

GROWING UP SINGLE: LIVES OF ADULT DAUGHTERS OF BLACK SINGLE MOTHERS
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT

Research on single mothers is abundant but research on their adult children is limited. Most research on single mothers and their children focuses on the children as minors and not on outcomes once they reach adulthood. Currently we do not know the full landscape of single motherhood beyond the stereotypical (re)presentation of single motherhood. (Re)presentations of single motherhood in both academic literature and the media are often depicted as single, poor, and Black or any races other than White (Bermudez et al., 2014; Kreager et al., 2010; Rowlingson & McKay, 2005; Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Feasey, 2013). Using multiple qualitative methods, I am exploring how perceptions and stereotypes of Black women and Black single mothers, in particular, affect the lived experiences and quality of life for Black daughters who were raised by Black mothers. The rationale for my study lies in the potential, through (re)presentation, to illuminate the lives of the adult children of mother who do not fit the stereotypical mold. Expanding the (re)presentation of Black single motherhood is important because it increases empathy for both mothers and their children, at any age. It also reduces the stigma surrounding mothering alone and dispels stereotypes. My dissertation is an ethnographic collective case study with embedded units. According to Goddard (2010), a collective case study involves more than one case, which may or may not be physically co-located with other cases. I have eight cases in my case study including one sibling group. Methods in my study, including interactive interviews, a focus group, and film analysis highlighting Black single mothers and daughters. As a Black woman raised in a mother led home of a single Black woman, I found that neither I nor my mother was represented in the current research landscape. This absence was the impetus for my dissertation. My dissertation explores existing themes of Black motherhood

and reinterprets those themes through the use of narrative. Using narrative allows me to shift the stigma paradigm that surrounds the (re)presentation of Black single mothers and their children.

DEDICATION

This manuscript is in memoriam to my loving mother, Deborah. Who taught me to think for myself, love myself, love words and love God.

This manuscript is dedicated to my loves:

Jason, thank you for sacrificing alongside me so that my dreams could become realities.

Harlem, thank you for showing me the woman I want(ed) to be.

Haven, you grew alongside this document and for that, I will be forever changed.

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Thank you, Lord, for keeping me. While completing my doctorate I lost my mother. Thankfully I have a village that surrounds me.

Thank you to my village, there are far too many of you to name here.

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A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

Throughout this manuscript, I use both the terms African American and Black interchangeably. I capitalize Black when referring to people of African descent as a matter of reverence and intention. I know that it is common practice that if you are going to capitalize Black then you must subsequently capitalize white but I have chosen not to employ this practice in this manuscript. At times White is capitalized and at times it is not. I am taking this inspiration from other writers of color who choose to recognize personhood as a proper noun that should be capitalized. Historically Black people were not always given the respect of being considered anything more than a common noun whereas Whites were always given the privilege of capitalization.

PREAMBLE

...I felt, once again, the kindling heat of my hope that we, the daughters of these Black women, will honor their sacrifice by giving them thanks. We will undertake, with pride, every transcendent dream of freedom made possible by the humility of their love.” ---June Jordan, 1985, p. 105

In Patricia Hill Collins’ influential work Black Feminist Thought she credits June Jordan’s words by saying that “there is a need for African American women to honor our mothers’ sacrifices by developing self-defined analyses of Black motherhood” (p. 173). I would extend her argument to include Black daughterhood as well. This manuscript is my response to Collins’ call.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Who am I?

I am my mother's daughter.

Who are we?

We are our mother's wildest dreams
At times, we've been their heaviest burdens

I need to lay my burdens down.
Can I lay them here with you?
No?
Then, I'll lay them with my mother.

It is us.

Her and I.
 I and she.
 We.

The past at our backs
The world our oyster or maybe more like our crawfish.
Pinch/Twist/Suck/Savor.

Sometimes it feels like we are being boiled like corn n' potatoes in this pot called life.
And still you have to ask
Who we are?

We are not your statistics.
We are not your risks or your worries.
We are not Moynihan's outcomes.
We are more than your stereotypes or tropes.

We are our mother's love embodied & personified.
Papa's sometimes (or never).
Mama's all ways
Always.

Statement of Problem: The Single Story of Black single motherhood

There has been a single story told of Black single mothers [read: (entitled) poor, uneducated, lazy mothers looking for a handout and not a hand up]. Other often present story characteristics have to do with multiple children by multiple fathers, an assumption of lack and/or deficit, unsupervised children, latch key kids and an assumption of lack of professionalization, regardless of the mother's educational attainment.

Is there something wrong with telling and re-telling a single story? It is not a measure on whether it is right nor wrong but that it is dangerous. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie warned us in her 2009 Ted Talk of the danger of the single story. She explains how a single story is constructed:

“That is how to create a single story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become... The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is... they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. The consequence of the single story is... it robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories can empower, humanize and repair.” (Adichie, 2009)

The stories we tell are deeply important because they are how we make sense of our worlds and the world at large. According to Ellis (2004), “stories are essential to human understanding” (p. 32). As a society we have understood Black single motherhood because of the single story that has been told.

This single narrative was perpetuated by the 1965 Moynihan report, and became further entrenched during the 1992 Presidential campaign when Dan Quayle sought to denigrate Black single mothers in juxtaposition to fictional character Murphy Brown (read: White, educated,

professional single mothers). The single story continued with Clinton's welfare reforms in 1996 and that single story continues today. The characteristics of the single story do not stop with the mother. They also extend to their children. For Black daughters of Black single mothers, the assumed narrative is that they are promiscuous, at-risk, will become a delinquent, and a teen mom. In short, they are to be an unfavorable statistic¹. Adichie explicitly states that a single story leads us to stereotypes. One of the most popular stereotypes attributed to Black single mothers is the welfare queen. Linda Gordon argues that the evolution of the American welfare state is best understood as a series of government responses to the "single mother problem" (West, 2016, p. 334). Originally, the single mother viewed as white, widow, and deserving of social supports. Over time, the single mother was linked to or viewed as Black, teen or unmarried, and less deserving of social supports. "Thus, the 'single mother,' even when differentiated from the Welfare Queen, is still assumed to be Black, economically-disadvantaged, and occasionally a 'teen mom'." (as quoted by West, 2016, p. 334).

And so, the story goes:

"The Welfare Queen stereotype/myth encapsulates a range of characteristics that crown her the ultimate deviant mother in American culture: she is African American, she is "unwed" or single, she started child-bearing as a teen, and she does not put her children first though she stays home full time and does not work" (West, 2016, p. 331). Her race, black, is always clear, even when it is not directly stated (p. 332)².

The welfare queen is just one of many stereotypes often attached to Black single mothers. Others include the Sapphire/Angry Black Woman, Jezebel and Baby Mama.

¹ The single story also extends to Black sons of Black single mothers but this manuscript and study focuses explicitly on daughters

² See Linda Gordon's book, Pitied, But Not Entitled for additional details on the connection between single motherhood and welfare

The historical implications that my research provide will also cross disciplines. For example, by narrowing the focus from parents to mothers, one can look at the creation and implementation of Mothers' pensions in the Progressive Era that eventually led to The Aid to Families with Dependent Children, which morphed into Aid to Dependent Child and is now Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. "Mothers' aid was typically denied to Black and Latina women, both because they were seen as undeserving and because their exclusion bolstered the prestige of the program as a support for "good mothers" (Soss, et al, 2011, p. 56) Yet presently it is society's opinion that only Black and Latina women receive government aid and are the face of the "welfare queen...but marginalization itself does not have a static relationship to race, class, gender, or other axes of social division" (Soss, et al, 2011, p.55). It is by looking at the fluid and interrelated relationship of race, class, gender and other axes of social division and inclusion that the significance of my research is seen.

Purpose of Study

I was drawn to this work because my mother and other Black single mothers I knew did not fit the single story mold. The purpose of this study was to produce new stories of Black daughters and Black mothers by adding depth to the common narrative. My intention was to disrupt the single story paradigm that maligns both daughters of Black single mothers and Black single mothers themselves. I also wanted to uncouple Black single mothers from the welfare queen myth by offering stories that showed other (re)presentations of Black motherhood. Likewise, I wanted to provide a new and more positive way of looking at Black single motherhood and children raised in single-parent households (regardless of age).

I decided to use qualitative methods because they support my own epistemology and

ontology as well as fit the purpose of my study. I chose a case study design because “qualitative case study methodology provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544). A case study approach allows me to look at the phenomena of being the daughter of a Black single mother as well as Black single motherhood as a whole within the framework of intersectionality.

According to Yin (2003) a case study design should be used when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context. My study fits criteria (a), (b), and (c) with the contextual conditions being the intersecting oppressions faced by Black women and girls. Additionally, I designed this study as a case study because I believe that a case study has the potential to produce tangible change and has the ability to shine a light on a phenomenon that may be hidden in plain sight. Single mothers and their children, regardless of color, are a phenomenon that is here and deserves our attention. The research questions that guided this study are:

1. How are the adult daughters of Black single mothers and their mothers understood through the lens of intersectionality?
2. In what way do the perceptions and (mis)representations of daughters of Black single mothers in the U.S. affect their lived experiences and quality of their lives?
3. How do the narrative accounts of Black daughters of Black single mothers provide an enhanced understanding of Black single mothers?

I chose these research questions because I wanted to tap into participants’ lived experiences. I also wanted to explore the effect of stereotypes and the ways people’s perceptions

can impact participant lives. I wanted to provide a counternarrative for and about Black women and girls and the best way I know to do that is through narrative/storytelling.

Anticipated Outcomes

As a qualitative researcher, I did not come to my study with a particular outcome in mind but I did have desires for this work. One desire was that children and adults of Black single mothers will feel seen and understood by reading the stories of the participants featured here.

Additional desires were that sharing these stories would increase empathy for children of Black single mothers and the women who raised them, that stigma would be reduced about mother-led homes³; and that their stories would dispel stereotypes often associated with Black women as well as Black single mothers and their children, in particular.

Scope, Rationale & Significance

“According to the current population survey, the percentage of children living with one parent (whether mother or father) has increased from 11.8% to 26.6% between 1968 and 2018” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Thirty-percent of Black families live in mother-led homes (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Eighty percent of Black mothers are mothering without a partner. One lens through which this harm manifests is stigma. This is significant given that in the years since the Moynihan report, single-parent households have become more common and yet the stigma surrounding them remains. If this trend continues, we are doing our society a disservice by relegating single mothers and their children to lesser status. Stigma has the ability to affect multiple aspects of life for both mothers and children from the mother’s pay opportunities and

³ A mother led home is one where the mother is the sole provider for the children’s physical, spiritual, and emotional needs without the assistance or presence of a father in the home. This definition was generated from data gathered during this study from the stories participants shared.

work-family policies to how children are labeled and treated within school settings. Another lens is equal pay⁴. Black women have to work an additional seven to eight months into the new year to earn what White man earned in the entire previous year. In other words, what a White male colleague earned in 2016, a Black woman had to work until July 31, 2017 to earn that same amount. In 2018, that date moved from July 31st to August 7th. In 2019, this date moved from August 7th to August 22nd.

Currently, a Black woman receives \$0.61 to her white male counterparts \$1.00 (National Women’s Law Center, 2019). But if a Black woman was to receive \$1.00 to her white male counterparts \$1.00 these are some examples of what she could do with this additional income⁵: 155 more weeks of food, 14 more months of mortgage and utility payments, 22 more months of rent and nearly 2.5 more years of child care. When considering how many Black women are heads of their households the impact runs deep⁶. Employers are diminishing Black women’s contributions by not paying them equal to their white male counterparts which widens the gap between the proverbial haves and have less/have nots. Over the course of a forty-year career, a Black woman is losing \$946,120 (National Women’s Law Center, 2019)—almost one million dollars. When you are the sole provider this wage loss is significant.

Use of poetic representation

According to Richardson (2011), poetic representation⁷ is a creative, emergent and changing form (p. 889). I think in poems and have written poetry throughout my life. I generated

⁴ To learn more about Black Women’s Equal Pay Day, refer to the National Women’s Law Center & the American Association of University Women

⁵ Higher Heights, 2019. See more at <https://www.higherheightsforamerica.org/>

⁶ For more, see The Center for American Progress’ 2016 and 2019 Reports on Breadwinning Mothers.

⁷ For more, see Laurel Richardson’s 2011 chapter on *Poetic Representation of Interviews* in the Handbook of Interview Research

poems from participant data when and where I saw them in my mind's eye as poetry.

“Poetic representation can both cohere and conflict with normative writing. It offers opportunities for alternative expressions of people’s lives as well as opportunities for critical attention to knowledge claims about them” (Richardson, 2011, p. 889)

Poetry is a crystallization process. Thoughts, stories, and ramblings are crystallized into chosen words, where words may be few but each and every one of them and how they are placed on the page and read counts. People do not speak in prose but instead we speak poetically. There are stops and starts, pauses and breaks, spaces and silences. Poems allow for a more accurate capture of speech than prose does. This capturing also allows poems to be felt in ways that prose cannot. I have been trained to show, not tell in qualitative writing. “The poem *shows* another person how it is to feel something” (Richardson, 2011, p. 886) (Emphasis added). Richardson (2011) suggests that there are several reasons a researcher can write poetic representations. Utilizing her suggestions I chose it to “(a) fulfill as best as possible both traditional research and traditional poetic criteria, (b) express the sense of the whole or the essence of the experience as constructed by the interviewer, (c) transform normative discourse and actions” (p. 893), and (d) my personal experience reading and writing poetry.

Use of Storytelling

“We should consider the data for what they are---stories interviewees tell in interviews” (Ellis, 2004, p. 66). During the dissertation process I attempted to approach the data from multiple perspectives but the only perspective that felt true to the stories that participants shared with me was to present them in narrative form. To combat the single story of Black single motherhood put forth, I offer up more stories from my participants’ lived experiences and my own. As mentioned earlier, stories are how we learn our world and understand it. Stories matter.

They should be considered as both a subject and a method of social science research (Ellis, 2004, p. 32). In addition, story/narrative can be used as analysis (Ellis, 2004; Koch 1998). Stories are offerings of “evocation in addition to representation as a goal for social science research. They provide generalization through resonance with readers and stories open up rather than close down conversation” (Ellis, 2004, p. 22).

Structure of Text

This manuscript contains seven chapters, including this one as the introductory chapter, Each chapter contains a brief introduction of what it contains. Chapter Two is a review of the literature. Chapter Three is an explanation of the methods and methodology used. Chapter Four is a Black Feminist Film Content Analysis that looks at two movies and their portrayal of Black single mothers and their children. Chapter Five is a narrative presentation of findings derived from participant interviews. Chapter Six consists of analyses and Chapter Seven serves as the concluding chapter. Appendix I is my positionality statement as a researcher during this project and process. Appendix II & III contain non-narrative data representations that could be useful for readers but were distracting within the main manuscript.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The aims of the literature review were to 1) provide historical context to the representation of Black single mothers in the United States, 2) summarize the negative stereotypes often attributed to Black single mothers and their children, 3) examine the existing literature on Black mother-daughter relationships, and 4) address literature that looks at the outcomes of children of single parents.

There are three subsections in Chapter Two: (Re)presentation, Perception & Stereotype; Black Mother and Daughter Relationships; and Outcomes of Children of Single Parents. The content areas were covered to adequately address what the existing literature says in reference to my research questions.

Perception & Stereotype Perception

Past research on single parents has centered primarily on mothers and the focus has been limited to those who are single, poor, and Black or other non-Whites. (Bermudez et al., 2014; Kreager et al., 2010; Rowlingson & McKay, 2005; Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Kaplan, 1997; and Robinson & Werblow, 2012). The research literature is well-supplied with work that reinforces negative (re)presentations and stereotypes of single parents (Wong, 2017; Hitchins & Payne, 2017; Daryanani et al., 2016; Mantovani & Thomas, 2014; Kreager et al., 2010; Kaplan, 1997; Huda, 2001; Akass, 2013; Haire & McGeorge, 2012, Ganong & Coleman, 1995 and Edin & Kefalas, 2005). How people are (re)presented within the literature is important because (re)presentation has the ability to alter how people are treated in society. There is a dearth of

literature on representation studies on single motherhood and even less if one focuses the search on Black single motherhood.

Through the use of a descriptive case study, Haire & McGeorge (2012) captured how and in what ways negative perceptions can be detrimental to single parents. The study sought to examine the differences in the negative perceptions of never-married, custodial, single mothers and fathers and explore how those perceptions varied by the gender of the single parent. Since my research interests focuses on single mothers, I concentrated on the negative perception of single mothers within their study. They documented that while single mothers perceive themselves to be good, responsible, and competent mothers, single mothers reported that society primarily focused on their perceived negative attributes (Jarrett, 1994; Jarrett, 1996 , Haire & McGeorge, 2012, p. 25). Additional findings from their study found that “the personal nature of the perceived negative attributes of single mothers appears to be consistent with existing literature that found that society views single mothers as deviant, unhappy, and having little hope for the future” (p. 43). I believe that society has negative perceptions of single mothers due in part to how single mothers are represented in movies, television, and other forms of media. By having limited representations of single mothers available to the public imagination, the stereotypical single story representation of poor, single mothers remains and reinforces those negative perceptions.

Reinforced perceptions are dangerous because perceptions hold weight. Jarrett (1996) studied the impact of negative societal perceptions on single mothers and found that these perceptions can have a negative effect on mother–child interactions and the mental health of both the mothers and the children. While these negative perceptions often do not accurately describe single-parent headed families, these perceptions do have a negative effect on these families

(Haire & McGeorge, 2012, p. 25). A contributing factor to the negative perception and stereotype of poor, single mothers is a preoccupation with access and use of public services, usually state or federal, i.e. “welfare” (Radey & Cheatham, 2013; Mantovani & Thomas, 2014; Huda, 2001). This use of services is closely related to the negative representation of single mothers i.e., the handout mentality and the welfare queen.

(Re)presentation in Popular Culture

Within popular culture, the cultural imagery productions of single mothers favorably center white mothers (Davies & Smith, 1998; Feasey, 2013; and Rousseau, 2013) and exclude single mothers of color. Research literature that focuses on popular culture in media reflects the same. There is minimal literature specific to single mothers as a whole and those that mention it do so tangentially (Johnston & Swanson, 2003). In 2010, Victoria Nagy discussed three motherhood stereotypes (the middle-class mother, Jewish mother, single mother) seen in U.S. society and “how they are depicted and trivialized on television, specifically within the show *South Park (SP)*” (pp. 1-2). Nagy desired to show why these stereotypes existed and how through comedy they are turned on their head. Nagy argued that the writers of *SP* understand the three stereotypes and are “acting like a mirror for American society” (p.4). She showed how the mirror reflects by interspersing scenes from the show with feminist literature that addresses motherhood, mythmaking and stereotypes. Her work spoke to (re)presentation and the power of stereotypes. Now that I’ve summarized perception and possible outcomes of negative perception, I would like to connect this to a report, frequently referred to as the Moynihan Report, that made a lasting impact on the perception of Black mothers and their children.

