarity and comprehension. The familiarization step serves to ground the analysis of the transcripts. Second, I coded the data. Open coding involves identifying ideas in the data, called codes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Codes were recorded in a codebook and applied to every place in the data the same ideas or a very similar idea appears.

Next, to answer the research questions, broader themes were developed. Themes are larger ideas that are developed by assessing the positionality of codes in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). When two or more codes recurred in a configuration that yields a larger idea and that idea is relevant to answering the research question, it was recorded as a theme. Then, the themes need to be validated (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In this step,

the themes were checked back against the data. Themes not supported adequately in the data needed to be revised or discarded.

Fifth, the remaining themes needed to be named (Braun & Clarke, 2022). As part of the naming process, any themes that were either too repetitive or that were incomplete were merged into other themes. The remaining themes were given descriptive names. Then, the final step was to compile the report (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Compiling the report will be done in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 of the study.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is similar to validity for qualitative research (Stahl & King, 2020). As such, there are four main components of trustworthiness. These are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These four aspects will be addressed as follows.

Credibility primarily relates to the cohesiveness of the study (Rose & Johnson, 2020). As such, credibility will be developed by carefully aligning the study components. A direct line of alignment running from the research problem through the interview questions will ensure that the same issues are adequately addressed at all levels. The use of member checking will also help to ensure that the study captured participants' experiences credibly. Credibility also derives from the validation step in the analysis.

Transferability is similar to generalizability. However, qualitative research is not generalizable; at best, the qualitative researcher can provide the necessary context for readers to decide where the results apply (Stahl & King, 2020). To this end, this chapter

contains a detailed description of the circumstances under which the study was conducted.

Dependability is like reliability (Rose & Johnson, 2020). To create dependability, the research process has been carefully documented from start to finish, including who will participate and how they will be recruited. Crucially, the data analysis process is spelled out in detail enough that another researcher could use the same protocol to analyze the data and be expected to yield the same conclusions.

Finally, confirmability is like objectivity (Stahl & King, 2020). As such, the repeated use of phenomenological bracketing, whenever I worked with the data, helped to build confirmability. In addition, the liberal usage of quotes from the participants to support the reported findings helped assure readers that the results of the study accurately reflect the data.

Ethical Procedures

The study was conducted in an ethically consistent fashion. Participation in the study was fully voluntary, and no coercion was used. Participants joined the study out of their own interest. The study addresses a potentially sensitive topic. As such, I took care to interact with the participants kindly and respectfully. Participants were provided with the contact number for a low- or no-cost psychological hotline in the event that discussing sensitive topics causes significant emotional distress. Otherwise, the participants do not represent a vulnerable population group. Participants reviewed and accepted informed consent terms to participate in the study.

All participants were assigned a codename to protect their identities, and any identifying information will be redacted. All data for the study are stored securely. Virtual files will be kept in a password-protected folder. On an external drive, physical files will be kept in a locked desk drawer along with the external drive. The data is stored for 3 years after the study's publication, then fully deleted and the physical external drive destroyed.

Summary

In summary, the purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of African American males raised in single-parent households and their association with criminal behavior. This chapter, Chapter 3, detailed the research methods for the proposed study. The research methodology is qualitative, while the research design will be phenomenological. The overall population of interest represents all African American single mothers with criminally involved sons, while the target population will be all African American single mothers with criminally involved sons in the area of Birmingham, Alabama. A preliminary sample size of 10-15 participants is proposed, to be adjusted as needed for saturation. The sampling strategy was purposive sampling. The study involved a single instrument of data collection, namely qualitative, semi-structured interviews. Participants were recruited online through social media. After agreeing to participate, the participants had the option to participate in either a face-to-face or virtual interview. Interviews were planned to be 30-60 minutes and were audio recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were used as the basis for analyzing the data

through qualitative thematic analysis. In the next chapter, Chapter 4, the results of that analysis are presented.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

African American males are historically stereotyped in the United States. Stereotyping of this population has harmed African American families and communities. This study was conducted to show how access to appropriate resources influenced the particular members of African American families and communities: African American single mothers of sons with criminal history. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of single African American mothers raising males and their association with criminal behavior. The design of this research was phenomenological. The research question that guided this study was: How do the perceptions of African American single mothers rank the roles of single motherhood as the major contributor to the criminalization of adolescent African American males?

This chapter contains the report of the study findings. To contextualize the findings, a description of the sample, data collection, and data analysis is provided. The sample of the study consisted of seven African American single mothers living in Birmingham, Alabama with at least one adolescent son with a history of criminal involvement. Data were collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The interview data were analyzed through qualitative thematic analysis. The results of the analysis are reported in the form of themes accompanied by descriptions and selected quotes from the interview transcripts. A summary concludes the chapter.

Sample of the Study

The sample of the study was seven African American single mothers living in Birmingham, Alabama with at least one adolescent son with a history of criminal involvement. For the purpose of this study, single mother was defined as currently not in a long-term relationship with the father of the child. Five of the participants were currently single, while one was divorced from the child's father, and one was a widow. Participant 1 has two children, both males aged 23 and 18. Participant 2 has one son aged 18. Participant 3 has 2 children, one of whom is a male aged 17. Two out of three of Participant 4's children are males aged 18 and 13. Participant 5 has one son aged 19 and one daughter. Participant 6 has five children with only one male aged 17. Participant 7 has only one son aged 19. Three participants described their neighborhood as urban, two as rural, and two as suburban. Four participants described their socioeconomic status as low, two as middle, and one as high. The participants' demographic information is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Information

Participant	Civil status	No. of children	No. of sons	Age(s) of son(s)	Neighborhood	Socioeconomic status
1	single	2	2	23, 18	Rural	Low
2	single	1	1	21	Urban	Low
3	divorced	2	1	17	Urban	Low
4	single	3	2	18, 13	Suburban	Middle
5	single	2	1	19	Rural	Low
6	single	5	1	17	Suburban	Middle
7	widow	1	1	19	Urban	High

Data Collection

The data collection method was individual semi-structured interviews. Walden University institutional review board (IRB) approval was obtained (10-02-24-1015117) participant recruitment and data collection to ensure a rigorous and ethical research process. Participant recruitment occurred within Facebook groups for single mothers in Birmingham, Alabama. With the permission of the group administrators, a participant recruitment post containing information about the study, the recruitment criteria, and the researcher's e-mail address was made. Prospective participants who reached out to the researcher via e-mail were assessed for participation eligibility through a series of screening questions that specified that they: (a) are African American, (b) living in Birmingham, Alabama, (c) are a single mother (defined as not in a long-term relationship with the father of their child), (d) have at least one adolescent son, and (e) have at least one adolescent son with a history of criminal involvement. Seven African American single mothers qualified and volunteered to join the study.