The Moynihan Effect

In 1964, then Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan and his staff put together a report on Black families that was completed and released in March 1965. The report was formally titled *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* but it is more commonly known as The Moynihan Report. The report was a seventy-eight-page document that was broken into five chapters. The crux of the report was that slavery and post slavery America had caused “deep-seated structural distortions in the life of the Negro American” and needed to be set right (p. 47). According to Moynihan, the way to set Negro American families on the right path was to focus [national] attention on family structure. “The object should be to strengthen the Negro family so as to enable it to raise and support its members as do other families” (p. 47). It was assumed in the report that the “structural distortions” of Black families was maternal leadership. According to the report, families with the mother as the primary breadwinner in the home of two parents or being the sole breadwinner in a female-headed household was bringing down the Black community, and by extension America itself. The Moynihan report did a good job linking the welfare system and single motherhood in the public imagination. Black feminist and political scientist Cathy Cohen cited the Moynihan report in her article *Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens* as an “example of regulated nonnormative heterosexuality regarding the ‘underclass’ and the destruction of the welfare system” (1997, p. 455). Cohen introduces the concept of a falsity of a “monolithic understanding of heterosexuality” (p. 452) and the existence of identities with “varying degrees of normative power” (p. 452) such as single mothers. She uses the intersection of oppression to introduce the potential of queer liberatory politics and how they can be applied regardless of sexual orientation.

Cohen's writings showed how the "Moynihan effect" on perception. She wrote "Moynihan, later in the document, goes on to describe the crisis and pathologies facing Negro family structure as being generated by the increasing number of single-female-headed households, the increasing number of 'illegitimate' births and, of course, increasing welfare dependency" (p. 455). Single mothers, regardless of sexual orientation, are engaged in nonnormative heterosexual relationships and are often seen as "an underclass". She goes on to write about how these racialized mothers are conceptualized and (re)presented: Often Black and Latina [single mothers] are portrayed as unable to control their sexual impulses and eventual reproductive decisions, unable to raise their children with the right moral fiber, unable to find "gainful" employment to support themselves and their "illegitimate children," and of course unable to manage "effectively" the minimal assistance provided by the state (p. 456). This is coupled with characterization of "the lazy, Cadillac-driving, steak-eating welfare queens of Ronald Reagan's imagination" (p. 457).

The coupling of single mothers and the Welfare Queen

Sadly, the characterization of single mothers was not limited to just Ronald Reagan's imagination. West (2016) conducted a content analysis of state-level newspapers and television stories on motherhood and child care during the four years leading up to the 1996 welfare reform legislation to provide concrete examples of how maternal myths are shaped by mass media outlets. West used political scientists Schneider and Ingram's target population framework as a way to show how motherhood myths about different types/groups of mothers affect social welfare policy. She detailed four types of mothers: advantaged, middle to upper class "soccer moms"; contenders, middle to upper class "career moms"; dependents, working poor "waitress" moms and deviants, "welfare queen moms". West noted that while some of the mothers e.g.

waitress moms have not been widely examined, “the welfare queen stereotype has been analyzed extensively by the public, the media, scholars, and political actors” (West, 2016, p. 331). The Welfare Queen myth encapsulates a range of characteristics that crown her the ultimate deviant mother in American culture: she is African American and her race is always clear, even when it is not directly stated. Yet, the myth has been disproven and refuted through social science research (pp. 331-332). As quoted by Ange- Marie Hancock, Welfare Queen is the "ultimate oxymoron". Yet the evidence disproving the purported Welfare Queen...has been overlooked by the media, politicians, and the public, as the story of the Welfare Queen fits much more readily with cultural expectations and beliefs about low-income minority mothers. The potency of this myth of motherhood lies in its explicit and implicit racial content. (p. 332).

West found that the conflicting and often overly negative portrayals of mothers receiving welfare during the 1990s reinforced theoretical assertions that welfare recipients are much more likely than other types of mothers to be constructed as deviant by the media (p. 344). Having outlined the extent of the Moynihan Effect on Black mothers above and how it pointed to the linkage of the “Welfare Queen” with single motherhood, I would like to connect how Black feminist and historian Paula Giddings demonstrated additional implications of the Moynihan Effect some twenty years after its initial publication.

Giddings (1984) makes strong connections between how Black single mothers, which she refers to as female heads of family, are (re)presented and the Moynihan Report in her section entitled *Strong Women and Strutting Men: The Moynihan Report*. She points out that the most controversial portion of the report focused on Black women and the Black matriarchy (p. 322). While often critique of the Moynihan Report focuses on racist foundations, Giddings shows how “it wasn’t so much racist as it was sexist” (p. 325). The Moynihan report emphasized that the

Black family would be better off if Black women focused their attention on uplifting the Black man. Giddings (1984) writes:

The suggestion that Black women break their progress, rather than eliminating the discrimination that kept Black men down, ignored the plight of disproportionate numbers of Black poor women, female heads of families, and the necessity for two decent incomes if Blacks were to have a quality of life comparable even to that of single-income White families. (p. 330). Giddings uses research to show that Black women's professionalization was one of the greatest benefits of Black matriarchy. "Black women professionals...grew up in homes where their mothers were doers" (p. 328). Their mothers were in professional or semiprofessional occupations much like those of my participants. Giddings spotlights a 1972 sociology study that looked at Black professional women. Each of the participants/daughters in that study "had a tremendous sense of confidence in themselves and their abilities" rooted in watching their mothers "doing" (p. 329).

In the research literature there are instances where single motherhood was mentioned as an aside but the underlying assumption is that single motherhood equals Black motherhood. Rousseau (2013) tested three key assumptions of historical womanist theory in exploring the issue of rhetoric and welfare reform: (a) the needs of the political economy dictate policies that disproportionately impact Black women; (b) social rhetoric is consciously constructed and manipulated as a tool of oppression; and (c) Black women experience a unique oppression that is at once raced, classed, and gendered. She concluded that the image of Black motherhood is clearly manipulated from one policy period to the next depending on the needs of the economy (pp. 468-469).

Stereotypes

Smith (1997) noted single motherhood is regularly viewed in comparison to two-parent families but she uses her article to highlight positive aspects, such as the mother's sense of self, to being a single parent, that are undervalued within the psychology community. Born out of being single," "single mothers are independent, strong, confident, self-reliant and decisiveness (p.530)." In addition, children of single mothers grow up "less constrained and more flexible in attitudes and behavior"(p.531) especially in terms of gender roles and/or norms . Smith's largest positive contribution to the existing literature was the recognition that single motherhood is a legitimate family form (p. 531). While Smith's work was in the 1990s, current literature still classifies children of single mothers as illegitimate.

It is this concept of illegitimacy and deficit (i.e. an identity contingency) of which children of single mothers are aware. According to Steele (2011), identity contingencies are those things that "you have to deal with in a situation because you have a given social identity" (p. 3). Steele's 2011 book Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do looks closely at the role identity contingencies play in our lives, in broader society, and in some of society's most tenacious problems (p.3). Using social psychology research from himself and others Steele (2011) shows how social identity and identity contingencies operate, specifically a kind of identity contingency he calls "stereotype threat" (p. 4). He describes stereotype threat this way:

Whenever we're in a situation where a bad stereotype about one of our own identities could be applied to us—such as those about being old, poor, rich, or female—we know it. We know what "people could think." (Steele, 2011, p. 5)

These stereotype threats have the potential to alter our behavior and how we perform

and/or excel at certain tasks. In many instances the presence of stereotype threat can cause poor performance but when there is a stereotype to disprove there are times when people work twice as hard as everyone else to do so. While evidence shows that children as young as five have the psychological development to experience stereotype threat, evidence also shows that self-affirming narratives help to alleviate the chokehold of the threat (Steele, 2011, pp. 107, 170, 176).

Black Mother and Daughter Relationships

Collins' (1991) essay *The Meaning of Motherhood in Black Culture and Black Mother-Daughter Relationships* provides a framework for looking at Black mother- daughter relationships. Her essay explains that Black mothers “employ diverse teaching strategies to convey the meaning of womanhood in Black culture to their daughters” (p.42). Black mothers know firsthand what life as a Black girl and a Black woman is like and seek to prepare their daughters accordingly. “Black daughters must learn how to survive in interlocking structures of race, class and gender oppression while rejecting and transcending those very same structures” (p. 58). In addition, she notes that the cult of true [White] womanhood negatively affects Black women’s lives (p. 45); and because of this injurious relationship Black women have generated an Afrocentric ideology of motherhood that began in Africa and is preserved in modern Black communities. Collins also laid a foundation for understanding and recognizing Black motherhood as a site of power and resistance against White patriarchy (pp. 52-54). Collins also utilized Rosalie Troester’s concept of “othermothers” within the Black community. Othermothers are defined as women who assist biological mothers by sharing mothering responsibilities (p.47). Afrocentric motherhood is community-based. A well-known African American proverb that is often attributed as an African proverb is “it takes a village to raise a

child". Black mothers take this sentiment to heart. Collins wrote that child care is seen as "a collective responsibility, a situation fostering cooperative, age-stratified, woman-centered 'mothering' networks" (p. 45). It is through mothers and othermothers that blackgirls⁸ become Black women and continue "the mothering traditions painstakingly nurtured by prior generations of African American women" (p. 57).

Moving from Collins' sociological explanation of Black mother and daughter and relationships, I looked at a first-hand account of a Black mother-daughter relationship through use of memoir. Veronica Chamber's 1996 text chronicles her life growing up with her Afro-Latina mother through physical and emotional separation. Veronica's mother was born in Panama and immigrated to the United States with her young daughter. While her mother was not as nurturing in her childhood as Veronica would have liked, she recognizes in her memoir that her mother was as supportive as she could be to her. Chamber's memoir is a mix of bitter and sweet. Her honest revelations about herself, childhood trauma, her mother as both a woman and as a mother give the reader an intimate peek into a Black mother and daughter relationship that is both complicated and conflicted. It is a relationship that is not cut and dry, but is instead one of love, hurt, healing, and survival.

Expanding from one daughter's perspective to multiple daughters' perspectives I reviewed Everet, Marks & Clarke-Mitchell's (2016) qualitative study of seventeen Black daughters between the ages of 25 and 64. The goal of the study was to explore Black adult

⁸ I employ Robin Boylorn's use of blackgirl (one word). Boylorn (2016) explains "It is way of owning who I am [as a blackgirl], expressing being at home in my [melanated and gendered] skin, avoiding the pause [between black and girl], and accepting the contradictions [within that personhood.]" (pp. 44-58). Boylorn's earliest iterations of blackgirl can be found in Rboylorn's 2012 Crunk Feminist Collective Blog Post "Overcoming A-Stigma-Tism: (An Affirmation) For Blackgirls Who Have Considered Suicide When Closed Eyes Are Enough" and Boylorn (2013) Blackgirl Blogs, Auto/ethnography and Crunk Feminism.

daughters' perceptions of the impact their mothers had on the development of their self-worth/self-esteem, resilience, and coping strategies (p. 334). They noted that there have been few studies that "examined the influence Black mothers have on their daughters' development" (p. 334). These perceptions were described as the lessons they learned and how they learned them from their mothers. Their study suggested that Black mothers exercise agency when they raise their daughters to think positively about themselves, to value their self-worth, and to be proud of their race (p. 347).

The lessons learned were about "coping with perseverance, faith, speaking up for themselves, and taking pride in their ethnic heritage" (p. 347). Everet et al., point out that "given the increasing numbers of Black single family households, it is imperative that we learn more about how Black mothers shape the sense of self in their daughters and sons" (p. 347).

Latchkey kid experience

The terminology of "latchkey kids or latchkey child(ren)" was at the height of its popularity between the 1960s and 1990s. Padilla & Landreth (1989) conducted a content analysis of literature surrounding latchkey children. Historically the term "latchkey" became common during World War II when fathers were away at war and mothers were working outside the home in large numbers. The term stuck because the children "often wore a housekey on a chain or string around their necks to permit them to gain independent entry into their homes" (p. 445). As time moved on and increasing numbers of women entered the workforce following the second wave of feminism along with the increase of variety in family structures (i.e. divorce, single parenting, adoption, etc.), this term was often attributed to children of single parents. At the time of their publication, Patilla and Landreth noted that there was still much to be learned

about the latchkey experience and that there was conflicting research on whether latchkey experience had positive or negative effects on children although they did reference some positive research in their article (p. 453). It was noted that latchkey kids had positive feelings about being at home, increased levels of independence and self-competence, and that positive influences were often associated with a good mother-child relationship, high maternal quality, a positive attitude of the mother toward her job, and full-time employment of the mother (p. 452).

Lamorey, Robinson, Rowland, and Robinson (1999) addressed the characterization of latchkey kids in their text, Latchkey kids: Unlocking Doors for Children and Their Families. They define latchkey kids as “unsupervised youngsters who regularly care for themselves before or after school, on weekends, and during summer vacations and holidays while their parents work” (p. 2). Using the lens of unsupervised children, Lamorey et al., seek to address some of the misconceptions attached to latchkey kids such as “they are more likely to abuse tobacco, alcohol & other drugs, they are more sexually active than adult-supervised children, or they are more likely to engage in criminal activity” (pp. 4-5). Throughout their text they use research and provide case studies of latchkey kids to show that there was no current evidence to support such myths and stereotypes. They also make specific connections on how latchkey kids are connected to a lack of comprehensive child care and the rising costs of childcare in the United States. Latchkey experience is something that some participants in my case study experienced but none reported negativity surrounding it.

Outcomes of Children of Single Parents

Being the child of a single mother can frequently be coupled to others’ negative perceptions and outcomes stemming into adulthood. Examples of negative outcomes can be

found in the following works: Biblarz & Gottainer, 2000; Wong, 2017; Hitchens & Payne, 2017; & Daryanani et al., 2016. Yet there is research that shows otherwise.

Johnson (2016) conducted a narrative analysis of four academically successful Black daughters of single mothers about their academic achievement in childhood through college. All participants were college students at the time of study. Contrary to Moynihan's (1965) declaration, this study revealed that the homes of Black single mothers can cultivate civility, encourage one's academic prowess, and perpetuate success in similar ways as two-parent homes (Johnson, 2016, p. 167). Additional findings included several life lessons the low-income Black single mothers taught their daughters. These lessons are as follows: (1) mothers utilized race, gender and class to stimulate their daughter's academic stamina, (2) mothers developed their daughter's steadfast character by embracing their perceived oppression; and (3) mothers were able to foster a degree of trust, which facilitated their daughter's academic independence (Johnson, 2016, p. 156).

Looking more broadly at outcomes for children, male or female, Aquilino (1996) conducted a comprehensive multivariate analysis of retrospective life history data from the National Survey of Families and Households. He looked at the "complex sequences of living arrangements among children born to unmarried mothers] and the impact of childhood living arrangements on the young adult life course" (p. 293). He pointed out that there has been little to differentiate children born to unmarried parents and those of divorced parents but that his study gives greatest attention to those children born to unmarried parents. His analysis found that there was "considerable heterogeneity in the life course trajectories of children born to single parents" (p. 305). Furthermore, analysis showed that children who grow up in a stable, single-parent household "were doing as well or better than those with other living arrangement trajectories" (p. 307) such as children in blended families or those living with grandparents or other relatives or

those who had multiple family living arrangements throughout their childhood. This “doing well” was seen in higher educational attainment and slower transition to more stable independent living arrangements after the age of 18 (p. 307).

The concept of support for single mothers has cultural implications that have not been looked at closely. The village of othermothers referred to by Collins is an aspect of Black community that is well known and utilized among members of that community.

The following study wanted to expand upon support networks and demonstrate what that may look like for Black single mothers. Gonzalez, Jones and Parent (2014) study aimed to “highlight the realities of the diverse co-parenting alliances that evolve in many African American single-mother families and the impact of these diverse alliances on youth externalizing problems” (p. 34) such as aggression and rule-breaking behavior. For the purposes of their study co-parenting referred to the coordination of childrearing responsibilities between two adults (p. 34). The authors recognized that Black mothers were employing distinct coparenting behaviors and alliances that were often overlooked because they did not fit a “conventional” family structure. Mothers were asked to identify the second most important person who was involved in daily childrearing responsibilities with their 11 to 16 year old child. Most mothers identified female relatives such as a grandmother, aunt, older sister or friends of theirs. Co-parents’ perspectives were directly included in the study. In a majority of cases, the co-parent did not live with the mother and child (p. 45). Having a co-parent appears to be beneficial to the child because the co-parent is able to have a higher level of relationship quality with the child as compared to the mother. The mother still bears the brunt of childrearing with tasks such as monitoring child’s activities and finding a balance in fostering relationship with their child. It is suggested that the co-parent may be able to focus more exclusively than mothers on building and

maintaining a relationship with the child (p. 46).

Continued review of existing research on African American single mothers and their children also confirmed the beneficial nature of social support. According to Murry, Bynum, Brody, Willert & Stephens (2001), “parenting support from grandmothers and other extended kin...serves as a protective factor that strengthens single-parent families” (p. 149). Additionally, Murry et al., found “the research on parenting in single-mother- headed African American families suggested that maternal support, warmth, and control predict positive mental health outcomes among children and adolescents” (p. 142). In terms of family structure and children’s outcomes their review found that growing up in a single-parent family does not in itself predict negative outcomes for African American children but rather it is often social factors such as economic hardship and low educational levels that can be prevalent among single parent families that appear to be of the reason for poor outcomes (p. 144).

Despite research that reinforces stereotypes and myths of the outcomes of children raised in a single-parent household, Rabindrakumar (2018) showed that living in a single-parent household does not have a negative impact on children’s wellbeing (p. 1). For their study, wellbeing included measures of child’s life satisfaction, child’s feelings about their family, and the child’s quality of relationship with their peers. Children who are living or have lived in single-parent families score as highly, or higher, against each measure of wellbeing than those who have always lived in two-parent families. This study added to the idea that the role of support whether it is from a co- parent, othermother or grandparent should be taken seriously and not overlooked in helping to produce children with positive outcomes.

In concluding this examination of existing literature there are some general observations that seem important to make. As mentioned earlier, research studies focused on Black single

mothers and their children and positive (re)presentations and outcomes are far fewer in number than those that reinforce stereotypical (re)presentations of Black single motherhood. There is also a great need to consider the language surrounding single mothers and their children. Lastly, we need more research that looks at “the specific risks, origins, and means of alleviating risks” rather than just viewing single- parent families as “at risk” (Murry et al., 2001, p. 150).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS & METHODOLOGY

I used a qualitative ethnographic collective case study with embedded units research design in this study. In this chapter I delineate the theoretical framework, the participants, and data analysis. I also describe the research data sources and collection methods employed. Also discussed are issues of trustworthiness; along with strengths and limitations of the study. Additionally, the assumptions I brought to my research are found here. Each of the aforementioned topics are part of the seven subsections within Chapter Three.

Background

The primary purpose of this study was to learn about the lived experiences of adult children raised by Black single mothers. I used a combination of several qualitative methodologies (e.g. case study and ethnography) to help capture these lived experiences. A case study is a methodological tool that is used to look at a particular phenomenon within specific boundaries. “Ethnography is a written representation of culture” (Van Maanen, 1995 as quoted by Goodall, 2000, p. 86) while “culture is the production and consumption of everyday life” as well as how everyday life is *accounted for* and *storied* into “meaningful orders of persons and things” (Sahlins, 1976 as quoted by Goodall, 2000, p. 86). I used an ethnographic collective case study with embedded units to look at the phenomena of what it was like to grow up the child of a Black single mother. For the purposes of this research study the culture studied is Black daughters of Black single mothers. According to Goddard (2010), a collective case study involves more than one case, which may or may not be physically co-located with other cases.

For my study, a case (also referred to as a participant) was considered a Black woman between the ages of 25-45 who was raised by a Black single mother for any period of time during the ages of 6-18. For the purposes of this study I defined single mother as an unmarried mother who was mothering/mothered at least one child (biological or adopted). The single mother could have been never married, widowed or divorced. Embedded units included the mother, or another participant-identified individual within the participant's support network. One of the reasons I chose to conduct a collective case study is because I wanted to explore cross-case comparisons and "illustrate the case studied in a way that captures its unique features" of growing up single (Ruddin, 2006, p. 804). I chose these specific limitations as a way to bind my case study. When determining who is *in* your case you must also determine who is *out* of your case. "Suggestions on how to bind a case include by time and place; time and activity; and by definition and context" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 546). I chose to bind through definition and context by being clear about who I was considering to be a single mother, etc. because "binding the case ensures that your study remains reasonable in scope." (p. 547).

By bounding the cases in this way, it helped me to obtain "different perspectives on what it was like" (Creswell, 2013, p. 75) to grow up as the child of a Black single mother.

I utilized multiple qualitative methods in my study including writing prompts, photo elicitation, a culminating focus group, film analysis, interactive interviews, narrative inquiry, and poetic representation. Each method was chosen to help highlight Black daughters and the mothers who raised them. I felt that the combination of writing prompts, photo elicitation and interactive interviewing would help me to achieve authenticity and depth in the data I was seeking to collect while providing me with a fuller response to my research questions. I chose to use ethnographic methods because being a Black daughter raised by a Black single mother is

something that I know personally. It can be argued that to write about the self is to write about social experience broadly (Ellis, 2004, p. 34). As a researcher and as a creative writer I loved that I could pair storytelling with cultural analysis and inquiry.

“Interactive interviewing is a collaborative communication process occurring between researchers and participants in small group settings.” (Ellis, 2012, p. 444). It is “an interpretive practice that emphasizes the communicative and joint sensemaking that occurs in interviewing” (p. 444). Both the participants and researcher(s) share their personal and social experience during the process (p. 444). I completed three interviews with each adult child/case for a total of 24 interviews. Interviews were organized thematically. Interview 1 focused on obtaining a history of the participant’s childhood and demographic information. Interview 2 centered on (re)presentation and stereotypes of Black women and Black single mothers and their children in particular. Interview 3 was used as a summation interview and gave me the opportunity to clarify any information gathered in interviews 1 and 2.

Interviews followed a semi-structured format and were completed face to face, using video conferencing through the Zoom platform, or via telephone. Interviews ranged from 30 to 120 minutes. I also interviewed a support network person for seven of the eight cases. I attempted to complete a support network interview for case 8 numerous times without success because of scheduling troubles. Support network interviews were completed face to face, via telephone or written survey-style. The support network interviews ranged from 30-60 minutes. The culminating focus group lasted roughly 40 minutes. In addition to interviewing my participants, I also interviewed myself using my interview guide. I did this so that I would be able to tap into being both researcher and participant since I am a member of the case under study.

During the second interview, participants were asked to bring three photos to the interview. Photos were used for photo elicitation. Participants were free to bring whatever pictures they liked but were given suggestions if they could not think of any. Suggestions included the following: a) a school pic/yearbook photo; b) a family picture; and c) their favorite photo of their mother. With photo elicitation the research uses the photographs as a launching pad for furthering discussion. Photographs can be helpful for eliciting memories and corresponding stories. Participants provided their pictures through email if they were completed through the Zoom platform. For face-to-face interviews, participants brought their pictures with them and photo elicitation was conducted in person. The number of photos participants brought varied from one to 29.

During the third interview, participants were provided with five writing prompts that they could choose from. Writing prompts were as follows: a) top 10 things participants love about their mom; b) to write a letter to their future self; c) to write a letter to their past self; d) to write a letter to their mother; or e) to write a letter to their father. For the writing prompts that were completed through the Zoom platform, participants were emailed a hard copy of the prompt and emailed their response back to the researcher. One participant did not return her writing prompt despite numerous reminders from the researcher. For the writing prompts that were completed face to face, participants were given time at the beginning of the interview to write. I provided paper and pen as needed. In sum, I amassed roughly 1300 minutes of audio from interviews which translates to over 600 pages of raw data including transcript pages, participant writing prompt responses, my analytic memos and field notes.

I incorporated film into my dissertation because film is a prominent form of media that

has the potential to reinforce and form stereotypes and reform the social imagination. I chose and included the following films: *Beyond the Lights* (running time 1:56 mins) because it offered a female filmmaker's perspective of a mother-led home highlighting a mother and daughter dyad of what it means to learn to be a Black woman in America further complicated by the fact that her mother is not a Black woman.

Mother-led homes, as defined by my participants, are those in which the mother is the sole provider for the children's physical, spiritual, and emotional needs without the assistance or presence of a father in the home. The other film featured is *Single Moms Club* (running time 1:51 mins) which offered a male filmmaker's perspective of a mother led home where the mother-daughter relationships takes a backseat and the highlighted relationship was that of a Black mother-son dyad. A detailed analysis is provided in Chapter Four.

Theoretical Grounding

Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality provide the theoretical foundation for this study. Intersectionality is informed by Black feminist thought. Long before Kimberlé Crenshaw, the "mother" of the term *intersectionality* crystallized the term in her publication *Mapping the Margins* in 1991, Black women had been writing about the position of Black women whether it was looked at as "double jeopardy", "multiple jeopardy", or "Jane Crow." From Anna Julia Cooper in the 1890s to Pauli Murray in the 1940s to the Combahee River Collective in the 1970s to Crenshaw's naming in the 1990s, intersectionality is something that Black female intellectuals "had been grappling with and attempting in various shapes and forms to name for nearly a century" (Cooper, 2016, p.389).

In 1996, Collins asked "What's In A Name?...", in an effort to capture the complexity of nuance within Black women and their lived experiences. Collins questioned whether that

encapsulating term was Black feminism, womanism or something else altogether. “Simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression” (hooks, 2000, p. 1). So why has it been necessary for Black women, like myself, and others to insert “Black” into feminism? This insertion “challenges the assumed whiteness of feminism and disrupts the false universal of this term for both White & Black women” (Collins, 1996, p. 13).

Black Feminist Thought moves Black feminism from a movement to a critical social theory. According to Patricia Hill Collins (2000), the author of *Black Feminist Thought*, “Black feminist thought’s core themes of work, family, sexual politics, motherhood and political activism rely on paradigms that emphasize the importance of intersecting oppressions in shaping the U.S. matrix of domination” (p. 251). The intersecting oppressions are often described as intersectionality.

In her 1991 work, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against women of color,” Kimberlé Crenshaw, breaks down intersectionality into three forms: structural, political and representational. This analysis looks closely at structural and representational intersectionality. Structural intersectionality refers to the complex ways in which systemic racism, sexism and classism converge in the experiences of women of color. This convergence often does not account for intersecting oppressions which results in greater marginalization within social structures.

Representational intersectionality includes the production of cultural imagery of women of color along with “a recognition of how contemporary critiques of racist and sexist representations marginalize women of color” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1283). The film analysis in the following chapter illustrates representational intersectionality. A lens of structural intersectionality can be seen in Chapter Six.

Invoking the term “intersectionality” has become pervasive both inside and outside of academia yet it is important to remember what the goal and aim of intersectionality is. The goal of intersectionality is “to rend the veil of illegibility and make sure that it is not reconstructed (Cooper, 2016, p. 392).” The aim of intersectionality is to “expose and dismantle dominant systems of *power*, to promote inclusion of Black women and other women of color and to transform the epistemological grounds upon which these institutions [juridical, academic or social] conceive of and understand themselves” (emphasis added) (Cooper, 2016, p.404).

By researching Black daughters raised by Black single mothers through Black feminist thought and intersectionality, Black single mothers and their children, regardless of age, are recognizable, reproduceable, and representable subjects. My work returns intersectionality to its original tenets and keeps Black women at the center of intersectional paradigms (Alexander-Floyd, 2012, p. 403). My dissertation research does the following: 1) it aligns with the distinguishing features of Black feminist thought and

2) it aims to establish consistency with the goals of using intersectionality by using it the way it was intended by looking at how power impacts the identities and the social construction of Black single mothers and their children, and what it is like to be a daughter of a Black single mother.

Participants

The purpose of this study was to produce additional stories beyond the single story so often told while also centering Black daughters and Black mothers in the process. I sought participants that met the requirements of my purpose using purposive sampling in accordance with the bounds of my case study. Purposive sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative

research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). Purposive sampling involves choosing cases that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Information about the study was disseminated using email, web posting and social media. Interested parties were asked to indicate their interest in participating by contacting me via email. Through my recruitment efforts, I received contact information for two possible participants. I contacted each of them via email to gauge their interest. Though contact was made, neither of them made it through the screening process. Overall, I was contacted by twenty-five people from recruitment efforts of which eleven chose to move forward. I screened eleven potential participants which I consented and conducted twenty-eight interviews in total. There were three consented individuals who did not persist to be a part of final case study. Attrition was due to time constraints of both the researcher and the participants. Four interviews were completed before participants were lost. One specific participant was a Black male and the researcher noted that the experience of being a Black son raised by a Black single mother was a different cultural experience and should be treated as such and so warrants separate study for future planned research.

The Collective Case Study⁹

My collective case study was comprised of eight individual cases, including one sibling group. All names provided are pseudonyms. Participants/cases can be found in Table 1 below. This information reflects participants at time of study.

⁹ This count does not include myself as the researcher, although I am part of the cohort

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Participant	Profession	Age Range	Sibling Group Interviewed (Y/N)	Marital Status (Y/N)	Mother (number of children)	Geographic Origin	Current Geography
Amelia	Graduate Student	Mid 20s	Y	N	0	Southeastern U.S.	Midwest
Ann	Graduate Student	Early 20s	Y	N	0	Southeastern U.S.	Southeastern U.S.
Callie	Entrepreneur	Late 20s	N	N	0	Northern & Southern East Coast	MidAtlantic U.S.
Dani	Insurance Adjuster	Early 30s	N	Y	2	Midwest	Southeastern U.S.
Delta	Case Manager	Late 30s	N	Y	2	Southern U.S.	Southern U. S.
Nia	Education Specialist	Mid 30s	N	Y	2	Southern U.S.	MidAtlantic U.S.
Summer	Nurse Educator	Late 30s	N	Y	1	Southern U.S.	Southern U.S.
Veronica	Social Worker	Late 30s	N	N	0	Southern U.S.	Southern U.S.
Jameka (researcher)	Doctoral Candidate	Mid 30s	N	Y	1	Southern U.S.	Southern U.S.

Methodological Analysis Approach

While data were collected from participant interviews, support network interviews, a focus group, writing prompts, and film analysis; I made the decision to not include the data from the support network interviews and the focus group due to data saturation. Saunders et al. (2018) explored how saturation has been conceptualized and operationalized within qualitative research. They identify four distinct approaches to saturation. The fourth approach is data saturation where “saturation is seen as a matter of identifying redundancy in the data, with no necessary reference to theory linked to the data; data saturation is distinct from formal data analysis” (p. 1896). Data saturation can also be viewed as the researcher’s *knowledge* of their data. (p. 1897). Data saturation “can be identified at an early stage in the process and precedes formal analysis” (p. 1899). The researcher can “continue probing until they feel that they have reached [data] saturation, a full understanding of the participant’s perspective” (Legard et al, 2003, p. 152). The inclusion of the support network interviews nor the focus group provided me with a fuller understanding of the participants’ perspectives. It was important to me to foreground my collective cases and doing so meant prioritizing data generated directly from them. All participant interviews were conducted individually including the sibling group. Interviews and writing prompts were transcribed and coded using a thematic coding and narrative analysis approach. “Thematic coding is the strategy by which data are segmented and categorized for thematic analysis” while “thematic analysis is a data reduction and analysis strategy by which qualitative data are segmented, categorized, summarized and reconstructed in a way that captures the important concepts within the data set” (Ayers, 2012, p. 868). Thematic analysis is mainly a descriptive strategy with the goal of providing a description of patterns within the data and the overarching design that unites them (p. 868). In this process coding leads to themes and themes

generate codes. It is not a linear process so “it is difficult to identify the point where thematic coding becomes thematic analysis” (p. 868). I used constant comparison across all of my data including my field notes, analytic memos, interview audio and film analysis to “reconceptualize, rename, reorganize, merge, or separate coded categories” as needed (p. 868). I used the identified themes as a way to organize and analyze participant narratives, which I go into more detail about in Chapter Six. Due to the sheer breadth of coded data I had, I chose to use a data management tool. I used MaxQDA Version 2018.2 to help me organize my data, generate a code book & analyze my data through its built-in analysis tools such as the summary grid. The summary grid enabled me to look at each participant’s interview transcripts and see which codes were represented in what interview. Each code shows the corresponding coded participant quotes.

To build my participant narratives I utilized elements of storytelling such as emphasis on dialogue and evoking emotion along with descriptions of place, color, sound, etc. as it was available to me through interviews. I took each participant’s interviews and looked for a through line that existed in all three separate interviews as a way to tie them together into one cohesive story. I also used the cadence of each participant’s voice to help the stories flow. During the interview process I asked evocative questions such as “If your mother was a color what would she be and why?” as a way to provoke thought. These responses also provided rich data to present poetically. It is difficult for me to describe the process of poetic representation because it is organic and not prescriptive but listening to the data describes it best. Wherever I “heard” data as poetry either during the interview such as Dani describing how the laundry blew on the clothesline in the courtyard or during the transcription process and reviewing the myriad of ways the participants colored their mothers, I wrote as poetry during analysis.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of research is an often-debated topic. According to Rossman, Rallis, & Kuntz (2010) “the trustworthiness of qualitative inquiry as with all research depends on the appropriateness of this study's design for the research questions posed, the depth and rigor displayed in data collection, the richness and integrity, and finally on the truth claims put forward, based on the evidence offered” (p. 505). “Ethnography focuses on an entire cultural group.” (Creswell, 2013, p. 68). Culture “is assigned to the group by the researcher through attribution of patterns in their social world” (p. 71). As the researcher I saw Black daughters of Black single mothers as a cultural group based on “behaviors, language, and the potential tension between what they do and ought to do, and what they make and use” (Spradley, 1980 as quoted by Creswell, 2013, p. 71). “In a collective case study, one phenomenon is selected, but the researcher selects multiple case studies to illustrate.” (p. 74). As an ethnographic collective case study my study focused on multiple cases to illustrate the phenomenon of growing up as the daughter of a Black single mothers. In summary, ethnographic collective case study design was appropriate for the purposes of this study. The depth and rigor displayed in the data collection aforementioned demonstrate the richness and integrity of my data.

Generalizability

Does using narrative analysis limit generalizability? Possibly but a story/narrative is not generalizable in the same way quantitative data may be but the generalizability can be tested. It is tested “by readers as they determine if a story speak to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know” (Ellis, 2004, p. 194). This testing can also be attributed to naturalistic generalization. With naturalistic generalization “people make some generalizations entirely from

personal or vicarious experience” (Stake, 2005, p. 454). Meaning is reinforced through repetition. The more the story is told, heard, and experienced, the more meaning that is made from it.

Validity

I found two conceptualizations of validity helpful for this work: ethnographic validity and catalytic validity. Ethnographic validity (Ellis, 2004) looks at the process and interaction that happens to readers, research participants, and the researcher. This type of validity means that the stories/narratives written are “life-like, believable, and possible” (p. 124). In addition, ethnographic validity looks at whether the work presented “helps readers communicate with others different from themselves or offers a way to improve the lives of participants and readers or even the researcher’s own life” (p. 124). By disrupting the single story but offering additional stories of Black daughters and Black single mothers it is my hope that readers worlds will be expanded and see the community represented differently than they may have before.

Patti Lather conceived of catalytic validity in 1986. Catalytic validity is “the manner in which the process of research re-orient participants to their reality to stimulate transformative possibilities.” (Rossman et al., 2010, p. 512). It “requires that the researcher(s) self-reflectively recognize the ontological and epistemological assumptions which govern their interactions with their projects, the very methodological practices they employ.” (p. 512). My ontological and epistemological assumptions can be found at the end of this chapter. Lather (1986) put forth a makeshift checklist to be built into research design that would lead to trustworthy research:

Triangulation of *methods, data sources, and theories*

- --reflexive subjectivity (some documentation of how the researcher's assumptions have been affected by the logic of the data)
- face validity (established by recycling categories, emerging analysis, and

conclusions back through at least a subsample of respondents)

- catalytic validity (some documentation that the research process has led to insight and, ideally, activism on the part of the respondents)” (p. 78).