The seven participants were given access to a DocuSign document containing the informed consent form. They were informed that a signed informed consent form was required before the interview proceedings. The informed consent form contained the protection of the participants' rights including the voluntary nature of participation, the confidentiality of their identity, and the potential harms of participating in the study.

The participants were asked for their preferred interview schedule. All seven interviews occurred via the videoconferencing platform Zoom Meetings from October 11 to 25, 2024. The interview was planned to last for at least 30 minutes, but the actual

duration lasted for a maximum of 16 minutes. All of the questions in the interview protocol were asked to all seven participants. Prompts and follow-up questions were also asked to elicit more in-depth information from the participants. As the interviews occurred simultaneously with the preliminary analysis, I determined that data saturation has been reached by the data from the sixth participant despite the short duration of the interviews. No new pertinent codes emerged in the seventh participant's interview data.

The simultaneous occurrence of the interviews and preliminary analysis entailed preparing and open coding the data. Data preparation involved producing a verbatim transcription of the interview recording using Zoom's auto-transcribe feature. Converting the interview recording to transcripts was an important phase in thematic analysis, as data needed to be in textual form (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The automatic transcripts were reviewed and corrected by the researcher and then sent to each corresponding participant for further validation. The validated transcripts were imported to NVivo 14, a qualitative data analysis software, for the coding process. The validated transcripts were read multiple times and then coded. The open coding process involved re-reading the transcripts with a focus on small chunks of texts in search of units that were relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. All codes emerged by the sixth interview data and no new codes further emerged in the seventh interview data.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. Specifically, Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-step reflexive thematic analysis was applied to the interview data to develop themes representing the participants' experiences of major contributors to the

criminalization of their adolescent African American sons. The steps, completed in a non-linear method, were: data familiarization, coding, theme identification, theme validation, theme naming, and report compilation (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The analysis was completed on the software NVivo 14 to aid with the management, organization, and storage of a large volume of qualitative data.

Data familiarization and coding were the preliminary analysis phase which occurred simultaneously with the data collection process to check whether data saturation has been reached. Data collection stopped after the seventh interview as no new meaningful codes emerged from the preliminary analysis. Data familiarization involved reading the entirety of the transcripts three times to become acquainted with the contents of the data set. During the first round of reading, the focus was on the participants' words on how they described their lived experiences of single motherhood and raising an African American son. During the second round, notes and annotations were made regarding the possible connections of the participants' words to the research question of this study. The third round of reading was to review the contents and the notes together. These notes informed the coding phase in which another round of reading was conducted. In the coding phase, reading the transcripts involved a line-by-line inspection in search of data units through the texts that were meaningful to the study. Samples of codes and coded texts are presented in 2.

Table 2*Sample Codes*

Code	Coded text
punished for poor behavior	On my role in discipline him is he know there's consequences for his actions...he may have to get his car privileges [taken] or something like that.
taught code switching	It just [makes] me let him know that certain things you wear the way you dress, the way you act, what make people think certain things about you.
taught to avoid escalation	Stay under the radar with you. Being black is easy to be stereotyped, some. So just try to stay under the radar as much as you can.
encouraged and supported education	I kept him in school
aware that father is a bad role model	He knows [his father] made some bad decisions, but it doesn't really influence his life choices.

As no new codes further emerged from the data, data collection stopped and the theme development process was conducted. The codes which served as broken down meaning units were assessed for relationships in the meaning patterns they represented. Related codes were grouped into an initial theme. Coding results in the emergence of 62 open codes that were clustered into 12 initial themes. The initial themes and supporting codes are reported in Table 3.

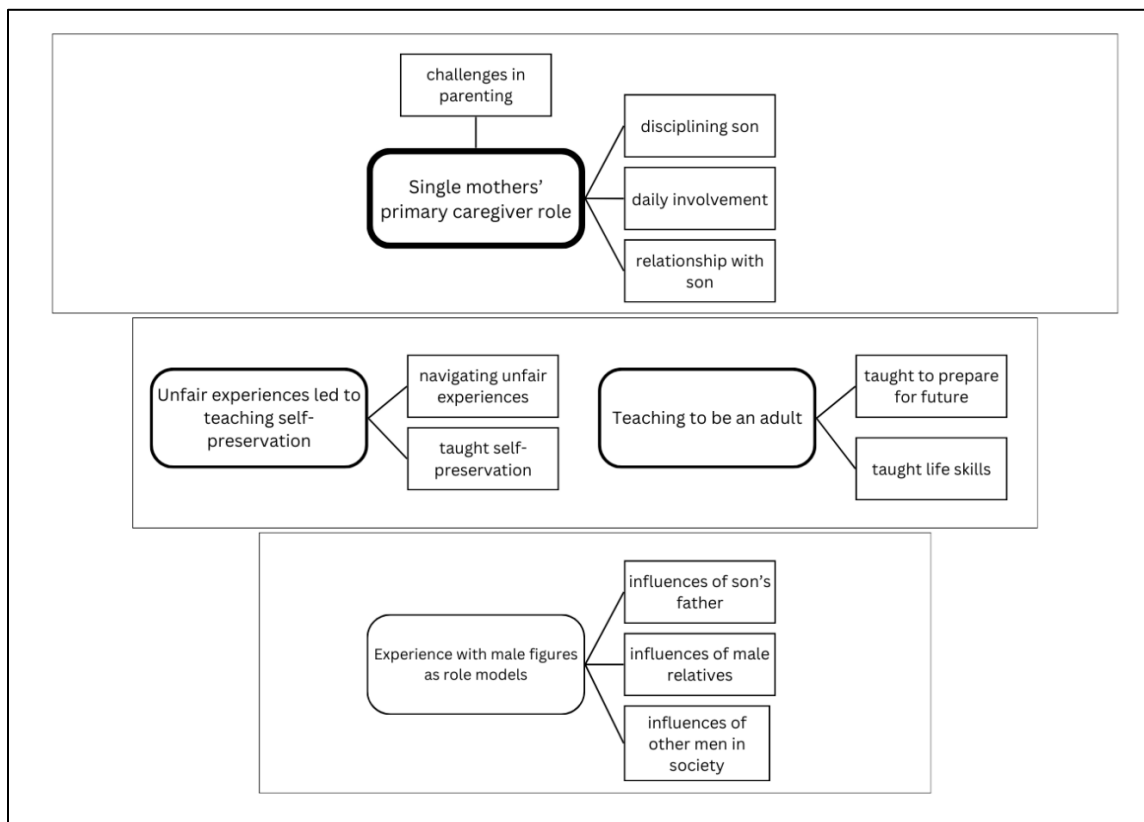
Table 3*Initial Themes*

Open codes	Initial themes
encouraged and supported education	prepared for child's future
guided in setting goals	
provided financial support	
taught resilience and to not give up	
taught to focus on goals	
taught to take responsibility	
taught to work on goals	
involved in activities	taught life skills
taught to be a man	