Triangulation through use of multiple sources of data can be found my data. These include film analysis, interactive interviewing, photo elicitation, writing prompts, and use of theories of intersectionality and black feminist thought. My reflexive subjectivity can be found in the last section of this chapter. Through my thematic coding and analysis, I established face validity by recycling and refining codes and categories. Catalytic validity was confirmed through participants sharing how “therapeutic” and “cathartic” participating was for them in addition to the tears and laughter shared during interviews. Put simply, I agree with Lincoln and Guba (1985) that a trustworthy study is one whose findings are “worth paying attention to and worth taking account of” (as quoted by Rossman et al, 2010, p. 512). I believe that my study is both.

Strengths and Limitations

This ethnographic collective case study had aspects of it that I considered strong but definitely had areas of improvement. I have taken both and addressed them by looking at steps within the research process, such as recruitment, sampling, data collection and data analysis.

Strengths and Limitations in Recruitment

One of the self-imposed bounds that I put forth in the recruitment process was to not include anyone that I knew closely such as friends or family members. I knew that from a relational ethics standpoint having participants that I had a dual relationship with was something I did not want to undertake. Instead I chose to utilize my friends and family members to help me with the recruitment process through snowball sampling. A fuller explanation of ethical

considerations can be found in Chapter Seven. I consider this self-reflection a strength in the recruitment process. In addition, the snowball sample that I gathered through my circle of friends and family gave me options for participants. A limitation I had in the recruitment process was time. I recruited over a series of sixty days. In retrospect, not having a longer recruitment period was a limitation that I could have improved upon. For future projects, I plan to build in more time for recruitment efforts.

Strengths and Limitations in Sampling

Originally, I wanted to be as broad as possible in who may be a good fit for my study while still maintaining the bounds of my case study; so initially, my sample included both sons and daughters. After completing two of the three requested interviews with a male participant I realized that gender needed to be a bound that I implemented on the case to move forward successfully. Putting this bound in place was a strength because it let me focus and strengthen my analysis on Black daughters and mothers. It also opened up future planned research for me to pursue. An additional strength was not limiting my sample to a specific geographic region and utilizing technology to my advantage. Being able to conduct interview via phone and video conferencing widened my participant interaction. Of the eight cases included, only two cases completed all of their interviews face-to-face. Age was an additional boundary that I established for participants. Knowing that I wanted to use ethnographic methods in my research, I wanted to include participants that aligned with my age. I considered this a strength because I could potentially make specific demographic cohort claims being children of the 1980s and 1990s.

A limitation in sampling was participants lost to follow up. I lost over half of my potential participants in between the process of them responding to my initial recruitment effort

and then never responding to schedule their initial interview. While conducting my interviews I became aware of a personal bias/limitation that I was not aware of prior to starting this work. The positive relationship I had with my mother inspired this project, but it also veiled my questions in a positive light. My questions were written under the implicit assumption that participants also had positive relationships with their mothers. It wasn't until I asked certain questions that I saw how some of my questions may be triggering or that my participant's experience by not be the same as mine. For example, with the use of the writing prompts I had two participants who really struggled. In her writing Dani shared "I wanted to write about the 10 things I love about my mom. However, I found I could come up with 10 things I disliked faster than I could come up with things I loved. So, I decided to write a letter". Dani's letter was more of a stream of conscious free-write. For Callie, she described writing a letter to her mom as "more cathartic than you realize". Knowing this limitation arose in this work it will help me to be more conscious about the questions and activities I ask of participants in the future.

Strengths and Limitations in Data Collection

By utilizing multiple types of data, I had an abundance of data to work with which was both a strength and a limitation. The breadth was a strength because it gave me a lot to work with when it came to data analysis but it was a limitation because at times it felt unwieldy. The breadth of data was also a weakness because not all of it directly helped me respond to my research questions in the manner I thought it would during the conceptualization process. One strength is that I was able to conduct all three requested interviews with the entire cohort and once the initial interview was conducted, I did not lose any participants to follow up.

An additional limitation regarding data collection was noted while cleaning and coding participant transcripts. I noticed that I did not ask all of my questions the exact same way every

time to each participant. I acknowledge that this variability could have altered my findings. Nor was I aware of this discrepancy while actively collecting. I think in part this oversight occurred because interactive interviewing is conversational and not a strict one-way interview where the researcher only asks questions and the participant just responds in turn. Another limitation was that there were methods that worked better in person (e.g. photo elicitation and writing prompts). With interviews that were conducted remotely it was difficult to get participants to return their prompts even with multiple reminders and it felt awkward to sit on the phone or video conference to let them write in real time while giving the participant time face to face felt much more natural. The completion of the support network interview was a limitation. Support network interviewees did not have the investment that cases/participants and found it hard to make time to complete the interview. One support network interviewee was offered a written survey option after numerous attempts to schedule an interview were unsuccessful. The subsequent survey was successfully completed. The second support network interviewee with scheduling challenges was offered both an interview and survey and neither were completed. It should be noted that this support network person is a single mother herself still actively mothering and I have found from previous independent study projects that single mothers who are actively mothering minors have immense constraints on their time.

Strengths and Limitations in Data Analysis

In the conclusion of Murry et al.'s (2001) article they asked where do we go from here in reference to research on Black single mothers. Most studies focus on describing negative behaviors and negative outcomes among the participants. Few studies use the ethnographic method, a more culturally sensitive approach that concentrates on the sociocultural contexts of human behavior. [Ethnographic studies] are useful in illuminating the meaning of parenting,

adjustment, and development to single Black mothers (p.150).

My study uses the ethnographic method and focuses on highlighting positive behaviors and outcomes. Both of which are strengths for this study. An added strength is the credibility of the study. “A credible study is one where the researcher(s) have accurately and richly described the phenomenon in question and accurately represented the data” (Given & Saumure, 2012, p. 896). I was able to do this through use of storytelling and narrative analysis. Additional strengths were utilizing multiple ways to analyze and represent data from narrative to poetic representation to tables to visual imaging.

Researcher Assumptions

My research assumptions are built on an endarkened feminist epistemology. An endarkened feminist epistemology is an epistemology that is framed within the Black female lived experience and history of blackness. More specifically, it is based and grounded in the historical roots of Black feminist thought and located in the intersection/overlap of the culturally constructed socializations of race, gender, and other identities and the historical and contemporary contexts of oppressions and resistance for African American women (Dillard, 2006, p. 70). Additionally, “the overt ideological goal of feminist research is to correct both the *invisibility* and the *distortion* of female experience in ways relevant to ending women’s unequal social position [emphasis added in original] (Lather, 1986). As a Black feminist researcher, I center the invisibility and distortion; what I see as (re)presentation and (mis)representation, of Black women and girls.

I believe that what counts as power/knowledge, who has power/knowledge and what power/knowledge gets produced all stems from one’s epistemology. This epistemology is

important to me as a researcher because I believe that standard research epistemologies are racially biased. Scheurich and Young (1997) ask the question of whether or not our research epistemologies are racially biased. My answer is yes. Research epistemologies are racially biased due to the social constructions of power/knowledge in our societal hierarchy. Those who are at the top of the power structure; white, rich, educated males, are those that have generated the epistemologies used in traditional research. Therefore, the epistemologies only truly reflect white, rich, educated males. While this bias is not intentional, it is constructed and (re)produced to the point of normalization. Systematic racism and inherent bias are unavoidable. By subscribing to epistemologies created by white, rich, educated men, researchers participate in covert and complicit racism.

For me, complicit racism is an all-encompassing term that absorbs the institutional, societal and civilizational racism put forth by Scheurich and Young (1997, p.4). With covert and complicit racism at work in research, a majority of White researchers benefit from racially biased epistemologies even when they are not enacting them with intent. As mentioned above, education is an example of the (re)production of white privilege. Education, particularly higher education, is an opportunity that historically was not afforded to Black peoples. Due to this limitation there are still a disproportionate number of African Americans underrepresented within the academy. By entering the academy I hope to assist in balancing the scales. Utilizing and adopting this endarkened feminist epistemology helps me to critically engage with more traditional epistemologies. Dillard's endarkened feminist epistemology is built on six assumptions: Assumption 1: Self-definition forms one's participation and responsibility to one's community; Assumption 2: Research is both an intellectual and a spiritual pursuit, a pursuit of purpose; Assumption 3: Only within the context of community does the individual appear and,

through dialogue, continue to become; Assumption 4: Concrete experiences within everyday life form the criterion of meaning, the ‘matrix of meaning making’; Assumption 5: Knowing and research are both historical (extending backwards in time) and outward into the world—to approach them otherwise is to diminish their cultural and empirical meaningfulness; Assumption 6: Power relations, manifest as racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. structure gender, race and other identity relations within research (Dillard, 2006, pp. 71-73).

These assumptions are crucial to me and show where I consider myself on the subjective/objective continuum, between being an agent of change versus a bystander. I accept as true that the qualitative researcher is so close to the subject being studied that it is essential to have a clearly formed epistemology. My Black feminist epistemology, ontology, and axiology are supported by the idea that “this is ethically responsible activist research. The avowed social justice commitment focuses inquiry on research that makes a difference in the lives of socially oppressed persons” (Denzin, 2010, p. 103). In this study I use narrative to shift the stigma paradigm that surrounds the (re)presentation of Black single mothers and their children, at any age.

CHAPTER FOUR: A BLACK FEMINIST FILM CONTENT ANALYSIS

Perhaps the devaluation of women of color implicit in society is linked to how women of color are represented in cultural imagery - Kimberlé Crenshaw

A textual analysis of film was completed because film is such a prominent form of media that has the potential to create, recreate, and reinforce stereotypes within the public imagination. The goals of the film analysis are to 1) see how Black single mothers and their children are seen in film and 2) analyze the depictions shown. I chose to include two films: *Beyond the Lights (BTL)* and *Single Moms Club (SMC)*, both of which were released in 2014. I chose *BTL* because it offered a female directed view of a mother-led home highlighting a mother and daughter dyad. *BTL* looked closely at what it means to learn to be a Black woman in America which is further complicated by the fact that the protagonist's mother is not a Black woman. I chose *SMC* because it offered a male-directed view of a mother-led home where daughter-mother relationships take a backseat and the highlighted relationship was that of a mother and son. I believe that the foregrounding of mother-son relationships occurs in many/most media representations of Black single mothers.

The question used to guide my viewing of *BTL* was: What do the visual shots, the motion of the camera, the camera angle, and the dialogue/use of music imply about Black daughter-mother relationships¹⁰? The question used to guide my viewing of *SMC* was: What do the visual shots, the motion of the camera, the camera angle, and the dialogue/use of music imply about

¹⁰ While I recognize that it is more common to use mother-daughter relationships, since this study foregrounds the experience of daughters I have chosen to invert it to daughter-mother instead.

Black single mothers? There are four subsections in this chapter: Context, Oppositional Gaze, *Beyond the Lights* and *Single Moms Club*.

Context

One of the questions undergirding this study, especially this particular chapter, was “why does representation matter?” I knew in my heart the importance. I know because I learned at a young age the feeling of being affirmed for who you are and seeing yourself reflected back to you through books, toys, and other images and models. My mother was intentional that from the books I read, to the dolls I played with, to the Santa Clauses on display at Christmas time in our home, that they all looked like us. They were Black. Affirmation was a deliberate act of resistance to convey that *Black is Beautiful*. This was a concept that had to be taught, monitored, and maintained because society prefers and is built for Whiteness.

Using social learning theory, I consider how representation teaches us and can affect behaviors which range from benign to malignant. Social Learning Theory is a model that posits that humans learn through observation and imitating others’ behaviors, i.e. modeling. “The concept of social learning highlights the relevance of models’ behavior in guiding the behavior of others. New models may be encountered at any life stage so therefore new learning through the process of observational learning is always possible” (Newman & Newman, 2006, p. 76). In addition, social learning theory helps to account for who and what can be considered a model, and how that perception of displayed behavior can impact others. This theory also helps us to learn morality and prosocial behavior through imitation and observation. “Prosocial behavior is acting in ways that are kind to others and to society as a whole” (Newman & Newman, 2006, p. 76). Imitation and observation can be mediated through media such as television and film.

E.g. it is possible to learn prosocial behavior in how to treat Black single mothers and their children “based on expectations formulated from observations of how the conduct of relevant models (including television or film characters) have been rewarded or punished” (Bandura, 1977, Newnan & Newman, 2006, p. 232). Knowing the effect that imitation and observation having on social learning I consider media to be both a site of resistance and of critical intervention by questioning and critiquing poor modeling. Like bell hooks (1996) I am a "Black female critical thinker who is concerned with creating space for the construction of radical black subjectivity, and the way cultural production informs this possibility” (p. 271). In approaching this film analysis, I wanted to find a current film (between 1998-present) that highlighted mother-led homes and Black daughter- mother dynamics. I found it difficult to find films that fit the criteria I was seeking that weren't blatantly reinforcing the single story of Black single motherhood, e.g. *Precious* (2009). I found that a majority of films that represented mother led homes are predominately of Black single mothers with sons or if the mother has other children the relationship with the son was foregrounded over daughter- mother relationship(s). These films are commonly directed by men.¹¹ Films that center daughter-mother relationships within mother led homes are often directed by a woman, particularly a woman of color; filmmakers such as Julie Dash¹².

Oppositional Gaze

In her work, *Reel to Real: Race, sex and class at the films* (1996), bell hooks details the oppositional gaze of Black female spectatorship. hooks wrote that "the 'gaze' has been a site of resistance for colonized black people globally" (p. 255) and charts how the gaze has changed as

¹¹ See films like *Boyz N the Hood* (1991), *The Bodyguard* (1992), *Baby Boy* (2001), and *Meet the Browns* (2008)

¹² See her film, *Daughters of the Dust* (1991)

the construction of Black images have entered into mainstream media. According to hooks, the Black looking relations, especially of Black female spectators, have not been given a lot of attention (pp. 256, 257). She details the long-standing cinematic racism inherent in Hollywood film and offers that conventional representations of black women have done violence to the image [of Black women] thereby black female spectators who have "looked too deep" at/into the screen have been hurt (pp. 260-261). hooks describes her oppositional gaze this way:

Not only would I not be hurt [using this oppositional gaze] by the absence of black female presence, or the insertion of violating representation, I interrogated the work, cultivated a way to look past race and gender for aspects of content, form, [and] language. (p. 262).

The raced and gendered position of the black female spectator neither "identifies with the phallogentric gaze or the construction of white womanhood" so the black female spectator's oppositional gaze becomes productive not in the mere looking but in the "pleasure of interrogation" (p. 268). This pleasure is heightened if "in the process of interrogation...the black female spectator encounters a narrative that invites engagement with no threat of violation" (p. 268). Black female spectatorship is not just about resisting.

We do more than resist. We [Black women] create alternative texts that are not solely reactions. As critical spectators, black women participate in a broad range of looking relations, contest, resist, revision, interrogate, and invent on multiple levels (p. 271).

The black female spectator has a symbiotic relationship with black women filmmakers. There is no need to "resist" the images generated by black women even as you watch their work with a critical eye (p. 271). It is this gaze of opposition/resistance/symbiosis that I brought to *BTL* and *SMC*.

Beyond the Lights

I sought to foreground the experiences of daughters throughout this project. *BTL*

foregrounds Noni's experience as a Black daughter being raised in a mother-led home.

The film provides a life course perspective, of a young girl, Noni, who wants to be a professional singer and is learning to be her own woman. It includes reflections of childhood to adulthood and the maternal influence throughout, much like the participant stories offered in Chapter Five.

"What did your mother teach you about men?" is part of the opening sentence of Patricia Hill Collins essay *The Meaning of Motherhood in Black Culture and Black Daughter-mother Relationships*. I believe that this line of questioning can be extended to "what did your mother teach you about life?" As I was watching *BTL* I reflected often on what was being taught to and from mother to daughter.

In addition to the daughter-mother relationship portrayed throughout the film there is also an interesting racial dynamic at play. Disrupting conventional notions of race the film invites the audience to look at race differently. Writer and Director Gina Prince-Bythewood, who is of mixed race (white birth mother, black birth father) was adopted and raised by white & latinx parents, and self-identifies as a Black woman. The daughter-mother relationship she highlights is that of a white mother, played by Minnie Driver, raising a mixed race daughter, played by Gugu Mbatha-Raw, who moves through the world as a blackgirl¹³. Mbatha-Raw is also of mixed race (South African father & British mother). In this way as a black female filmmaker she does exactly what hooks espouses by "providing us with different ways to think about black female

¹³I employ Robin Boylorn's use of blackgirl (one word). Boylorn (2016) explains "It is way of owning who I am [as a blackgirl], expressing being at home in my [melanated and gendered] skin, avoiding the pause am [as a blackgirl], expressing being at home in my [melanated and gendered] skin, avoiding the pause [between black and girl], and accepting the contradictions [within that personhood.] (pp. 44-58). Boylorn's earliest iterations of blackgirl can be found in Rboylorn's 2012 Crunk Feminist Collective Blog Post "Overcoming A-Stigma-Tism: (An Affirmation) For Blackgirls Who Have Considered Suicide When Closed Eyes Are Enough" and Boylorn (2013) Blackgirl Blogs, Auto/ethnography and Crunk Feminism.

subjectivity and black female spectatorship and provides viewers with new points of recognition" (hooks, 1996, p. 274). Prince-Bythewood does a lot of heavy lifting in this film by bringing into the film various social issues such as the objectification of women and their bodies, both in and outside of the music industry, women's body image and the beauty myth¹⁴, blackgirl hair, along with mental health and suicide. While the film can read as a love story, the longest enduring relationship in the film is the relationship of mother and daughter.

Prince-Bythewood uses a layering technique of visual shots, camera angles, dialogue and music to strengthen her storytelling. She utilizes dialogue not only as a way to move the storyline along but also as a way to demonstrate the daughter-mother relationship. Since Noni's character is a singer, the role of song and lyrics features as an additional character in the film. *BTL* employs a weaving filmic practice to provide a foundation for connecting with the narrative while also both moving the audience back and forth between spectator and co-creator throughout the viewing experience. In the passages below I discuss visual shots, camera motions & angles, and dialogue/use of lyrics that point to the daughter-mother relationship. I also weave in exemplar scenes to strengthen my analysis.

Mother-led home

The centering of a mother-led home is apparent in an early scene in the film and is set in a quintessential setting for a blackgirl, the beauty shop, at closing time. The first words of dialogue in the film are of the daughter-mother relationship.

"My name is Macy. This is my daughter, Noni."

Macy admits that she doesn't know what to do with her black daughter's hair and expresses a sense of urgency due to her daughter performing in a talent show the following day.

¹⁴ See Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1991) for more.