Open codes	Initial themes
taught to be a member of society taught to care for vehicle taught to cook taught to know rights taught to make good choices taught to save money and about finances	perception of society
prejudice against AA men sons' experiences of unfair treatment stereotyped because of juvenile sentence	taught self-preservation
taught discernment taught about realities of racism taught code switching taught situational awareness taught to avoid escalation taught to obey the law	father's influence
a good role model absent aware that father is a bad role model inconsistent used to be present but a poor influence	influences of male extended family
encouraged to finish school good role models poor role models taught life skills involved in productive activities	influences of other male figures
mentorship from other male adult pastor provided opportunities	challenges in parenting
faced discrimination as a single mother with low income faced judgment as a single mother lack of male role models for sons lack of opportunities for AA children lack of support for child's special needs went through divorce	discipline
different attitudes of multiple children old enough to reason with punished for poor behavior rewarded for good behaviors talked to by male figures taught to be accountable for actions	minimal support in parenting
child support from child's father	

Open codes	Initial themes
extended family's help government support other people's support	
fully involved in child's life present everyday doing everything protected and raised by oneself spoke up for child's rights ultimate decision maker	everyday involvement
difficult due to child's disapproval of mother's relationship mutual respect openly discussing everything poor due to child's behavior	relationship

The initial themes were not yet the final results, as they represented categorical groups lacking contextualization. The fourth step of the analysis was to contextualize the results to the study through validating the themes. This step involved evaluating the whole story told by the themes. A thematic map, shown in Figure 1, was created to visualize the story. Figure 1 contains the narrative that African American single mothers were the primary caregivers to their sons. Primary caregiving roles included providing for daily needs, having a relationship, and disciplining their children. African American single mothers faced stigma and judgment from the community. However, they accepted their realities and used their experiences to teach their sons self-preservation and preparation for their future. While single mothers had minimal support, they acknowledged the influences of male figures in their sons' lives in which good role models were good influences and bad role models were bad influences.

Figure 1*Thematic Map*

As the narrative of the themes made sense as a whole, the themes were finalized. Each theme was compared and contrasted with each other to check for overlapping findings. The themes were then given names that were complete sentences concisely representing the participants' lived experiences, and were defined to further distinguish the meaning of each theme. The final themes and their definitions are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4*Final Themes*

Validated themes	Final themes	Definition of themes
Single mothers' primary caregiver role	African American single mothers' experiences of their primary role in raising their son	Lived experiences of meeting daily needs, fostering open communication, disciplining, advocating for fairness, staying involved, and managing the challenges of limited support and societal stigma
Unfair experiences led to teaching self-preservation	African American single mothers' experiences of teaching their son self-preservation after unfair encounters in society	Lived experiences of guiding son to navigate prejudice and discrimination through situational awareness, lawfulness, de-escalation, and caution in interactions
Teaching to be an adult	African American single mothers' experiences of preparing their son for their future	Lived experiences of teaching life skills, fostering resilience, emphasizing education, instilling accountability, and encouraging financial responsibility
Experience with male figures as role models	African American single mothers' experiences of the importance of male figures for their sons	Lived experiences of having positive influences from good role models while acknowledging the negative impact of absent or harmful male figures

Detailed descriptions of the themes are found in the Results section. The Results section was developed from the final step of the analysis which was to compile the study findings. The order of presenting the themes was planned to represent the ranking of the roles of African American single mothers in raising adolescent sons based on the narrative developed in the previous phases. Descriptions were created and excerpts from

the data were carefully selected to provide sufficient evidence of the emergence of the themes and the narrative they tell.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Techniques applied to the data to address the trustworthiness issues presented in Chapter 3 are described in this section. Trustworthiness is important in establishing the rigor of the study (Stahl & King, 2020). The following criteria were met to increase the trustworthiness of this study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility refers to the accuracy of the results representing the participants' lived experiences (Ahmed, 2023). The interview guide was reviewed by an expert panel for relevance and clarity to ensure meaningful data collection. Data saturation was achieved when no new codes or insights emerged from participant responses which indicated the robustness of the data. Triangulation was employed by using in-depth interviews and reflective journaling to validate the findings through a comprehensive perspective. Triangulation in research is using multiple approaches to study a single phenomenon. Member checking was conducted by sharing the interview transcripts and summarizing findings with the participants to confirm the accuracy of their responses and the researcher's interpretations. I maintained a reflexive journal throughout the study to document my thoughts, assumptions, and potential biases. Verbatim quotes from participants were included to support the findings, ensuring their voices were authentically represented.

Transferability was the extent of the applicability of the findings to another context (Ahmed, 2023). Transferability was addressed by providing detailed descriptions

of the research context, participants, and findings to enable readers to determine the applicability of the study to other contexts. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants who had direct experience with the phenomenon under study, ensuring a rich and relevant dataset. Contextual details, such as the participants' demographic characteristics and their lived experiences as African American single mothers, were clearly documented to provide a framework for understanding the study's findings.

Dependability refers to the degree of replicability of the study (Ahmed, 2023). Dependability was established through systematic documentation of the research process, allowing for replication and consistency. Changes to the research design or approach, such as adjustments to interview questions based on early findings, were documented with justifications to ensure transparency. An audit trail was maintained, detailing each step of data collection, analysis, and interpretation to provide transparency. Detailed notes and memos were recorded during the analysis to capture emerging themes and maintain alignment with the data. Additionally, the use of NVivo for data organization and analysis promoted an accurate and systematic coding process. The iterative nature of the analysis was documented through NVivo which showed how the themes were developed, refined, and validated.

Confirmability refers to the extent of objectiveness of the study (Ahmed, 2023). Confirmability was established through practices that minimized researcher bias and ensured that the findings were based on the participants' experiences rather than the researcher's assumptions and preconceived ideas about African American single mothers and their sons. A reflexive journal was kept throughout the research process to document

personal reflections that were reverted to and set aside during the analysis to ground the codes and themes to the interview data. An external audit was conducted by the dissertation committee to evaluate the study. Descriptions of the methodology were detailed to clarify how data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted. The use of NVivo for coding ensured systematic data management and reduced the potential for manual errors.

Results

The results of this study were developed from the thematic analysis of the interview data collected from seven African American single mothers living in Birmingham, Alabama with at least one adolescent son with a history of criminal involvement. The results revealed that African American single mothers primarily served as the caregivers for their sons. Their caregiving responsibilities included meeting daily needs, building relationships, and disciplining their children. The participants often encountered stigma and judgment from the community as for being an African American single mother. Despite the challenges, the participants embraced their circumstances and used their experiences to teach their sons lessons in self-preservation and future readiness. Although single mothers received limited support, they recognized the impact of male figures in their sons' lives, noting that positive role models had a beneficial influence, while negative role models had a detrimental effect. Four themes emerged from the data to represent the participants' collective lived experiences: (a) African American single mothers' experiences of their primary role in raising their son, (b) African American single mothers' experiences of teaching their son self-preservation after

unfair encounters in society, (c) African American single mothers' experiences of preparing their son for their future, and (d) African American single mothers' experiences of the importance of male figures for their sons.