The Black female shop owner, Felicia, questions her community. "Grandma? Aunties?"

Macy responds "No, it's just me."

As was referenced in the literature review Black families childrear in community in ways that are often overlooked by researchers. Yet in this film, this isn't a Black family, it is a Black child being raised by her White mother and she finds herself without community. It is implied later in the film that Macy's lack of maternal community is because she is a white mother with a Black child.

The camera immediately pans to the daughter, Noni, and the look of sadness in her eye. It is an effective way to illicit immediate empathy for the daughter. Felicia talks with Noni directly and decides to help.

Talent Show

Noni sings "Blackbird" by Nina Simone in a youth talent show and it is the first time as the audience that we see her talent. The film uses "Blackbird" as dialogue offering commentary about being the child of a single mother. Prince-Bythewood's layering of "Blackbird" and use of camera shots sets up the daughter-mother relationship throughout the film. "Blackbird" serves as a recurrent song in the film and given that Nina Simone is known for using her music to offer social commentary on Black life, I believe its choice was deliberate. The Blackbird in the lyrics could be substituted for children of single mothers. The assumption of negativity in the song, see "your mama's name was lonely and your daddy's name was pain" plays into the trope that being the child of a single mother is inherently bad. The song also speaks to the assumption that children of single mothers will not be successful, see "why you want fly...you ain't ever gonna fly". Looking closely at the lyrics you can see how it not only echoes racialized perceptions but

also the negative questions/perceptions/stereotypes associated with children of single mothers.

Why you wanna fly Blackbird You ain't ever gonna fly
Why you wanna fly Blackbird You ain't ever gonna fly

No place big enough for holding All the tears you're gonna cry
Cause your mama's name was lonely And your daddy's name was pain And he called you
little sorrow 'cause you'll never love again

Why you wanna fly Blackbird You ain't ever gonna fly
Why you wanna fly Blackbird You ain't ever gonna fly

You ain't got no one to hold you You ain't got no one to care
If you'd only understand dear Nobody wants you anywhere

So why you wanna fly Blackbird You ain't ever gonna fly
So why you wanna fly Blackbird You ain't ever gonna fly

At the talent show, the camera moves from Noni singing on stage to the shop owner, Felicia, sitting in the audience and pans back to Noni who begins to sing. Felicia has become part of Noni and Macy's community. During the performance the camera pans between Noni and her mother looking at her from the wings of the stage. Noni singing "Blackbird" is overlaid to images of her finishing her performance and getting hugs and approval from her mother and verbal praise of how well she's done. The only time that this affection is seen between mother and daughter for the remainder of the film. The camera focuses in tight on Noni's face lighting up under her mother's approval. Noni is awarded first runner up and is thrilled with the result. Her smile spreads wide across her face as she accepts her trophy and the camera moves from her to her mother's face which is like stone of disdain to Felicia who is giving Noni a standing ovation. Once Noni sees her mother's frown the light in her own eyes fades. The camera follows Noni's mother, Macy, as she grabs Noni off the stage and storms out of the auditorium with Noni in tow before the talent show has formally ended. Noni's mother is visibly livid and is cussing about the girl who won. Noni begins to cry listening to her mother's rant. Her mother stops ranting long

enough to turn to her daughter and bend to look her in the eye and tell her to throw away her well-earned trophy.

"Why, Mommy?" Noni asks

Macy responds, "Do you want to be a runner up or do you want to be a winner?"

A heartbroken Noni leaves the trophy outside the car. This is one of the first mommy lessons that Macy imparts on her daughter. While the film jumps from Noni leaving her trophy behind to being a popular young adult music pop star, the desire for her mother's approval remains a theme throughout the film and is one that most daughters can empathize with. Despite her success her mother is often unsatisfied. This is demonstrated through body language. There is little physical touch or intimacy between mother and daughter in the film nor is dialogue given to offer verbal praise or adoration. An additional theme observed in the film is having Noni sing her dialogue. Noni literally finds her voice through song.

Momager

Macy serves as Noni's momager¹⁵ throughout the film. Most times they are on screen together the role of manager is foregrounded. Macy is often on her cell phone but is simultaneously managing her daughter's image/actions. For example, Noni sits down to eat breakfast and places a napkin on her lap. Her mom while on the phone grabs the napkin off of her lap and removes the hash browns from Noni's plate. Noni opts to eat the grapefruit instead. Macy's actions perpetuate the (white) beauty myth. Survival of the prettiest is part of the myth and she is seeking to make sure Noni is the pretty one at all times because "the beauty myth is always actually prescribing behavior and not appearance" (Wolf, 1991, p. 150). Cottom (2019)

¹⁵ Momager is a portmanteau of mom and manager

explains that the beauty myth as posited by Wolf “will reshape an acceptable beauty standard for women that adjusts for body types, but never for body color” (p. 46). Cottom clarifies that while Wolf never made an exact argument of body type versus body color, “the absence of such a critique rather proves the point: beauty if for white women” (Cottom, 2019, p. 47). A question to consider is by choosing to be her momager rather than her mother what has Macy taught Noni about life?

As her momager, Macy talks *for* her daughter and *at* her daughter. In one scene they are seated next to each other and Noni says nothing and it is evident that she is meant to be silent. Macy talks about her as if she isn't present. Their daughter-mother relationship has become transactional. Noni self-reflects: "My whole life is in someone else's hands" and that someone being her momager. Noni's mother has an anything goes attitude and focuses more on Noni as a product versus Noni Jean her daughter.

Adulthood

A lesson that both mothers and daughters have to learn is how to interact with one another once the daughter becomes an adult. The daughter is simultaneously still their mother's child but they are also their own woman. This can cause growing pains on both sides and this is seen on film for Macy and Noni. After secretly retreating to Mexico and physically separating herself from her mother Noni returns to herself. She removes her weave and wears her natural curly Afrocentric hair and sings “Blackbird” again but this time she's an adult with adult experiences that are felt in her singing. She's also singing it for herself and not for anyone else's approval. Noni's performance goes viral. Macy comes to Mexico after seeing the viral video of her daughter. Their interaction in Mexico is different. It is the first scene in a long time that Macy

is talking *to/with* Noni versus *at* her. Macy does a majority of the talking and Noni's dialogue is still limited. In addition, Macy is physically different. In previous scenes as "momager" she has on business attire and her hair is pulled back severely off of her face. In Mexico, Macy is dressed casually and her long curly hair is down. She's there as Noni's mom...first although she still wants to talk business.

Mom Famous

In the most pivotal scene in the film both mother and daughter are dressed casually and their body language is open to one another. The key to this scene hinges on dialogue. It brings into play all aspects of the film; Noni being the child of a single mother, her career, her mental health, Macy's mothering. While they are talking about Noni's career they are also reminiscing together. It is the first time in the film that Noni does the same amount of talking as her mother. They are equals.

Macy: We all win here, Noni. Noni: I'm not doing it.

Macy: Not doing what? Noni: I'm not re-signing.

Macy: Yes, you bloody are.

Noni: You work for me, remember? You know, I always wondered when I'd do a shoot or something and they'd tell me to hike my skirt up more or take off my shirt, and I'd look to you to see if it was OK, and it was always OK.

Macy: Would you look around you? It is OK. Noni: It's not OK! It never was!

Macy: Noni, the song doesn't make you, you make the song. It's a game, right? You know that. It's a game!

Noni: So, what, you give me a new nose, a new body, some Indian chick's hair. New and

improved, except I'm not a bloody product.

Macy: We did what we had to do.

Noni: There was never any "we". Your word was gospel.

Macy: Oh, wait, so now you're a victim? When did you ever tell me that you didn't want this?

Noni: When I was on that balcony. (referencing her suicide attempt) Macy: You promised me that was a mistake.

Noni: You wanted it to be a mistake. *When I needed a mother, you were always my manager. [emphasis added]*

Macy: I was your manager, I was your mother, I was your father, I was whatever I had to be in order to take care of you!

Noni: *You didn't take care of me, you took care of my career!*

Macy: And I made you a bloody star!

Noni: And everyone who looked down on you would suddenly look up to you. Prove to the world you weren't a fuck-up [implied for having a Black kid]. It was never about me, it was always about you.

Macy: Don't you dare question my love for you! [Macy slaps Noni across the face] Noni, come on.

Noni: You're fired.

Noni finds her voice outside of song when she looks her mother squarely in the eye and fires her as her manager. Noni walking away from her mother while rubbing the side of her face ends the scene. This is also the last scene of the mother and daughter together on screen.

Brixton/Home

The film brings Noni full circle. She's returned to London to sing for a large music festival where she was asked to sing "Blackbird" but chooses to debut her own original song that she's written based off of "Blackbird". It is her first performance without her momager. Felicia, the beauty shop owner from the beginning of the film returns and is doing Noni's hair once again

and they discuss Noni's mom...

Felicia: Your mom called.

Noni: She want you to tackle me before I get to the stage?

Felicia: No, she wants to know how you're doing. You know, it wasn't a monster who dragged you into my shop. It was a desperate mom who seemed like she'd do anything to make her kid's life better.

Noni: *pauses* You can tell her that I'm scared

The film closes with Noni singing her song to an adoring crowd while Felicia holds the phone up so Macy can hear her daughter sing on speakerphone. The lyrics to Noni's song are here:

As I dive in Without my wings
At the speed of light
I'm flying to my end

As I fall
Without my wings
Humming the last song
The blackbird will sing

I'm free at last, free from you
Free from the past, freedom at last
What is life, other than a cage to me?

Blackbird Oh, Blackbird
Blackbird Oh, Blackbird

Now I rise
As the phoenix escapes from me
Through the fire, through the flames
Making ashes out of me

I'm free at last, free from you
Free from the past, freedom at last
What is life, other than a cage to me?

Blackbird
Oh, Blackbird Blackbird
Sing One last song for me

By setting the film between London and Los Angeles, Prince-Bythewood helps the audience think about the global nature of our society and how race is viewed both here and “across the pond”. During my research I have read numerous articles out of the UK about single motherhood and the British aspects of this film brought me full circle as well. While the daughter-mother relationship in *BTL* is not a traditional Black daughter-mother relationship the result is still an adult Black woman’s maturation. We live in a society where children and parents of mixed-race are becoming more and more common and looking at these expanding (re)presentations are crucial.

Single Moms Club

The *Single Moms Club* is a story of five single mothers, two of whom are black. For the purposes of this manuscript I foregrounded the Black mothers' experiences much the way I have in my larger project. Instead of disrupting stereotypical (re)presentations of Black single mothers, *SMC* reinforced them through the characterizations that black male filmmaker Tyler Perry offers through his writing and directing. This film was an example of the phallogentric gaze that hooks talks about that is potentially hurtful to black female spectators. *SMC* builds on existing cinematic narratives to (re)produce specific types of black female subjectivity. In the

passages below I discuss how the movie uses prevailing social narratives in its filmic practice.

One main difference in analysis between *BTL* and *SMC* is that dialogue wasn't as crucial in *SMC* as the images or (re)presentations of the characters themselves.

The mothers of the Single Moms Club are brought together because of their children. The children all attend school together at a private school and the school principal calls the mothers to a meeting because each child was found to be on the school's campus after hours. The boys, who were the sons of the Black mothers, were "tagging" the walls with spray paint and the girls, who were white and latinx, were smoking cigarettes. The mothers are "voluntold" that they must put on a fundraiser for the school to prevent their children from being expelled. The narrative of "undesirable behavior" feeds the negative narrative and perception of children of single parents being problem children, delinquents, etc. and being unsupervised because their single mother is working. Sadly, by the end of the film, there is nothing to redeem this stereotypical narrative for children of single mothers.

The two black mothers in the film are May Miller, played by Nia Long, a newspaper writer and mother of one son seeking to break into the literary book world and Lytia Wright, played by Cocoa Brown who is a mother of five. Lytia was as a teen mom and has two older sons in jail that are referred to throughout the film but never appear on screen.

There was an additional single mother in the film although she is never seen on film. May's love interest, TK, is a divorced father who sees his two sons on the weekends. His sons' mother is leading that home and doing the work by herself.

The Club

While meeting to organize the fundraiser the moms commiserate on being a single mother.

May: Ah. if people only knew what single moms go through. I guess we all want what every other single mother wants- help.

Esperanza: I just want to feel equal. Lytia: A break.

Hillary: To know that everything's gonna be okay. Jan: To know we made the right choices with our kids.

May: We should start a support group for single mothers everywhere. All: Yeah, yeah.

Hillary: A toast to the Single Moms Club.

The moms agree to rotate on Fridays and Saturdays so that one mom will watch the kids while the other four go out and "catch up on life". This arrangement is an interesting commentary about balance or lack thereof for single mothers because they are the sole enforcer and everything falls on them. The concept of a support group that consists of karaoke and movie nights also reduces what single mothers need more of is fun and romance. There is an emphasis in this film on the mothers finding love and it is implied that their lives are somehow incomplete without a romantic relationship. Yet single mothers need support in multiple ways. Love and companionship are not wrong but I think it is dangerous to make it seem that single mothers cannot have balance in their lives without it.

Black mothers and sons (and daughters)

The moms are the main characters of the film and their children are treated as supporting characters. There is limited interaction between the kids and their moms on screen, especially interactions that require dialogue. Scenes that have dialogue between mother and child centers on May and her son, Rick, and Lytia and her son, Hakim, even though in the film Lytia has two daughters on screen. Her character's identity is in being a mother to Black sons. The mothers are

often talking *at* the children in an authoritarian tone. As mentioned earlier in the chapter there is a popularity to featuring Black single moms and sons and this can be seen on full display in this film. It is also referenced throughout the film that you have to be tough on boys. Lytia's interactions with her son can be summarized into two "interactive" dialogues and two passive dialogues. I use interactive loosely because Hakim's dialogue is brief.

Lytia gives her son, Hakim, a stern lecture about his "tagging". This is one of two "interactive" dialogues.

Lytia: You are not getting kicked out of that school? You're not going to end up like...

Hakim: Like who? My daddy? My brothers?

Lytia: Hakim baby, you are going to be somebody, okay?

Lytia has her second interactive dialogue with her son, Hakim is at their neighborhood basketball court with her two daughters also present but the dialogue is only between Hakim and his mom. The girls stand idly by. The camera shots get tighter in on Hakim and Lytia talk to the point that the daughters are no longer in view.

Hakim: What are we doing?

Lytia: You know how to play, right? Hakim: Uh, if I say yeah, will you get mad?

Lytia: No. Come on. Play your mama one-on-one. Hakim: For real?

Lytia: Come here. You know why I'm so hard on you, right?

Hakim: Yeah. You don't want me to go to jail. But I'm not a little boy anymore. I know right from wrong. And you've gotta trust that what you put in me is in me. Mama, I'm gonna make you proud of me. You'll see.

Lytia: I'm already proud of you.

There are at least two instances that Lytia talks *at* Hakim and Hakim says nothing. First,

Lytia scolds Hakim about doing his school work instead of letting him play basketball with his friends. Second, Lytia tells him to put his sisters to bed. Lytia talks *at* her daughters in very limited interaction in the film. The daughters are usually in tow. They are peripheral the entire film. In *SMC*, the relationship between Black mother and daughter is non-existent. Lytia's daughters have no dialogue in the entire film. The daughters are early school age and old enough to be shown care and pride but the line about mom pride is only directed at her son.

May and Rick's dialogue is limited as well. They discuss his tagging. May is very authoritative in her response to Rick and Rick is dismissive at best. Camera angles are wide and long. Rick is also quick to use his dad to change the subject of what his mom is trying to instill through an after-school curfew. Rick expresses that he wants out of his mother-led home and wants to live with his dad. There is an underlying assumption in the film surrounding absent fathers and that if the boys in particular had a father figure it would be an improvement. Rick desires for a better relationship with his father and after receiving a call from his father asking for money, Rick decides he wants to live with him instead of his mother. When Rick finds his father, his father is high on drugs and steals money for him leaving him stranded to get back home to his mother. Rick eventually makes his way back home by foot.

Once home Rick and May discuss what happened. During this exchange the camera starts out wide and long while their voices are raised at each other but once the conversation calms and is more intimate the camera mimics that. Both mother and son are crying by the end of the conversation. May looks at Rick in the eye and touches both of his shoulders. She alternates pulling him in for an embrace and pulling him out to make eye contact. Camera follows suit. but The audience reveal that Rick's father is a drug addict and is incapable of providing him with a better relationship is an emotional one and the camera's back and forth movement reflect the

fraught nature of loving someone who is incapable of truly reciprocating that love.

Stereotypes

Perry introduces several stereotypes throughout the film. I have focused on those stereotypes that are specific to the Black community and family but stereotypes of other racial groups are also in the film. Stereotypes of the Black mothers, their children, and their children's father(s) that are seen are family structure, absent fathers, drug use, involvement with the criminal justice system, utilization of social welfare services and the Sapphire stereotype.

Melissa Harris-Perry (2011) writes that Black women are standing in a crooked room when they are confronted with raced and gendered stereotypes and have to figure out which way is up (p. 29). Perry's movie places Black women and children in a crooked room and everyone is contorted to fit the distortion.

Neither of the Black mothers have been married. While one white mother is a "single mother by choice"¹⁶, the other white mother is a divorcee and the latinx mother is also a divorcee. It is implied that Lytia has multiple children's fathers and at least one of the children's fathers is in jail. Lytia's character fits the stereotypical (re)presentation of a Black single mother. She lives in the projects and her sister admonishes her to just get on welfare like her instead of working a minimum wage job at Waffle House. She brings her daughters with her to work when she doesn't have childcare, she doesn't own a car and uses the bus for transportation.

Lytia's characterization is also representative of the sassy black woman who is

“irrationally angry” and has “emasculating anger” (Perry, 2011, pp. 29, 34). Throughout

¹⁶ A single mother by choice is one who seeks fertility treatment to have a child. There is often a racialized assumption that single mothers by choice are white and yet single mothers by accident are Black. Can also see Golombok, Zadeh, Imrie, Smith & Freeman's (2016) *Single Mothers by Choice: Mother-Child Relationships and Children's Psychological Adjustment*

the film she is mean towards her potential love interest, Manny, and just demeans him over and over again until she outwardly flips a switch and kisses him and starts being nice to him for the remainder of the film. The popular portrayal of Black women as uniquely and irrationally angry, obnoxious, and controlling can be attributed to the Sapphire character on the 1930s *Amos n' Andy* radio show (Perry, 2011, p. 88). Lytia's character is that of a modern-day Sapphire. And Sapphire is just one of numerous iterations of the angry Black woman myth¹⁷.