Theme 1: African American Single Mothers' Experiences of Their Primary Role in Raising Their Son

All seven participants reported their experiences in being the primary caregiver for their sons. The participants stated that as single mothers, their children mostly relied on them. They described taking on the role of a father and a mother to raise their children. Participant 1 shared, “I’m the mother, the father.... I am everything [in] raising them.” Participants 2 and 5 both described their primary role in raising their children as being the “sole provider,” while Participant 7 stated that she was the “sole support” for her son. The father of Participants 1’s and 2’s children were never involved in their lives. The father of Participant 5’s children provided inconsistent financial support, and the father of Participant 7’s son was a present and involved father until he passed away.

The participants also shared that their role as the primary caregiver included being involved in their children’s life. Participant 6 stated, “I’m the primary everything – provide his finances, his home, his mentorship, everything is on me.” Participant 4 reported being additionally involved in her oldest son’s life after he exhibited discipline issues. Participant 4 stated, “We’re dealing with some discipline issues, trying to keep him out of prison, off of drugs, away from the wrong crowd... I’m staying ahead with knowledge of what’s going on [with him] ... at school and in his personal life.” The participants’ experiences as the primary caregiver for their children included deciding and

advocating for their children. Participants 4 and 6 revealed their role as the ultimate decision-maker in their household. Participant 6's son was in "state custody" and she decided for her son to abide by the law. Participant 6 added, "I'm the only parent in the home, so everything is my decision right now. I tell him to do what the state wants him to do right now." The participants also reported that they took on the role of protecting their children. Participant 3 shared that she protected her son when he experienced discrimination at school for being African American from a low-income family. Participant 3 specified that she talked to the school personnel to report the incident of her son not being able to eat lunch because he forgot his lunch money while another White male student was provided food even being in the same situation of her son. Participants 6 and 7 protected their sons from the hazards in their community. Participant 6 noted, "The society we live in now, it means you have to protect your son with all means. That means financially, racially, education wise, you have to protect him because in the state we live in, crime is horrible."

According to the participants, being the primary caregiver also meant establishing a good relationship with their children. The participants stated that they maintained an open communication with their children. Participant 3 described, "Me and my son have an excellent relationship... We have open communication. He knows he can talk to me about anything, good or bad, whether or not I want to hear it or not." Participants 1 and 7 also shared that their relationship with their children was based on open and honest communication. Participant 7 specified that she allows her son to reach out to her about anything and that she did not make promises she could not keep. Participant 7 also shared

that she and her son had mutual respect between them. Participants 4 and 6 stated that they were having difficulties in their relationship with their sons. Participant 4's son did not approve of her current life partner, while Participant 6's son was having behavioral issues that made their relationship difficult. Participant 6 added that her fragile relationship with her son prevented her from disciplining him the way she wanted to.

The participants discussed how their role as the primary caregiver for their children also meant being the disciplinarian. Six of the seven participants shared that their method of disciplining their children was to give rewards and punishments. Good behavior was rewarded with gifts and privileges, while the consequences for poor behavior were to have the gifts and privileges taken away. Participant 2 shared, "We don't believe in hitting, but things were taken away... he couldn't go with his friends or things like that." According to Participant 3, the purpose of taking away gifts and privileges was to let the children know that their actions have consequences. Participant 3 noted:

On my role in [disciplining] him, he knows there's consequences for his actions. He's a little bit older now, so it ain't like I can take so many things from him, but he has a car now, so he may have to get his car privileges took or or something like that, or do extra chores.

While several participants shared that the rewards they gave were often material games such as videogames and phones, Participant 7 rewarded her son with trips, vacations, and night outs so that they could spend time together and talk about their issues. Participant 7 also reasoned that her son was already old enough to be reasoned with.

Theme 2: African American Single Mothers' Experiences of Teaching Their Son Self-Preservation After Unfair Encounters in Society

All seven participants disclosed their experiences in society as African Americans, and they reported teaching their sons about the realities of being an African American in the community. The participants shared their beliefs that their sons experienced discrimination and prejudice against African Americans, especially among males. Six participants stated their perceptions that society generally saw African American males including their sons as “thugs” and dangerous. Participant 4 described, “If he's in traditional urban wear Nike Jordans, a hoodie and jeans, he's considered a thug. Although he makes, although he makes really good grades, that's the perception of how they see him.” Prejudice against African American males led to experiences of discrimination. Five participants shared that their sons have been racially profiled. Participant 4 stated, “The other guys were stealing, so I feel like he was guilty by association. And once again, it was a group of African American young males and one Hispanic.” Participants 1 and 2 stated that their sons experienced unfair traffic stops. Participant 1 noted:

Because it was a strange car and he's Black with dreads out on his face. He got pulled over and car got impounded, taken to jail ...So the same cop stopped him the next day and took him to jail on illegal stop is because he was a young Black male.

With experiences of prejudice and discrimination, the participants believed in the importance of teaching their sons how to save themselves. The participants described teaching their sons self-preservation including being mindful of their words and

appearance, avoiding escalation, and being alert. The participants shared that they taught their sons to dress well to appear “presentable” and to speak courteously. Participant 5 stated, “I always tell him, be presentable. Don't walk up by anybody with a hood over your head like you had. Take the hood off. Hold your head up because people see you that way, they perceive you in a certain way.” Participants 1, 2, and 3 reported telling their sons that people already have prejudice against them because of their skin color and that dressing sloppily only added to others’ poor perception of them. Participant 1 shared, “Don't give nobody a reason to say nothing to you if you know they look at you as a thug. Pull your hair out your face. Pull your pants up. Look presentable.” They also taught their sons that when interacting with others, especially with police officers, it was best and safest to be respectful and avoid confrontations to prevent escalation. Participant 7 shared that avoiding confrontation was not due to being Black, but due to being a “decent human being and decent young man.” For Participants 1, 2, and 5, they taught their sons to walk away from arguments to avoid antagonizing others and to keep themselves safe.

According to five participants, unfair treatment was the reality of racism experienced by African American people. Participant 3 stated, “I let him know that, you know, there's still some division and you know, racism is going on where White people are treated a little bit more ...advantage than Black people.” For Participant 3, staying under the radar meant avoiding trouble and obeying the law. Thus, Participant 3 shared teaching her son situational awareness: “I teach them to always be aware of your surroundings and communicate.”

Theme 3: African American Single Mothers' Experiences of Preparing Their Son for Their Future

All seven participants shared their experiences of teaching their sons to prepare to be adults. The participants believed in the importance of education and provided support and encouragement for their children to persist in school. Participants 3, 4, and 5 shared that they did not have the opportunity to graduate from high school, while Participant 2 obtained a GED which was the reason they supported their children's education. Participant 3 stated, "We are trying to break that curse with this generation of our kids, making sure they finished high school... I play a big role in staying on him to make sure that he gets a great education." Participant 4 discussed that "education was a priority" in their household. Participant 2 revealed that her she supported her son throughout his basic education and was currently encouraging him to enroll at a vocational school as an alternative to college due to his lack of readiness. Participant 5 believed that education was the key to future career success:

I try to let him know that education is something that you really need... You don't have to worry about getting these low paying jobs. You got education and [that's] something that can take you farther and you get an education, you can step up and go places.

The participants also shared that they taught their sons to persist in life through building resilience and not giving up. Participant 2 expressed how she talked to her son about challenges and obstacles being part of life, and to keep going despite setbacks: "Things could happen, but you don't just lay down. If it happened, get up, wipe yourself

off and move on.” Participants 3 and 4 shared that they taught their sons to maintain a positive attitude towards life despite the challenges they might encounter. Participant 4 stated, “I can only prepare him from my experiences, and that is keeping him in a positive environment...education, prayer, faith, and wanting to do better is the only way you are going to do better.”

According to the participants, preparation for the future included setting and achieving goals. As mothers, they noted guiding and supporting their children in working towards their goals. Participant 3 specified taking time with her son to talk and write about short-term and long-term goals including helping him map out a timeline, and giving him options:

We sit down and talk about plans...I asked him what should where do you see yourself in three months? Or where do you see yourself when you graduate? We sit down and write down short-terms goal as well as long-term goals. We're not sure if college is a thing now. He wants to go into the workforce, so we let him know that there's an option and he has several different options on the table.

Participant 7 shared that she had the financial capacity; thus, she shared that she will provide monetary support for her son to work on his goals when he turns 21.

The participants additionally shared that they prepared their children for the future through teaching them important life skills such as making good decisions, saving money, cooking, and maintaining their car. Four participants perceived that future prospects can be affected by present choices; therefore, they taught their sons to avoid associating with bad influences. Participant 2 explained, “He is a young Black man and his peers and who

he hangs around can make a huge difference in his life choices.” The participants added that instead of worrying about who their children spent time with, they supported their sons joining sports, school, and church activities to help with their growth. Participant 3 stated, “I try to keep him active in sports and keeps up doing to keep his mind to keep his mind occupied.” Participant 7 reasoned, “You need to keep your children busy...I didn’t. Time makes idle thoughts and it’s, you know, caused a couple of problems as he’s grown up to mature into a young adult.” The participants shared that their ultimate lesson for their sons was to be a man and take responsibility for themselves. Participant 4 described, “So the most important life skills is building a foundation based on who you are and what you want to be in life. You need to be the man of the household. You need to be able to lead properly and most importantly, you need to be able to have a career where you can financially support yourself and a family. If you choose to have children and a wife.”

Theme 4: African American Single Mothers' Experiences of the Importance of Male Figures for Their Sons

All seven participants shared their experiences of have a male influence in their sons’ lives. The participants described that the men influencing their children’s lives included their biological father and male relatives. Some participants additionally referenced male friends and church pastors. The participants had conflicting statements about the influence of their children’s biological father. Some participants noted that the children’s biological father was influential in their lives, but not necessarily in a positive way. Participant 4 shared that her son’s biological father was abusive and a bad influence when he was present:

He would influence his son to disrespect me and to say that my relationship was not right. He told him that he didn't have to go to college and he make the same kind of money he did...He was involved in illegal activity...He influenced my son a lot. He wanted to be in the streets.

Some participants stated that their children's father were not good role models, and that their children were aware or made aware to not be like their father. Participant 1 shared, "Neither one of them wanted to be anything like their father." Participant 2 elucidated, "He knows his father made some bad decisions, but it doesn't really influence his life choices. I have told him numerous times that fast money will only lead him down the same road as his father." Other participants noted that the father of their children was not involved in their lives and had no influence over them. Participant 2 articulated that her son's biological father was abusive and selling illegal drugs. Instead of letting him influence her son, she reported that she chose to leave to protect her child. Since separating, the father has not been involved in the child's life and had no influence over him. Additionally, some participants stated that the father of their children used to be good role models and had a good relationship with them until they left. Participant 3 stated, "It was a pretty good father son relationship, but after the divorce is like it just all faded away." The father of Participant 7's son passed away, but Participant 7 reported that he was a good role model when he was alive. Participant 7 shared, "His father taught him all of the things that you know, I think men need to teach their sons and how to treat a woman... His father was still an integral part of his life."

The participants reported that male relatives including grandfathers and uncles were typically good role models in their sons' lives. Participants 3 and 5 shared that their male relatives set good examples for their sons to follow and provided guidance for their sons. Participant 3 stated, "So they've accomplished all this and have goals and dreams and houses, and they want to see the same thing for him. So they stay on top of him to make sure that he's a successful young Black man." Participant 2 expressed that her brothers were enlisted in the army and were positive role models for her son.

According to the participants, other influential male role models for their sons included their male friends and church pastors. Participants 6 and 7 shared that their male friends and church pastors provided mentorship for their sons. Participant 6 noted, "My male best friend was a huge influence in his life. When he tried to be tried to keep him on the right track, tried to be his mentor." The participants additionally described that these adult male role models did not only provide mentorship, but also included their sons in productive activities. Participant 2 shared, "My pastor allows him to run the music in the church, he participates in community events and is paid." Participant 3 reported, "Our church pastor helped in getting the =m into sports, into college, or just get them involved in the church, keeping them out of the streets and having them something to do."

Summary

This chapter contained the findings of this study. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of single African American mothers raising males and their association with criminal behavior. This phenomenological study involved the lived experiences of seven African American single mothers living in

Birmingham, Alabama with at least one adolescent son with a history of criminal involvement. The participants were interviewed and the interview data were analyzed thematically.