Lytia character is used in class dynamics in the film. She's the working poor Black single mother with multiple children by multiple men who has to teach the upper-middle class advantaged mom how to "single mom." Hillary had been a pampered married woman with a nanny who is now in the midst of a divorce and for the first time learning how to be an active mother. Lytia arrives early to a meeting of the group because of the bus schedule and they talk before the others arrive. Hillary's baby is crying and Lytia jumps in, in Mammy-like fashion, to soothe the baby. Lytia's dialogue continues to point to her class. Hillary is overwhelmed and asks Lytia the following:

Hillary: How do you do it? How do you be a single mother? I can't-it's so much work to do on your own.

Lytia: See, that's the problem. You're thinkin' about it. You can't do that. No, girl, you can't think about it. You just gotta do it. You try to take it in all at one time, it's gonna overwhelm you.

Instead of presenting social commentary on drug addiction or affordable childcare, Perry starts and stops with stereotypes.

Black Female Spectatorship

¹⁷ For more about myths of Black Women, see Perry's 2011 text, *Sister Citizen*

What I have offered her is my own oppositional gaze of Black female spectatorship. I was familiar with both of these films as a moviegoer but to watch them and analyze them using a Black feminist lens showed how insidious normalizing stereotypes can be. It should not be lost on spectators that Black women are shown and (re)presented more fully through a Black female director's lens and yet Black female directors with mainstream access are hard to come by and are not supported in the same ways as their white female counterparts or Black male directors. In conclusion, as spectators it is important to remember that identity is found "not outside but within representation" (Hall, 1989, p. 80). Media, including but not limited to film is capable of teaching us who we are. Film stimulates and adds to our personal and collective social imaginations and from these imaginings, constructs about people form and are fertile ground for change. Film has the potential to move us away from the single story.

Film & The Single Story

Film can expand the single story but it can also reinforce it. This is why it matters who tells what stories, especially when it comes to representation. Tyler Perry's directorial choices were that of a modern-day Moynihan. He put forth tropes as factual representations of single motherhood and of race. In *SMC*, Perry does not address stigma, he upholds it. Prince-Bythewood chose to play with the constructs of race and single motherhood. In *BTL*, Macy, while white, still experienced the stigma often relegated to mothers of color by mothering a Black child. Macy mitigated the stigma by seeking to turn her daughter into a star, in the vein of "I don't see race" and that if Noni was talented enough, her race would be rendered obsolete. Yet, for Noni, her race could not be ignored or minimized. Instead Noni leans into her blackgirlhood as a way to manage stigma. Noni utilizes Black motherhood principles such as othermothers to aid in her development as a Black woman. For example, the Black female salon

owner, Felicia appears throughout the film at pivotal moments for Noni, operating as an othermother for her. As a Black female director, Prince-Bythewood is able to move beyond mischaracterizations of Black girlhood/womanhood to fuller and more nuanced ones. Characterizations in which race is muddled and daughter-mother relationships have depth.

In a similar way to Noni, each of my participants learned ways to manage the stigma of being the child of a Black single mother. Some of these ways are featured in the following chapter. For some, like Ann and Amelia, they use their socioeconomic class and proximity to Whiteness to navigate around and away from stigma. While for others like Dani and Callie, they addressed stigma head on by leveraging it and using it to their advantage for future success. For example, receiving a scholarship to attend a better high school because they were viewed as “needy” or “at-risk”. Thinking about how each woman managed stigma in their life was a viewpoint that informed my interviews and subsequent analysis. I believe that ultimately thinking about how stigma is managed for all children raised in mother-led homes and abolishing the stigma associated with them is a view that our society as a whole need to take.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

Chapter Five presents findings gleaned from the interactive interviews I conducted during data collection. Interactive interviewing is a collaborative process between researcher and participants where the author/researcher is “I”, readers are “you” and participants are “us” with the goal of reaching a depth of information elicited through emotion and intimacy. This research strategy is especially useful “when all participants (researcher included) have had personal experience with the topic under discussion” (Ellis, 2004, p. 64). With interactive interviewing all the conversations (i.e. interviews) during the research process occur together and the stories shared in conversation are then co-constructed into one cohesive story. Co-constructed because the both the participant’s voice and the researcher’s voice are present in the resulting story. In this chapter I offer these co-constructed participants narratives as part of the findings. The narratives explore how each woman became the Black daughter of a Black single mothers. Also included is a personal narrative from me/researcher. My narrative was produced from my self-interview. Each narrative uses the participant’s own words from various conversations and I have strived to maintain each individual woman’s voice. Additional non-narrative findings can be found in Appendices II & III.

Storied Participant Narratives

“Okay. So, tell me how you became the child of a single mother. Like were your parents divorced, was your mom a widow? Were they never married? That kind of thing, what did that look like?”

“Um, so what's your story? How did you become the (black) woman you are today?”

Amelia

My parents were married and they divorced when my younger sister was about a year old. We're two years apart. It's been the three of us mostly, my sister, my mom and I. At one point we moved back into our maternal grandparents' home but that was short lived. Growing up, we'd see our dad on occasion but then he moved out of the area and we'd see him less frequently. We mainly saw him at soccer games. My sister and I played soccer. We played club ball and so we traveled a lot. He would meet us if he could. He did that a couple of times over the years. And then eventually my sister and I just stopped talking to him.

As kids, my sister and I spent a lot of time with our grandparents and was the case up until the age of about 13 and then club soccer really took over. Our grandparents would pick us up from school every day. When my mom needed a break and wanted to go out and be with some of her friends on the weekends, we would stay with them. It was also a major help that we lived only 15 minutes away from them. We truly grew up seeing our grandparents every day. That regularity is something that my sister and I have thought a lot about and have talked about. It's hard for us to relate to the juxtaposition of only seeing your grandparents once a year. Our grandparents were literally there in a major way for a majority of our lives. Our first grandparent didn't pass away until I was 18. As a teenager, I didn't see them every day because I started to drive and doing other things that kept us away from being with them every single day. We definitely saw them several times a week.

I had a really great childhood. My sister and I weren't around a lot of black kids and that was mainly due to attending a predominantly white private school from K-12. The black kids that we knew were either at our school or at rival private schools. In addition, we played a sport that was predominantly white. At any given time, my sister and I were on 3 separate

teams: our club team, our school team and then our Olympic development team for the East Coast. There were a couple of black kids that we would meet playing soccer but I didn't have like a core group of black friends growing up. When I reflect on my childhood there's not much that I wish was different. I do wish my mom had more black friends like her with money with kids my age so that I could have had a peer group growing up. Even participation in Jack and Jill would have been nice.

I've always been driven and I think that came from me seeing my mom do it by herself. There's a type of strength that I've gotten from her. She's given me confidence to pursue my goals with perseverance. I know I couldn't do that had I not had some sort of place to pull that kind of confidence from. That place being my mom.

She's been remarried twice. Our first stepdad was great. He helped us out a lot and treated us like we were his own kids, still does. We've all remained close even after they divorced. But while they were married, we still went to our mom for everything. She set the rules what we were allowed to do and not do. I think of myself as the child of a single mother with my mom being a divorcee but I also have some friends whose parents are divorced and they wouldn't classify their mother as a single parent because their dad is in the picture on some level. I think that's because maybe single parent has a negative connotation and possibly a racial connotation. Like it's a title in the black community. I don't think I've ever heard any of my white friends say, my mom is a single mom. They just say my mom's divorced.

*I think that growing up in a single parent home leads me to think that men are disposable because I've seen with my own eyes in my own home that you don't **need** a man to become successful or to do the things that you need to do. Coming from a single mother, it's given me an extra drive to succeed. While men may be disposable on one level, another I was able to see a*

loving relationship with my grandparents and they were married for over 50 years. Being with them every single day for many, many years, I was able to see the physical contact, the emotional exchange and see people making decisions together. The best of both worlds. I have a thousand and one memories of my mom doing it one her own and taking the lead in my life. Her picking us up from school, coming home with her, her picking us up from our grandparents' home or only seeing her face at my games.

I never felt different from kids who had two parents in the home because we had money. I definitely went to school with kids who had far more money but regardless I was in space where the white kids knew I wasn't the poor black kid raised by a single mom. I was spoiled as a child. My mom worked for another company for awhile and then she broke out with my first stepdad and they created their own business. And for the 15 years my mom created her own schedule. It was perfect timing too. My sister and I were preteens and were getting to the point where we needed her around more plus the business took off right when my sister were accumulating extra expenses. For example, we went to play soccer in Germany and France twice but by my mom having her own business she was able to send us with the team and travel with us. On one of our teams, the uniforms alone were \$700 apiece and all those soccer expenses added up. My sister and I were both talented players. Ann went on to play on the college level. It made me feel really good being on a team of 18 kids total and my sister and I were the only black kids that my single black mom was physically there to support us but also that she could afford to get me stuff better than everybody else on the team. We were the rich kids on the team. As cocky as that sounds, I think it matters when you're in certain spaces. My mom has already walked the path of being a black educated woman working in predominantly white society. Through her experience she's been able to guide me as I enter the working world. From conversations on what to wear to an

interview to wearing my hair a particular way. When I was in undergrad, I started to feel uncomfortable in groups of my peers. I wouldn't share certain things, about my financial situation with anybody, let alone somebody else just because they were black. It was difficult because we couldn't relate to a lot of the same things. Um, now there were some black kids who did come from a similar social and socioeconomics background as me; where their friends had been white and college was the first time that they interacted with a lot of black kids outside of family members on a regular basis.

*Coming from a single parent home definitely had its ups and downs. even though I wasn't poor and I had the best of whatever it was, I still didn't have someone I called dad or I interacted with in a dad/daughter sort of way. I've learned not to depend on men and that missing dad piece is a burden I've learned to bear. But if I were to sit here and complain about my father **choosing** not to be around, I'll be missing out on all the blessings I've had. I drive a \$45,000 car, brand new that I got for graduation. I don't have to ask my mom for things, I still receive. I don't have to save money to go have something because of my mothers. I got a designer purse and shoes last week just because we were out and about and that's been my reality since I was little. Not to say that there weren't certain sacrifices along the way but I can say there was no suffering.*

I have a good relationship with my mom and always have. Everything I have is because of her. My childhood was great because I had exposure. My mom was well read and made sure that we were too. I've been around the globe. I've yet to have a full-time job. I've been able to explore what the world has to offer because my mom provided me that luxury. When I think of exposure, I think of other cultures but also expose to my own culture. My mom made sure we knew what pot liquor is or other cultural references. These things matter, black people talk in code all the time.

There's a look or a reaction you get when people learn that you are the child of a single mother or that you are a single mother. It's a disdainful almost mocking tone that people may not even be aware that they are using or the subtlety of a raised eyebrow when they nod their head. It's rare for someone to empathize and say "me too or my sister is a single mother, I get it." But without stigma you can breathe better. Not have to worry about people's perception of you.

Black women would be able to let their guard down a little bit. I wish that black single mothers had that freedom.

Ann

My parents were married. They had my older sister but by the time my mom had already filed for divorce. My relationship with my father has waned over the years. As a child I used to see him because we lived in close proximity but eventually he moved to another state. Once that happened, I would see him during those times that my sister and I played soccer. We were on a travel soccer team and we'd go to the state he lived in for games every once and awhile. But by the time I turned 16, I decided I really didn't have to have any contact with him anymore and it wasn't really a hard decision. Needless to say, I haven't seen him or talked to him in a while.

When I think of who I am today, I think my largest influences were my mother, my maternal grandparents and being a student-athlete. As a child, my grandparents were very involved in my life. We never really had babysitters because my grandparents were always there. I started playing competitive, travel, soccer at a young age, and my grandparents came to my games as well as school events in addition to my mom. I went on to play soccer in undergrad.

I've completed my Master's degree and I'm getting ready to start medical school. While I know I'm not the only Black girl raised by single parent who is doing well but depending on your environment it can sometimes feel that way. I know I wouldn't be where I am without my mom.

I had a phenomenal childhood into young adult life. I have lots of amazing memories...Christmas time, every day traveling. It was very exciting. I loved every second of it. There was always something going on. We were always trying out for soccer teams or going on family vacations. We were always on the go. There was always something new going on and we were never static.

Growing up, I didn't think much about being raised by a single mother until about high school. I can't remember exactly what comment one of my friends made to me but it was like a friend I knew from kindergarten and her parents were finalizing their divorce and she made some comment to me and it made me think "Oh yeah, I forgot that like my mom's a single mom." I had never thought about it 'til like that moment.

When I think about a single mother, I think about a woman who is raising her child without the child's birth father involved because even if the woman remarries, it's still very different. Especially depending on when that other partner enters the relationship. Like if your mother remarries someone when you're a baby and they've been there all your life, it's very different than someone like coming in when you're 16.

I've thought about this a fair amount because even though my mom has been remarried twice my sister and I still identify as the children of a single mother and I think it's because of who my mom is and the strong woman she is. It never mattered whether she had a partner or not because her partner could not make decisions for or about me and his finances never affected me. When my mom got married it was never like "Oh, I'm getting married and we're moving houses or vice versa, I'm getting divorced and we're going to move." It was more like, "this is my house and you are joining my daughters and I in my house."

Throughout school, I was around kids whose parents were married and I didn't feel

different than them. Particularly as an athlete. I always had someone at my games and some of my teammates didn't. Plus, once we got to college, a lot of people's parents started getting divorced left and right. As a female headed household, I feel like we have a healthier household. That are doing well compared to my peers' parents who are like fighting, there's been like affairs, like verbal abuse, stuff like that. I can see how Black single mother are stigmatized in the media but I never saw my mom that way. It shouldn't be stigmatized.

I know everyone believes their mom is superwoman but my mom is truly superwoman. My mom and I are definitely close. If there's ever anything, especially boys, school, whatever... she's my first call every time...no hesitation. that's who I call for anything. She's an entrepreneur, has three degrees including her doctorate. Being her daughter has given me the confidence I have, my work ethic, and the traits of a successful person. She taught me how to stand on my own two feet.

Callie

I was born in the South but have lived up and down the East Coast. My family is Jamaican and that played heavily into my upbringing. Even to this day, my friends still laugh at me because I don't know why everybody is going home for Thanksgiving. That is not a holiday. It's not a holiday in Jamaica. Culturally, the US celebrates way more stuff and my mom never adopted those traditions. So, we don't celebrate Thanksgiving. We don't celebrate Halloween; we don't celebrate Columbus Day.

My mother came here when she was 16. My father still currently resides in Jamaica. I was raised by mother obviously with limited interaction with my father. I'm my mother's only child. My parents were never married. My father cheated on his wife and had me with my mom. I did go to and from Jamaica quite a bit up between the ages of five and 15. My mother didn't go

to college and her side of the family is poor. She just happened to be one of the ones who got to the US and she did what she could but we didn't have a lot growing up. We barely did birthdays. My mom would get me a cake. We didn't celebrate major anything because she was usually working. For Christmas, she would buy me like one gift if she could. But she did what she could to make sure I was fine. We were living up north and then we moved to Florida when I was about

11. One day, my mom literally was so angry that she packed up all of our shit in her car, put my grandfather on a plane and just was like, I'm done and drove our dog in her raggedy ass car, 1500 miles. I had gone to Jamaica and when I left on my trip, I lived up north. And when I returned, we were in a new state. I was like, okay, cool. I guess this what we're doing.

I am who I am today through a mix of like mentorship from outsiders, a lot of bumping my head on a wall, a lot of anger, a lot of like baggage that I'm working on with my therapist to this day, and mostly just being very driven. I want to make sure that I can take care of my mother as she ages. I own my own house. I have a MBA and run my own start up. I've had to do a lot of visualization to get to where I am.

When I think back on my childhood I remember when my mother used to drop me off at school when I was in middle school and her car was raggedy as hell. So when I used to get dropped off, there was this little short lil' Napoleon dynamite looking muthafucka who used to always have something to say to me whenever I got out my mom's car and it was at that moment I realized that if we don't have anybody else, it's just me and her, like if she wanted to get a

better car, she couldn't because she didn't have it. She earned that car with her minimum wage salary. So, I would argue that between 12-14 is when I started to really realize, oh it's just us, like it's us against the world.

My childhood was a fucking rollercoaster. I was always trying to like create a space for

myself in the house because my grandfather moved in with us when I was like 9 or 10, and he was like 90 from Jamaica. He was largely in good health. So, I would have to come home from school, take care of him, feed him, make sure all of his stuff was straight medically and then go out and pretend like everything was cool in my crib and play with my friends. And he was kind of just like, this hidden figure in my house because my mother was at work from like 6:00 AM to 10:00 PM every day. So, I would keep myself occupied and I was just always taking care of myself and that's kinda why I am the way that I am today. To me, it's like a never-ending cycle when a single mother, my mother, is forced to take care of herself from basically 16 in a country that she didn't grow up in, to then having a child with a man who is a piece of shit, who has whole other family, and is not going to help you.

I wouldn't change anything about my childhood. As much as I used to bitch and complain about it, I wouldn't have changed it. I think that some people say I wish I had this, I wish I had that. I never needed anything. My mother made sure that I had everything that I needed and when she couldn't provide, she would figure it out. Being the Black daughter of a Black single mother taught me how to be a better version of myself. I do have a little bit of a chip on my shoulder and I know it's because of my upbringing. I know I'm just a little bit harder than most people. I'm a little bit more resilient, I'm a little bit more likely to figure shit out than most people because I've had to figure out a lot of stuff in my life. So, I wouldn't change my childhood. I would just like that added some things here and there.

I think my personal story mainly says I'm adaptable. I know from my own experience that your outcome isn't tied to your start. The start is a good frame of reference but it is not the end all, be all. I don't really listen when I hear people started talking that "you're a product of your environment" shit. I get it but there are things within that environment that you control to the

best of your ability and then you don't give a shit about anyone else or anything else that's in that environment and keep grindin'. Then you technically are doing the best that you can with what you are given. But if you're just stuck all the time, like this happened TO me, this happened AT me, that's not really an excuse because people come from much worse and do a lot more in a shorter period of time. It's all about decisions and how you decide to show up for yourself.

Dani

Whenever I tell people about my parents they are always like "are you for real?" It's off the chain but it is a true story. It needs to be on Lifetime.