Four themes resulted from the analysis: (a) African American single mothers' experiences of their primary role in raising their son, (b) African American single mothers' experiences of teaching their son self-preservation after unfair encounters in society, (c) African American single mothers' experiences of preparing their son for their future, and (d) African American single mothers' experiences of the importance of male figures for their sons. The findings were that African American single mothers were the main caregivers for their sons, taking on roles such as meeting daily needs, fostering a connection, and providing discipline. The participants faced societal stigma and judgment but accepted their situations and used their experiences to prepare their sons for self-preservation and future challenges. While their support systems were limited, they acknowledged the influences male figures had on their sons, with positive role models offering constructive influence and negative ones having harmful effects. The discussion of the findings will be presented in the next chapter. The findings will be interpreted based on their contribution to the body of knowledge on appropriate resources influencing African American single mothers and their sons. The conclusions of the study will also be reported in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of single African American mothers raising male adolescents and how their perceptions of these experiences contribute to the criminalization of their sons. Negative representations have negative impacts on the education achievements, employment opportunities, socio-economic status, and family and community stability of African American male learners (Adedoyin, 2019; Carey, 2019; Harris & Kruger, 2022). The findings of this study established the following themes: the single African American mothers admitted to feeling overburdened and unsupported due to the challenges they undergo when raising their sons in a world that is rampant with racism against black individuals, societal restrictions, and stereotyping. Many felt that their sons were unfairly targeted and criminalized by law enforcement and the broader community due to their race and gender.

Second, the mothers described the pressure and stress that they feel when struggling to be providers and shielding male adolescents from the realities of living in impoverished and insecure communities. This strain, according to the GST, made the mothers develop feelings of anger, frustration, and despair, which, if not well managed could lead the son to engage in criminal activities as part of dealing with the stress. Finally, the mothers stressed that education, mental health, employment, and community resources are the key to ending poverty and criminalization of families. The participants advocated for policy-makers and other leaders of the society to take time and more

consideration in the plight of single African American mothers and their children. The results of this research contribute to the understanding of African American mothers who are often overlooked and whose voice is rarely heard. In doing so, this study adds to the understanding of the experiences of single African American mothers in relation to systemic racism, scarce resources, and the criminalization of African American male adolescents. Chapter 5 provides the interpretation of these findings, the limitations of the study, and the implications for future research, policy, and practice.

Interpretation of the Findings

Theme 1: African American Single Mothers' Experiences of Their Primary Role in Raising Their Son

The findings related to this theme identified the difficulty and burden that African American single mothers experience while raising their sons. Based on the results of this study, it can be deduced that mothers are always stressed because of being the primary caregiver of their male adolescents, especially given the numerous socioeconomic and systemic challenges that can lead to their sons becoming involved in crimes. The results of this study contribute to the existing knowledge of the discipline. For instance, the results are consistent with Baker's and O'Connell's (2022) research on the financial and logistical barriers that African American single mothers may face that could prevent them from being nurturing figures to their sons. Also, the findings support the assertion made by Carey (2019) that African American males are plagued with historical and current negative stereotypic portrayals that intensify the difficulties experienced by single mothers. These mothers tend to feel the pressure of the expectations set by the society

and the desire to revert the wrong perception of their sons, which contributes to increased stress and pressure.

The results presented can be discussed within the context of the GST as well. The data in this study confirm that African American single mothers feel stressed and strained due to limited resources, negative attitudes towards them in society, and the burden of rearing young sons alone. As postulated by the GST, these negative feelings and experiences may cause their sons to resort to crime as a way of relieving the stress that comes along with the strain (Agnew, 1992). The GST demonstrated how the mothers' narratives factually contextualize the criminalization of young black male adolescents within structural and socioeconomic factors rather than blaming it on free will.

Theme 2: African American Single Mothers' Experiences of Teaching Their Son Self-Preservation After Unfair Encounters in Society

The findings of the research demonstrated that African American single mothers had to teach their sons how to take care of themselves when they faced discrimination in certain incidences in society. This finding was concurrent with the reviewed literature, which revealed that African American male youths are portrayed negatively in society and even branded criminals. For instance, Harris and Kruger (2022) narrated that African American males are stereotyped to be aggressive, dangerous, and criminal; hence, this has a reflection in their education and job opportunities. Similarly, Coaston (2019) concluded that there is still rampant racism and discrimination against African American males, which makes them an easy target for unfavorable treatment. The current study builds on this knowledge by presenting the first-person experiences of African American

single mothers regarding these stereotypes and discrimination that are in turn, affecting their parenting and efforts to shield their male children.

In the context of GST by Agnew (1992), the results imply that the strain and stress received by African American single mothers because of the unfair treatment of their sons can cause negative emotions like anger, frustration, and despair. As explained by Brezina (2017), these negative emotions lead to pressure for corrective action with the reaction being crime or delinquency. The current study also shows how such attempts by the mothers to instill self-protective strategies in their sons can be seen as a way of alleviating and preventing the overall burden and pressures due to the said stereotypes and discriminations and hence minimize and or prevent the chances of the sons turning to a life of delinquency as a form of coping mechanism.

Theme 3: African American Single Mothers' Experiences of Preparing Their Son for Their Future

The results of this study based on this theme established that African American single mothers in Birmingham struggle to help their sons prepare for their future. The conclusions derived from this theme add to the existing knowledge in the discipline by offering a better understanding of the lived experiences of this vulnerable group. The results validate earlier research and literature on the prejudice and social attitudes of the society that African American single mothers and their sons encounter. For instance, Coaston (2019) discussed that despite the advancements in the society, most individuals still have prejudice attitudes towards African American males especially when it concerns educational or employment opportunities. Similarly, the results of the current

research showed that the mothers worried about the lack of opportunities open for their sons because of these prevailing stereotypes in society. According to Carey (2019), the strong historical associations of African American males with slavery are still influential in forming today's view of these people, which was indicated by the experiences of these mothers in navigating these biases of society in an effort to prepare their sons to confront the future.

The results also confirm the GST propositions. According to Agnew (1992) and Brezina (2017), in this theory, strain leads to negative feelings which in turn result to the involvement in delinquent or criminal activities. The findings of the current study identified that the stress and strain of the African American single mothers trying to support and protect their sons from these perceptions place their sons at risk for using criminal activities as a means to cope with this stress. The lack of mothers' resources, racist practices, and responsibility on account of single-handed parenting proved the GST's reliability in explaining the circumstances in the lives of the above-mentioned subjects and challenges African American families experience.

Theme 4: African American Single Mothers' Experiences of the Importance of Male Figures for Their Sons

The results of the current study established that African American single mothers stressed the importance of masculinity in the lives of their teenage boys. The mothers pointed out the need to have positive male role models who could help in disciplining the young males and also offer them some level of emotional support. The findings based on this theme corroborate Baker and O'Connell (2022), who demonstrated the detrimental

effects of the limited availability of resources and support for single-parent families, especially when it comes to Black families. The results of this study also show that the lack of father figures in the lives of African American adolescent males can make these young men's experience even more difficult and could lead them into criminal activities. Furthermore, the findings expand the knowledge of Coaston (2019), who discussed the effects of societal stereotypes and prejudice perceptions of African American males. The participants in the current study demonstrated that male role models could offer the direction, structure, and affection that may assist the young men in overcoming the challenges that they face in society and within structures of oppression, likely reducing the burden and pressure they experience in their daily lives.