My father is Jamaican immigrant. He came over when he was still young and my parents grew up together. They were high school sweethearts. They had my older sister before me and were set to be married. But weeks before their wedding, my paternal grandfather passed away. My dad was so sad over his death. He got on a plane to Jamaica to go back home for the funeral and on the plane from New York to Jamaica he met a lady named Sylvia. And within 24 hours of landing, they were married. Adding to the shock is that my dad didn't communicate with anybody when he left to go to Jamaica. He just completely disappeared. My parents wedding day came and went. My mother was sick. She was just completely devastated because nobody knows what has happened to him. Police looking for him and everything. Eventually, he finally calls home and tell them that he's in Jamaica. Sylvia grabs the phone and tells my mom, "I married David. I'm Mrs. Younger now and that thing you had with David is over." In time my father and

Sylvia have a baby but they eventually divorce and he moved back to the United States. Meanwhile, my mother knows that he's had a baby with another woman and is heartbroken. Not only did he marry somebody else but he got a baby with someone else too. It's a lot.

When my dad came back to the states, my parents "reunited" and I was born. When I

was born, he didn't come to the hospital. As time went on, he still wouldn't come. Her emotions were very, very high and deep. They never really got back together after he left her at the altar. He tried in his own ways to do right by her over the years but that didn't come until long after I was born and older.

I know you asked about me but I have to start with my mom to get to me. When I think about the woman I am today, I have to say that everything that I've been through in my life has contributed to who she is. My mother truly only had me because she tried to keep my father. That decision played a large part into our relationship. Me and my mother had a really bad relationship growing up. Like a really, really bad relationship. 'Cause she would literally tell me to my face that she didn't want me. She real blunt. Hurt people, hurt people type-uh shit.

My mom was hooked on cocaine when I was younger. At that point in her life she couldn't deal with all the stuff that was happening to her. She had a new baby, my younger sister. My parents had made these plans to get married. My father runs away, has another baby, then he basically shuns her, her entire pregnancy with me and that greatly affected how she was with me. My father wanted a son and my mom knew that. In her heart she felt that she was going to have a boy and that by giving my father a son, it would make my father want to be with her. Clearly, I wasn't a boy.

She was just all over the place. She eventually met a guy and he was a dope dealer and she told me that they used to have parties and stuff in the seventies. Everybody was into coke, drinking, party stuff and at first it was just like a recreational thing. But it got the point where she needed to feel that happy because everything else in her life was horrible.

Because I was young the timeline for me is a little fuzzy on some things. So much happened before I was even in kindergarten. My older sister and I lived with my father for a bit

while my mother was strung out. But I remember it was snowing and it was Christmas time when my mother was granted custody of us again. We went to live with my mom in Marvel Town.

Marvel Town was a substance abuse recovery community for mothers and their children that was located in a local project. We stayed there for a while and my mother was doing much better. She started going to school to become a nurse. She got a better paying job as her education improved. We moved from the projects/Marvel Town to the east side of town, which is still, it's not the projects but it was the hood. People be trying to make them the same thing but it's not. That was around second grade. In the hood, all my little hood friends all they mamas single too. Everybody mom was doing the same thing; busting they ass. While my mom was going through school we'd cook things of ramen noodles, take the chicken out until she got home. We doing what we supposed to do, true latch key kids.

I'm a Midwest girl through and through but living on the east side of town made a big impact on me. My grandmother lived on that side of town too. We lived like three streets away from her. My sisters and I would ride our bikes over there, stay over there. My grandmother didn't drive so she would catch caught the bus and come pick us up or she'd meet us at the corner so we could walk to her house. Felt like we were always over there. If our lights and stuff got cut off or something like that then we would stay with her and she will always take care of us. Then my mother got a really great job and bought a house and we moved to the suburbs. It was like a new type of beginning for us. It was different than the hood. We moved around 7th/8th grade. In 7th grade I got a scholarship for a private school because my mom didn't want me to go to the hood middle school. I wanted to go to the damn hood school where all my little hood friends was at. I wanted to have fun. But it turned out cool because I was a cheerleader and going to cheerleading competitions and travel and stuff it kept me out of trouble. There were

only one or two other black kids that went there but their parents were doing really well. The rest were these little preppy white kids. They had a whole different skew of problems. They popping pills. Their parents didn't know. When we moved, I wanted to stay at the private school but ended up having to go to the suburban middle school which was cool too.

I mentioned that my mom and I had a really bad relationship when I was growing up and mainly it was my teen years. When I got my period and my body started to change that's when we really started to go at it. She would say crazy stuff to me and we would fight, like two random people on the street. It was really bad. By the time I got to 9th grade it was like, we wasn't mother and daughter. For me, it was like I gotta stay here with you because I'm a minor but I don't like your ass. And for her, it was like you gotta stay here with me because if something happened to you, somebody's gonna call county on me. There wasn't no love. It got progressively worse. My whole 9th grade year me and my mother would fight. I was put in a diversion program because of it because we'd get the police call on us for fighting. I was getting arrested for fighting my own mother. We had some really bad fights. Bloody noses, black eyes, knives pulled, all that shit.

We reached a point of no return on a family trip down south. We tore up our hotel room fighting. She left me in another state without clothes. She took everything and left me in the hotel room and went back home. After that I swore that I would never, ever, ever, ever talk to her again as long as I live. My then boyfriend, now husband, literally drove across the country to get me from this hotel where I was stranded. Once I was back in my home state, my aunt took me to my mom's to get my stuff and I moved in with my maternal grandmother and that's where I stayed for the remainder of high school. My grandmother was my rock.

When I think about my childhood, it was tragic. My mom had a lot of things working against her but I can see that she tried. We were never dirty. ever. Like when I say ever, I mean ever. I remember we would have to catch the bus because my mother's car wasn't working or

whatever. And she would bundle us up from head to two. It was winter in the Midwest; lake effect snow, wind chills below zero. Serious cold. We would be so bundled up that we could barely walk, we'd be sweating. And I remember she had this little, thin, leather Peacoat and these boots that the toes used to flap. Her soles were literally talking. She had a hat, no gloves, but we had gloves. When we waited for the bus to come we would like huddle around her to keep her warm. Our hair was always combed, braided, beaded and good for the week.

Being my mother's daughter prepared me for life because it made me more independent. It made me more able to know how to provide for my own stuff and not depend on other people. We coulda got free lunch but my mother packed our freaking lunch every day, even if it was just a peanut butter & jelly sandwich. It made me more resilient because it's a lot of things that I think that can happen to us in our life that a lot of people fold under and I just feel like that having such rough & tumble as an early life experience kinda like set a foundation that I'm just like you gotta to roll with the punches. Regardless of the bad stuff that may have been a part of my childhood, I have great memories as a kid. Barbeques. Block parties at my Grandma's house. Like if something bad happened I have the unique ability to find a good memory and remember that good memory to the point where that good memory outweighs the bad one. A good memory is more important and more forefront in my mind than whatever the bad memory. I can always recall good things. I can recall a bad thing too, but I can recall great memories with clarity.

My relationship with my mom is better even if it still has challenges. I feel like that my mother has really worked on herself and she has been very aware of her shortcomings as a mother to me. She knows like that at any point in time I can just stop talking to her and I just literally will not give two fucks and I think because she knows that she acts accordingly with me. She also wants to be in my kids' lives and I can say that she's been a phenomenal grandmother to

my children, way better than she ever was to me as a mother. I allow her to be in my childrens' lives because I felt like that she needs that. She needs a chance for redemption and she gets that with my kids.

I'm not a nothing and neither are other black women raised by their moms. Some of the strongest people come from black, single mothers. especially their daughters. Women who were raised by a Black single mother, we're like really resilient and strong and just capable of doing amazing things.

Delta

I didn't really know that there was an alternative. It was just kind of life. It was just me and my mama. My mom and dad had me, and got married when I was one, and then they got divorced when I was three. I don't have any memories of them together but I do have a few pictures. My mom served in the Air Force for 18 years. It was just she and I for the longest, until I turned 14, when she married my stepdad. He was around for the remainder of my childhood. I use around loosely.

We moved around a lot because of the military. I'm an only child and being an only child was great. Even still to this day, I don't meet any strangers which has served me well, but it also has been a deficit at times, because everybody's not your friend, but I still tend to think that everybody's my friend. I spent a lot of time alone. I spent a lot of time watching TV. I had a lot of friends. Still to this day don't like a noisy house. I grew up a lot of silence. I was quiet in my room. Mom was quiet in her room. We might come out and talk to each other.

Shortly after my parents divorced my mom went on active duty and the military stationed us in different places. We left the South when I was three and didn't return until I was in the 8th grade. Coming back home was one of the most defining moments of my life. It was a culture

shock for me because although I came back to visit my grandmother and other family, being on a military installation, you are friends with everybody. I had one best friend from Thailand, and one was from England. Coming back south it was all so homogeneous.

Living on various military bases was very multicultural. I left that environment and I went into one of the more urban sides of town. It was just very super different and I was different. I did not get a good start at kind of re-acclimating myself to my new environment, or getting used to it. I would probably say that, that was really, really defining. I felt like I was kind of left out there by myself to just kind of figure it out. But while it was challenging that experience taught me problem solving and conflict resolution.

Growing up with my mom made me independent. It made me a free thinker. I was able to think for myself, being independent, and it made me responsible. I was that "latchkey kid." When I got home, no one was there. I don't really ever remember my mom picking me up from school, like ever, unless I got in trouble for something. I just remember she had to work. I rode the bus home. She would say, "Lock the door. Don't open it up for anybody. If anybody asks, I'm in the shower," or what have you. Even from a really young age, like maybe three or four, I remember her leaving out a dry bowl of cereal in the morning. She had a cup of milk in the refrigerator. I knew how to go get my bowl of cereal that she left out, and pour my cup of milk in there. My children have no idea how to do any of this.

I also remember her trying to get a nap as a single mom. As a married mom, I can understand her pain. She looked out the window and she was like, "Oh," and I was like, "What?" She said, "I just saw Big Bird go in the house." I was like, "Where?" I sat at that window. She said, "Sit right here at the window and wait for him to come back out," and I sat there for hours while she took a nap.

My childhood was my normal. There were no traumatizing events that necessarily happened, but it wasn't all boring. As the single mom of a girl, my mother was very careful about who was around. I was aware that she had boyfriends and stuff. She brought them around sometimes but as I got older though, I realized that she dated way more than I knew about.

I did experience some loss with my father and grandfather, and stuff like that. Nothing more or less than what the average person's loss would be. It was a good childhood. I had sleepovers. As many of the times that I felt like she wasn't there, there were more times that she was. When the 90's girl group SWV first came out, and they had like the cross-color shorts on, and like the jerseys, I was in a talent show with my friends, and we lip sang to "I'm So Into You." My mom choreographed the whole dance routine and taught it to my friends and I in our backyard. She's like, "Y'all don't know how to do the bus stop?" We like, "What's that?" She, like, "Five, six, seven, eight." She would choreograph African dances and stuff, just pretty much whatever I was into, she would take or find a way for me to have that outlet. My relationship with my mom is ever evolving. As much as we are alike, we're very different. But I've learned that time softens. Time softens.

Nia

As far as I know my parents were never married. I don't know much about their relationship or how they met. I've never had a relationship with my father. I was born on the West Coast but after a couple of years, my mom moved us back to her hometown in the Southern part of the country. My mother and I lived with my maternal grandmother until she passed away and then it was just my mom and I.

I think two big things that shaped a lot of my childhood were going to parochial school and my mother's mental health. For most of my life I went to Catholic school. I always played

sports, primarily basketball, because it was the sport, I was best at. I played it through high school and then I was recruited to play in college. For high school I went to a Catholic boarding school. My high school was about 50 miles away from home. I would stay on campus during the week and then go home on the weekends. By high school I was mostly in white spaces with lots of kids who were in two parent homes. I think that, people made some assumptions about me and my home life but they weren't ones that I remember feeling like held me back in any way. It was more just their perception.

After high school, I played college basketball at an Ivy League institution up north and then returned to the South for my graduate degree. I met my husband and we moved to the East Coast and have been here since the early 2000s. I felt different growing up but I would say my sort of "feeling different" came from the lack of money versus being the child a single parent. As a kid, I felt really behind, like there were just super, super basic things that I needed in life that I couldn't get. It was easy to kind of cover it up because I went to Catholic school, so I always had uniforms. Even with that I would argue that I'm far more typical than people would think. I feel like there's this sort of weird narrative about children, particularly women, who were raised by single mothers and doing something extraordinary. Especially black women as if it's somehow extraordinary just our very existence, but I feel like I know lots of young black women who were raised by single black moms who are just regular. And maybe to some extent that is extraordinary.

I would say that my childhood was a little rough but not because I was the child of a Black single mother but because my mother was also bipolar. She was actually had borderline personality disorder, bipolar disorder and schizophrenic. So needless to say, she just had a lot of like quirks/challenges and so that's actually what I think made our lives difficult. She was

actually a very intelligent woman and was one of those people who enjoyed working and being productive but I can see how her mental health challenges actually made things in our lives more complicated.

I mentioned that when we moved, we lived with my grandmother. My grandmother owned her house, so we always like lived in that house. But after my grandmother died, my mother couldn't really afford to keep the house up, but she still owned half of it with one of her brothers. Because I didn't have any siblings or another parent, there was no one else to sort of buffer her quirks.

You know she was my mother so there were certain things that I kinda thought everybody's mother did. For instance, I thought everybody's mother talked to themselves but hers wasn't typical. She would be thinking people were answering her. She had arguments with people in her head. She had flights of fantasy and just things like that I just kinda thought were weird, but it wasn't until, she became really depressed and our utilities were shut off because she just couldn't get it together to go to work and function. That's when I realized she was unique. I was in the fourth grade. That is the first time I remember her being hospitalized.

During that time, I split my time between staying with an uncle and I lived with my best friend for a little bit. I eventually transitioned back with a neighbor because I remember like actually being afraid, like I didn't want to be in the house with her for some reason and not because I actually thought she was dangerous. I never thought my mother would do anything to me. But some her of behavior was scary to fourth grade me. I remember one time she woke up like after she had been released from the hospital and, she started getting dressed and she kept telling me to get ready because it was time to go to church. She was thinking it was Sunday morning and in face it was like Wednesday at 3:00 AM or something like it that. Definitely not

time to go to church. Her not being able to grasp that difference was scary. She had subsequent hospitalizations over the years but by then I was either in high school or away at college.

Despite those challenges I think I had an interesting childhood. I say interesting because I have a lot of negative things that I mostly associate with living in the South, not necessarily with like my mother per se. And it is definitely one of those hindsight things. There were things about myself that I thought were abnormal when actually they were just due to my environment. So, for instance, we were relatively poor and we didn't have a car so we would have to take the bus or get rides. I associated that negatively but once I moved to the northeast, I realized everybody took buses. In my high school it was the norm that you took a senior trip and usually somewhere abroad. Something I didn't do. But I got to college and met all these people who were actually relatively well-to-do growing up who had never left the country. So, there were all these things that I thought were a deficit about my life that turned out to actually not be. Instead they were just experiences that I had that kind of made me who I am.

Summer

My parents got married in 1980. My mom had just gotten out of the military. She was young, beautiful and had just come home and reconnected with my dad. My mom's mother and my dad's mother lived in the same apartment complex, just a few doors down from each other so my parents grew up knowing each other but had never dated as kids/teens. I was born in '82 and the November after my 10th birthday me and my mom left and we moved in with my grandma.

I'll never forget that my picked me up early from school and initially I didn't get why she had picked me up instead of letting me go to aftercare but when I saw all of our stuff in the back of the car, I knew. That started their separation and they were officially divorced like April of '93.

We lived with my grandmother until the school year ended and my mom moved us into a

nice apartment. We lived in the apartments about three years and then she bought us a house. I'm an only child so it was just me and Mama. Before my parents got divorced, my dad was like my best friend but after their divorce, our relationship just went completely to the left. It's still a work in progress as an adult.

When I was in middle and high school most of my friends were products of single mothers. I can only think of two of my friends whose parents were married. But my closest friends, they were all products of single moms. So, I really didn't notice a difference or think much about my home life until I was in college. During freshman orientation they had broken us into small group and I remember we were sitting on the lawn and we were in a circle and everyone was asked to go around and tell things about ourselves. In my group was another black girl from my area but she had gone to a county school and I had gone to a city school. When I stated which high school I graduated from she kinda smirked or laughed. But I remember her reaction because I thought "I'm not sure what's so funny because we both ended at the same college and I knew that I was there on a full academic scholarship."

My mom is military through and through. You can take her out of the military but you can't take the military out of her. She was fastidious and made me much the same way. If there is a dust ball to be found on the floor, she will find it. Or the best example was "How to handle a Period 101" by my mama. When I was on my period there was a very methodical way we did the situation. 1. You had a black towel and you put that on your sheet so that you don't mess up your stuff. 2. You lay on your side, not on your stomach or back because then you're going to mess up your clothes. 3. If you do mess up your underwear, then you have to wash them in the, in the sink first before you put them in the washer or they're going to be stained and look nasty. 4. Then when you change your pad you're supposed to stick it back in a little paper and there was

newspaper. You rolled it up. You put it in that newspaper. 5. You don't stick that in the trash in the house. You stick it in the trash in the garage. There was no tamponage, and it still wasn't until I was 18. I told her "I'm not wearing these pads anymore. They're big and bulky. I'm wearing tampons. Everybody wears tampons in college, mom." And she was like "fine, you spend your own money for it." And so that's what I did.

But despite all of that it didn't change her being the life of the party. She taught me the balance of work and play. She was dealing with a lot while raising me and I never knew that at one point my mom was only making like \$9 an hour. She got about \$400 a month in child support from my dad. I don't know how my mom was able to ensure that there wasn't anything that I lacked, but she did because I didn't feel like I lacked a single iota of anything. We were never without power, water or heat. I might not have had all of it, but I had a great deal. My childhood was just that, a childhood. My mom let me be a kid. It was fun. I don't feel like I missed or lacked anything.

She had a lot of stress and so in moments of stress she might've yelled entirely too much about something but she'd always come back and apologize. Our home was loving. I was in the position where I was a single mom for a little bit after my divorce and I get it. It gave me a lot of empathy for my mother and understanding because even now if I'm stressed, I can tell. "Okay. I might've went too far, my voice was too loud, reel it in." Outside of those periods of time, I could and still do talk to my mom about everything. After my own divorce, I dated and my mom dated too when I was growing up but there was no coming over to the house or spending the night.

None of that. I didn't play that. I wasn't raised that way. My mom didn't have a whole bunch of men around me. So, guess what? When I was in a similar position, I didn't have a whole bunch of men around my daughter either.