When analyzing the results through the lens of GST (Agnew, 1992), it is possible to conclude that the absence of positive male role models in the lives of African American adolescent males is a form of stressor that can cause negative emotions and force them into criminal behavior as a way to alleviate their suffering. The participants in the current study demonstrated that male role models could offer the direction, structure, and affection that may assist the young men in overcoming the challenges that they face in society and within structures of oppression, likely easing the burden and pressure they experience in their daily lives.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations were encountered in the execution of this study. First, the study was conducted on a small sample of African American single mothers residing in Birmingham, Alabama. Although this sample size is enough to conduct a qualitative

phenomenological study to reach data saturation, the study's results may not apply to the overall population of African American single mothers residing in different regions or with diverse socio-economic status hence limiting the transferability of the findings of the study. The findings on the lives of single mothers in this study may not have been the same if the research was conducted in other urban, suburban or rural areas.

Another limitation of this study is that the data collected was based on the participants' self-reports of the experiences which can affect the credibility and confirmability of the findings of the study. While self-reported data, as applied in the present research in the form of interviews, provides valuable insights into the phenomenological structuring of the participants' life worlds, it is prone to certain limitations such as recall bias, selective forgetting, and social desirability (Lim, 2024). The prejudice of respondents as well as self-reported data and people's unwillingness to report specific incidents could influence the results of the study.

Finally, the research was based on cross-sectional data and therefore reflects the participants' experiences and attitudes at a specific time which can affect the dependability of the findings of the study. Retrospectively, the study lacks longitudinal data, which, by observing the participants at various points in time after their sons' diagnosis, could have revealed how various problems oscillated and how the participants coped with them as their sons grew into young men.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and the limitations identified, several recommendations for future research can be made. First, this study aimed at exploring the

experiences of African American single mothers in Birmingham, Alabama, on the criminalization of their adolescent sons. Despite the fact that this approach helped to gain essential information on the issues single mothers face, future research can focus on incorporating single mothers from other urban centers with comparable characteristics in terms of demographics and socioeconomic status. The extension of the geographical scope would provide a broader perspective of the difficulties encountered by African American single mothers in various settings, and how those difficulties may predict the criminalization of their sons.

Second, the current study employed a qualitative, phenomenological research design that sought to capture the participants' narratives and experiences. This research strategy was appropriate for the study as it focused on the research question; however, future research could supplement the interviews with both qualitative and quantitative data. The integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches may offer a broader understanding of the topic, which would enable the authors to verify hypotheses and study the relationship between the independent and dependent variables more systematically (Pregoner, 2024).

Third, the present study targeted only the African American single mothers. As for future research, investigation should focus more on the perceptions and experiences of other relevant stakeholders including the adolescent sons, the police officers, teachers, and members of the community. Incorporating information from diverse sources and individuals would help researchers have a better view of the various aspects leading to African American male adolescents' criminalization. Further, research investigations that

prospectively assess these young men and their life courses may elucidate the broader effects of the difficulties experienced by their single- parent homes. As highlighted in the study, approaches such as providing improved community support systems and education materials should not be dismissed but rather embraced in future research and policy-making. In this way, researchers and policymakers can actively identify the expressed needs and concerns of single mothers regarding their contact with the criminal justice system and strive to find better solutions for uplifting African American families and disrupting the vicious cycle of criminalization.

Implications

Positive Social Change

This study's findings offer several important implications for positive social change at the individual, family, and societal levels. On the individual level, the knowledge of the research results allows African American single mothers to engage more actively in fighting for the necessary resources to change the conditions of poverty and criminalization for their families. By sharing their personal stories, the study can prevent the perpetuation of unfair stigmatization of these mothers while raising awareness of the systemic challenges they experience. Rising awareness of these challenges can enhance their self-efficacy and enable them to effect positive change in their community in this research. On the family level, recommendations made in the study regarding improved community support infrastructure and educational resources might help stabilize African American single parent families and promote the healthier development of male adolescents. These interventions could therefore prevent the

continuation of generational cycles of incarceration by actively eradicating the causes of strain and stress that lead to criminal engagement and provide new opportunities for young men to succeed. Also, enhancing the competencies of these mothers in caring for their kids' needs and addressing related issues can usher in numerous positive repercussions affecting family unity and stability.

In the societal context, it will be possible to intervene in policy-making and encourage changes that will better explain the reasons for the criminalization of African American male adolescents. The current study addresses these questions by providing insight into single parents and young adults' experiences of race, education, employment, and poverty, information that can potentially inform more effective and sensitive policies for supporting single parents, enhancing educational attainment, and combating systemic racism. Finally, the findings of this study can be beneficial in helping to create a fairer and post-racial and post-family structure society that would give every person an equal opportunity to achieve success.

Methodological and Theoretical Implications

From a methodological perspective, this study contributes to understanding the methodology used in this research, which employed a phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of marginalized African American single mothers. Focusing on the participants' own experiences allowed the study to unveil the multifaceted relationships between single motherhood, racism, and criminalization of young African American males. The phenomenological approach could be useful for

other scholars who are interested in establishing the experiences of those most affected by social issues and produce more grounded and practical knowledge.

Theoretically, the use of GST as the theoretical framework for this study establishes a solid framework to analyze the stressors and adverse childhood experiences that might result in increased criminal involvement in African American boys who are headed by single mothers. Thus, highlighting how stress and strain experienced by these mothers may lead to unfavorable coping strategies and delinquency among children further supports using GST to understand the causal relationships between the criminalization of the vulnerable population. Furthermore, the results of this study point towards the necessity of broadening the GST framework to address race, gender, and class, and to pay attention to the situational factors in relation to the individual and community outcomes.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the insights gained from this study, three key recommendations emerge to support African American single mothers and their male adolescent children and address the systemic issues that contribute to the criminalization of this population. First, it is necessary for communities and policymakers to invest in adequate culturally responsive resources for the African American single-parent homes. Such systems should comprise but are not restricted to, low-cost and easy-to-reach mental health care, vocational training and employment programs and literacy campaigns. Since the problem is complex and requires intervention from various angles, such interventions can assist with reducing the pressure and challenges that these families face and that contribute to

the likelihood of criminal activity among male adolescents. Second, educational institutions and youth-serving organizations should adopt culturally responsive, trauma-sensitive curricula and programming that disrupt and reform the stereotypical depiction of Black male youth. These principles should be accompanied by continuous professional development on cultural sensitivity for teachers, head teachers, and other service providers to enhance their ability to foster understanding for this group.

Third, the police and the criminal justice system need to be overhauled to eliminate racism, prejudice, and the criminalization of young Black males. The reforms may encompass measures such as shifting to the community policing approach, using community-based restorative justice, providing mandatory de-escalation and implicit bias training for police officers, and offering youth diversion programs. These recommendations could help in interrupting the cycles of poverty, incarceration, and oppression of young African American males and, therefore, promoting a just society.

Conclusion

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of single African American mothers raising male adolescents in Birmingham, Alabama and how their perceptions of these experiences contribute to the criminalization of their sons. The data collected in this study was relevant and important in understanding the dynamics and reasons for high rates of young African American males in the criminal justice system. The first key finding of this study was that the representation of young African American males in a negative light and their criminalization is not solely due to their personal decisions or actions but due to structural racism, lack, and other adversities that single

mothers face in their lives. The mothers participating in this study demonstrated the day-to-day challenges they encounter in their attempts to properly raise their sons in a society that seems stacked against them - even in matters of police brutality, the school-to-prison system, and the lack of access to effective schooling, jobs, and therapeutic services for their families residing in socio-economically disadvantaged areas.

Rather than blaming the mothers or their sons, the results of this study highlight how social, economic, and institutional factors beyond their control ultimately shape the life trajectories of these young men. The mothers were remarkably perceptive of the culturally ingrained prejudices that criminalize their sons, and they had a passionate concern of keeping their children away from realities of racism and oppression. Nevertheless, they are ill-equipped to do so due to their lack of access to support systems and resources that most privileged families enjoy. Therefore, this research raised pertinent questions and concerns about the perception of young African American males as dangerous liabilities that need to be controlled and restrained rather than valuable. Thus, this study offers a direct counter narrative to the prevailing frames portraying single African American mothers in overwhelmingly negative terms.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Introduction

African-American males especially face stereotyping that could affect their prospects for educational outcomes, employment opportunities, and socioeconomic success. These outcomes may result in criminal behaviors and future criminality of African-American males, dismantling African-American families and communities. Although this problem has been investigated by researchers, the perspectives of single mothers of African-American males have not been explored.

This session is a recorded one-on-one interview for data collection purposes on my study on the perspectives of African-American single mothers in Birmingham, Alabama on the societal stereotypes and criminalization of African-American male adolescents. The duration of this interview is expected to be a maximum of 90 minutes. As a participant in this study, you have earlier submitted a signed informed consent form as documentation of your agreement to voluntarily share your lived experiences in raising your son. If there are instances that you might feel uncomfortable during the interview, please know that you are free to take a break or stop the session. All the information you share will be treated with privacy and confidentiality.

Are you ready to start?

Demographic Questions

1. What is your marital status?
2. How many children do you have?
3. How many among your children are African-American males?

4. How old is/are your African-American son/s?
5. How do you describe your neighborhood: urban, rural, or suburban?
6. How do you describe your socioeconomic status: low-income, lower middle class, middle class, upper middle class, or high-income?

Interview Questions

Opening question: What does being a single mother raising an African-American adolescent son mean for you?

1. What is your role in raising your son?
 - a. How do you describe your relationship with your son?
 - b. What is your role in your son's education?
 - c. What is your role in disciplining your son?
2. What is the role of your son's biological father in his life?
 - a. How do you think your son's relationship (or lack thereof) with his biological father influences him?
3. Who do you consider as positive influences or role models for your son?
 - a. What instance made you say that these people are positive influences or role models?
4. How do you prepare your son to become a young adult?
 - a. How do you prepare your son to face different kinds of people and scenarios that might not be favorable towards him?
 - b. What important life skills do you impart to your son?
 - c. How do you talk about plans for the future with your son?

- d. How do you talk about obstacles to his plans?
5. How did you reward your son when he behaves well?
6. How did you discipline your son when he behaves poorly?
7. How do you think society sees your son?
 - a. How does this perception influence the way you parent your son?
8. Describe a time, if any, during which you feel your son has been treated unfairly or with prejudice because of his race.
 - a. How did you react to the situation?
 - b. What did you say to your son regarding the situation?
 - c. What did your son say to you regarding the situation?
 - d. How do you think the situation influenced your parenting method?
9. What supports, if any, do you have in raising your son?
 - a. What social supports do you have?
 - b. What financial support do you have?
10. How have your experiences as a single mother raising an African-American son influenced how you seek support?
 - a. What instances, if any, influenced your decision to seek support in raising your son?
 - b. What instances, if any, barred you from seeking support in raising your son?
11. What supports do you think would have helped improve your experiences of raising your son?

Closing question: Do you have anything else to add?

Closing

That was the last question. I appreciate your insights. I will be transcribing this interview session and email you a copy of the transcript within 72 hours. Please review your responses and feel free to make changes as you see fit. You may do so for 5 business days before I consider the transcript approved and ready for analysis. I may also reach out for clarifications or follow-up questions during this period. Also, if you feel the need for assistance, please be in touch with me. Thank you.

Appendix B: List of Codes and Themes

Open codes	Initial themes	Validated themes	Final themes
encouraged and supported education	prepared for child's future	Teaching to be an adult	African American single mothers' experiences of preparing their son for their future
guided in setting goals			
provided financial support			
taught resilience and to not give up			
taught to focus on goals			
taught to take responsibility			
taught to work on goals			
involved in activities	taught life skills		
taught to be a man			
taught to be a member of society			
taught to care for vehicle			
taught to cook			
taught to know rights			
taught to make good choices			
taught to save money and about finances			
cops upset son	perception of society	Unfair experiences led to teaching self-preservation	African American single mothers' experiences of teaching their son self-preservation after unfair encounters in society
prejudice against AA men			
sons' experiences of unfair treatment			
stereotyped because of juvenile sentence			
taught discernment	taught self-preservation		

Open codes	Initial themes	Validated themes	Final themes
taught about realities of racism taught code switching taught situational awareness taught to avoid escalation taught to obey the law			
a good role model	father's influence	Experience with male figures as role models	African American single mothers' experiences of the importance of male figures for their sons
absent aware that father is a bad role model inconsistent used to be present but a poor influence			
encouraged to finish school	influences of male extended family		
good role models poor role models taught life skills			
involved in productive activities	influences of other male figures		
mentorship from other male adult pastor provided opportunities			
faced discrimination as a single mother with low income	challenges in parenting	Single mothers' primary caregiver role	African American single mothers' experiences of their primary role in raising their son
faced judgment as a single mother lack of male role models for sons lack of opportunities for AA children			

Open codes	Initial themes	Validated themes	Final themes
lack of support for child's special needs			
went through divorce			
different attitudes of multiple children	discipline		
old enough to reason with			
punished for poor behavior			
rewarded for good behaviors			
talked to by male figures			
taught to be accountable for actions			
child support from child's father	minimal support in parenting		
extended family's help			
government support			
other people's support			
fully involved in child's life	daily involvement		
present everyday doing everything			
protected and raised by oneself			
spoke up for child's rights			
ultimate decision maker			
difficult due to child's disapproval of mother's relationship	relationship		
mutual respect			
openly discussing everything			
poor due to child's behavior			