I've learned so much from my mama. Mama is a business woman. She made sure that I was timely and put together. Crossing all T's, dotting all I's, get to work on time but if you're on time, you're late but if you're 15 minutes early then you are on time kinda woman. She wanted me to be able to be comfortable in whatever room I'm in and I am and one way she did that was making sure that I was around different types of people. When I was in elementary and middle school, I was in predominantly white environments but mama always said you've got to learn your own people. When she bought our house, it was in a black part of town so when I went to high school it was my first time going to school with a bunch of people that looked like me. I didn't want to go to the school our house was zoned for but she insisted that I go and "learn your own people." I didn't understand it then. But I definitely understand it now.

I watched my mom do you know everything for herself so I was never the girl who dreamed of getting married. I knew I want it to be something. I wanted to be able to take care of myself and be in a position that I wouldn't rely or need anybody to do anything for me. My focus was on what I was going to be in life.

I wish that people would see children of single mothers as equal counterparts. That we are just as educated, were raised with values and a family comes first mindset. It shouldn't be looked at as a miracle when the daughter of a single mother doesn't get pregnant in high school. It shouldn't be shocking to people that you are high achieving. I have people, especially older white people, who are literally shocked by my accomplishments but I think "I just did just like your kid did. Not a big deal." What differences is how old I am as to what I have achieved or what I have done. They're are younger Caucasian women who are my counterparts and their achievements and aspirations (which are similar to mine) are not questioned. It's literally no big deal. But because it's me. It's a big deal. Why? It shouldn't be. Am I a product of a single mom?

Yes, but most importantly I was the product of a strong mother. Did what she had to do, for me, so that I could thrive and be successful in life. That's what I had, period point blank.

My personal story says that you don't have, you don't have to conform to someone else's labels, it's okay to stand out. I remember when I was in high school, everyone was wearing these brand name work pants and I wanted a pair. I was trying to fit in. I told my mom that I wanted some of these pants and she was willing to get them for me but when she took me to buy them and I tried them on she said " No, no, you are not wearing those. They don't show your shape or give you a shape of any kind plus they make your butt look flat. No." I pleaded and she went on "No, we're not doing this. This is something that a mechanic wears. These are utility pants. You will wear these regular ass khakis I'm going to buy."

*I was really upset about it and we got in the car and she explained this to me... "you putting on those pants is not going to change who you are. The kids at school are still going to call you white girl. They are still going to call you bougie. They're still going to call you all this stuff but now the only difference is, is that now you got on pants that do nothing for you. So just be who you are and the people that are going to like you are the ones that are going to like you and the ones that aren't, they're just not and that's okay." That was a pivotal moment in my life because of course, you know, she'd been dealing with me coming home and asking for all these different things that I thought would make me accepted. Jens, jewelry, shoes, purses, etc. all through middle school and she kind of dealt with it, but then I feel like when I hit ninth grade it was like, okay, she's four years away from leaving this house and she has to know who she is and be proud of who she is. that was like **the** moment for me.*

Veronica

I am who I am because of the strength of the women in my family, especially my maternal

grandmother and my mother. We had an amazing family bond and my grandma was the backbone. I was raised to be an independent woman. My mom instilled it in me and she got it from my grandma. My grandma raised five kids by herself. My grandparents were married and had their five children back to back like stairsteps. One day my granddad just got up and never came back. He was working for this Caucasian man and his boss trusted him so he was designated to collect money for the business and put into the business account for payroll.

Instead of doing what was asked of him by his boss, he took the company's money and bought himself a ticket up north. He had some family that lived there. My grandmother finds out that my granddad has skipped town from the police. She's thinking he's at work until the police show up at her door. My granddad's boss had called the police after his stolen money. The police had found the Caucasian man's abandoned truck with a Bible on the front seat that had Karen Hancock on the front. The police question my grandma as to the whereabouts of Karen because they are thinking that Karen may know where my granddad has gone. My grandma explained to them that Karen is two years old. My mom was three at the time. She's the middle kid of the five and Karen is one of my aunties. In spite of his colorful exit, my grandma made it happen. She didn't complain. She didn't talk crap about it. She just saved her little money did what she had to do to get her divorce from him and just kept living her life.

My mom saw her mother do it and did much the same. My parents were never married. My mom and dad met randomly at a nightclub. They hit it off and started dating. Fast forward about 18 months and here I go. My parents stayed together for a little while but it wasn't a long time because my mom made a startling revelation when she was six months pregnant with me that my father was married. Talk about shock. My mom was in a complete relationship with a guy who had whole wife. My father is deceased now but growing up our relationship was

strained. I had a lot of resentment towards him that he made my mom a part of something that maybe she wouldn't have chosen for herself. I'm my mom's second child. My brother was five years older than me. We were super tight. He was a great big brother. He passed away recently and I miss him terribly.

Growing up I had a wonderful childhood. So, growing up from probably birth to like 10, we lived in this house that's actually my house now. It was my grandmother's house, we lived with my grandmother. Birth to 10 and then at the age of 11 we moved into the house where my mom lives now.

My mom was amazing. I never really thought much about my mom being single because I grew up with so many of my friends having single moms too. It wasn't until I got older that it seemed to stand out more. People saying things like, "Well, your mom's not married." And me... "huh?" "What?" "That matters?" It stood out to me the most when I was an undergrad. I was taking this Women's Studies course. My instructor had taken us outside and had us all line up on an imaginary starting line and asked us a series of questions and we had to step forward or backward based on our responses. One question was "If you were raised by a single parent, take one step back. If you had a nanny growing up, take one step forward" kind of thing. And I thought, "Crap" as I took my step backward. I had never looked at having a single mom as a step back kind of thing until that day. As the exercise went on another question was "If you've ever went to bed hungry, take a step back." I never had to take a step back on that and that felt good. When the questions were over, I'm standing next to a Caucasian male and we were the only two on our line. There were people way ahead of us and people way behind us. As I stood there I thought "Wow! This is what my mom did. I never went to bed hungry; we never had our lights turned off. None of that, ever. It made me proud.

My mom was a hard worker. She worked. She cleaned houses for a living and worked so many jobs I think to make sure we weren't a statistic or whatever. I don't remember anybody giving us anything or for asking my dad or my brother's dad for anything. it's so funny because mama's little saying, to this day, "mama's baby, daddy's maybe." No matter what she just made it happen. If she had to work extra hours then she worked extra hours. If there ever was a time when my mama didn't have it, my grandma did and helped us out.

My mom is awesome. Honestly, the reason I went into social work is because I used to always tell my mom, "If I could just help one child have a childhood like I had, then I'd feel like I was doing something." My mom made sure we were well taken care of. She would always tell my brother and I "Listen, you're just as good as everybody else. It doesn't matter what it looks like, you're just as smart, just as whatever as everybody else." She just did what she had to do to make sure we had everything we needed to have. That perseverance takes strength. And it's the kind of strength that I don't even know if people have no more.

Jameka (researcher)

My parents were both widowers when they met. Each of their first spouses were murdered, in separate incidents. My mother's widow and my father served in the military together. When my mother's first husband died, his military cohort sent my mom condolences letters and my parents became pen pals. They fell in love through their letters. Their "love story" would make the basis for great fiction. They eventually married and my mom adopted my dad's son from a previous marriage and years later they had me. My parents separated when I was 5, that was 1989 and they finalized their divorce in 1996.

I'm the sum total of my mother. She had a very challenging home life and she worked really hard through self-reflection, knowing herself, loving herself, therapy, prayer, Bible study,

and seeking knowledge to heal her wounds and be the best person and mother she could. She was really smart. She wasn't college educated but was extremely well read and she placed a high value on education. She never received support around her intellect so I think it was really important that she give that to me. My mom was the smartest person I know. I don't always think about being smart. I know that I work hard. I attended a private school from kindergarten through 7th grade. I initially started going there because they had all day kindergarten and my mom worked full time and needed the school hours to work with her work hours. The public-school system in our area only provided half day kindergarten when I was little. I think now how elitist that was of the school system. I'm not sure if my mom felt like it was a slight against her as a single mom or not. Either way it was in school that I first felt "singled out" (no pun intended) by being raised by my mom. In elementary school, the guidance counselor started a "support group" called the Banana Bunch for kids of divorced & separated parents. I think kids who had deployed parents could be included as well. But we were removed from our classrooms and brought to do feelings exercises. I don't even know how the school knew which kids to target but I know being called out of class made me feel some type of way. Beyond that I didn't often feel different for being the child of a single mother even though the majority of my peers' parents were married. Instances where I felt different, especially while in private school, were surrounding race. I was often one of a handful of other students of color and one of even a smaller number that persisted at the school for years. It was not uncommon for there to be 1-3 new black kids each school year but they didn't come back the following year(s). From 1st grade through 7th grade there was only one other consistent black girl peer that I had in my grade and her mom was a doctor.

I loved growing up with my mom. We were a duo, a pair. It felt like an extension of the

other. Debby and Jameka, Jameka and Debby. As an adult, she'd grown to be my best friend although we'd always been very close. My mom had an incredible work ethic and was the consummate professional. She was always seeking knowledge and looking to see how she could hone her skills but I think one of the biggest things she taught me was that being a mom comes first and it's the most important job. I remember when I was little, I had gotten sick and she needed to leave work to get me and her boss threatened to fire her if she left to go get me and she quit on the spot and came and got me.

I always wanted to be a mom and be married. I didn't want to do it alone and I know I hurt my mom's feelings in the past expressing how strongly I felt about those two things. But as an adult I know and recognize that she didn't want to have to do it all on her own either but that's what happened. She always used to say, "no one gets married thinking they are going to get a divorce."

What my personal story says about me is that I'm my mother's daughter. I think of that definition of myself and have written in so many different contexts so often lately that it sounds a little cliché even to me but honestly, I believe it's the most accurate. Everything about me and in my life points back to her in some way.

CHAPTER SIX: ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Chapter Six provides analysis and interpretation of the data unearthed through the research process. The research questions that directed my interview guides were:

1. How are the adult daughters of Black single mothers and their mothers understood through the lens of intersectionality?
2. In what way do the perceptions and (mis)representations of Black daughters of Black singlemothers in the U.S. affect their lived experiences and quality of their lives?
3. How do the narrative accounts of Black daughters of Black single mothers provide an enhanced understanding of Black single mothers?

Analysis relates to each research question and is synthesized with data from other methods and literature. Interviews were coded during analysis. Codes with the highest frequency were as follows: daughter experience, daughter-mother relationship, mommy lessons, (re)presentation, mother-led home and support. All codes are not present in each participant's narrative which is why I have structured my analysis by addressing each participant's narrative in part. I do want to note that this analysis puts each woman's narrative into conversation with one another and findings may overlap from one woman to the next. Central themes that could be seen across narratives are offered at the end of the chapter. Additional analyses, poetic representations and visual representation, are provided in Appendix II & III, respectively.

Codes

As mentioned above, I identified the following codes during analysis: daughter experience, daughter-mother relationship, mommy lessons, (re)presentation, mother-led home

and support. I define each of these within this study below.

Daughter experience: participant's life events and their response to them.

*Daughter-mother relationship*¹⁸: participant's description of their relationship with their mother throughout their life.

Mommy lessons: life lessons taught to participants through their mothers, whether through observation, imitation, or explicit instruction.

*(Re)presentation*¹⁹: ways in which Black women are viewed in society including but not limited to stereotypes or tropes.

Mother-led home: mother-led homes are those in which the mother is the sole provider for the children's physical, spiritual, and emotional needs without the assistance or presence of a father in the home.

Support: the community (familial or fictive) that assisted participants and/or their mothers over participants' life course.

Analysis in Storytelling

Ellis (2004) offers three ways analysis can take place in narrative: narrative analysis, thematic analysis of narrative and structural analysis of narrative. I have used both narrative analysis and thematic analysis of narrative in my study. "Narrative analysis assumes that a good story itself is theoretical. Stories are themselves analytic" (Ellis, 2004, p. 195). Additional layers of analysis can be added by theorizing *about* the story. I have done this through thematic analysis of content. "Thematic analysis refers to treating stories as data and using analysis to arrive at

¹⁸ While I recognize that it is more common to use mother-daughter relationship, this study foregrounds the experience of daughters hence the use of daughter-mother relationship instead.

¹⁹ ⁰ I have chosen to use (re)presentation as a way to trouble the word representation as well as a way to tap into the double(d) meaning of to *represent* and to *present* something

themes that illuminate the content and hold within or across stories” (Ellis, 2004, p. 196).

I used the following two questions in working through my narrative analysis:

- 1- What are the performative acts that (re)produce my participants’ subjectivities as Black daughters of Black single mothers?
- 2- What are the performative acts that (re)produce my participants’ mothers as “single mothers”?

Amelia and Ann (sister participants)

I had the pleasure of interviewing one sibling group as part of my participant cohort. While I conducted all of Amelia and Ann’s interviews separately there were areas of overlap in things that they shared with me being raised by the same mother in the same household. As an older sister of a dyad, Amelia often spoke in plural of her and her sister’s experience during each interview. While Ann was most likely to just speak for herself alone. Since I spoke to them as individuals and not specifically as sisters, I have sought to present both their narratives in Chapter Five and their analyses as distinct from one another.

Amelia

My parents were married and they divorced when my younger sister was about a year old. We’re two years apart. It’s been the three of us mostly, my sister, my mom and I.

The individual themes that were most prevalent in Amelia’s story were support, daughter experience, and (re)presentation. Distinct features of Amelia’s story were the role of her grandparents in her life, her socioeconomic status, her proximity to both Whiteness and to marriage. When talking about her childhood, Amelia spoke a great deal about her grandparents and their influence on her, her sister Ann (a fellow participant) and her mother.

My grandparents I think really set the tone to the life that their grandkids are going to

have. So even my grandparents were well off. Um, and they raised my mom... to have the better things.

Amelia's access to money and having a great deal of financial security featured prominently in each interview. *that money piece it made it so I didn't quite fit the stereotype*

Amelia was aware of her own monetary privilege and that being a part of a higher economic social strata insulated her from the stereotypical challenges or stigma of having a Black single mother. Additionally, Amelia and her sister, both had a proximity to Whiteness that other participants did not have. Amelia's mother had been remarried at two different points during her childhood but the relationship that made the most lasting impact on Amelia and her sister was her first stepfather, for ease of narrative I will call him Madison. Madison is white man to whom her mother married when Amelia was 10 and they divorced when Amelia was 14. Madison and Amelia's mother remain close and are business partners. Amelia detailed that her and her sister continue to be close to Madison and that they are closer to him than their own biological father. Both in school and in social circles they were often one of a handful of Black people. Amelia spoke candidly about navigating her Blackness including her natural hair once she was in college. Her undergraduate education was the first time in her life that she had been around a large number of Black people and specifically ones that may have grown up in a similar social stratum as herself. While Amelia's mother was married on and off throughout her childhood this did not change Amelia's conception of being raised by a single mother.

*I've seen it with my own eyes in my own home that you don't **need** a man to become successful or do the things that you need to do. Even though I said my mom did it by herself, and she did. But I've also seen how the benefits of having two parents in their home. Yet, I think coming from a single mother, it's given me that extra drive to succeed.*

Amelia explained that while she had stepfathers at different points, they were around but not actively co-parenting along with her mother. She and her sister were her mother's daughters and all decisions for and about them were made by their mother solely. Amelia's daughter demonstrated that her daughters were a priority. She chose them over a male partner, an experience that not all children experience and not one some of my fellow participants had.

Amelia's narrative tells the often untold but typical story of a Black daughter raised by a Black single mother who defies the stereotype of the poor, Black, uneducated, never married single mother. Amelia's mother is an entrepreneur with a PhD. Both her life and the life of her mother dispel the negative (re)presentations of Black single mothers and their assumed "at-risk" children.

Ann

I feel like I would have different answers compared to other people.

In response to why she'd chosen to participate in this study, Ann shared the above quote. It is was true. Her responses were different than my other participants, including her sister. Ann was the youngest participant in the cohort. She had the same insular life experience and distinct features in her narrative that her sister did but the most unique feature of Ann's was the notion of her chronological age as compared to her scar age. Her scar age or lack thereof was made evident through her responses.

According to Clarissa Pinkola Estés (1995), there is a "timeless tribe of women of all colors, all nations, all languages, who down through the ages have lived through a great something, and yet who stood proud, still stand proud" (p. 404).

Estés refers to this tribe of women as members of the Scar Clan. Scars that are borne of trauma and drama. Ann had little to no scars compared to the other women in the cohort. This

lack of scars coupled with the social strata and proximity to Whiteness accounted for the “difference” in her answers.

The individual themes that were most prevalent in Ann’s story were support, (re)presentation and mommy lessons. Ann spent a most of her childhood so free from bias due to access to money and higher socioeconomic class that it wasn’t until high school that she first recalled recognizing that she was the child of a single mother.

I didn't realize it until high school and I can't remember exactly what comment one of my friends made to me but it was like a friend I knew from kindergarten and her parents are finalizing their divorce and she made some comment to me and then it was like oh yeah, I forgot that like my mom's a single mom, which is really, it's hard to understand that value. My grandparents were always there. It wasn't ever like, oh, my mom's a single mom 'til like that moment.

For Ann, this recognition continued to be an internal struggle throughout our interviews. One in which she may not even of been fully aware of. Her story offers an inside look to the insidious nature of how stereotypes and labels operate. In this instance, the label being single mother. In the quotes below Ann uses the word mold.

I just feel like she [her mother] just never fit into those molds. I think it's hard to say. My mom is a single black mom, but my mom does not fit that mold. Like, I don't think I've ever seen a movie or something in the media of a single black mom that's on the level of my mom sort of thing.

Even in her own self-definition of single mother which closely mimics that of her own mother²⁰, Ann still struggled to reconcile her mother with the term single mothers.

²⁰ This practice of self-definition mimicking their own mothers was common amongst participants. Most participants defined a single mother the way they would describe their own mothers.

I think of single mothers... as women who are so educated, kids are still going to be educated, going to Top -50 schools like it's nothing, like making it look easy. But still that's what I think of but I wouldn't classify my mother as a single mother. Like I just don't think of her as that even though she is...

Ann was aware of the negative (re)presentation often attributed to Black single mother and did not see this reflected in her own mother. I surmise that this disconnect is what leads to Ann's inability to readily classify her mother as a single mother.

Each participant was aware of the harmful way that Black single mothers are (mis)represented. My participants and I had conversations on how their mothers combated negative stereotypes through their motherhood. Ann reported that the biggest way she saw her mom combating stereotypes of Black womanhood was how she carried herself. Ann's mother taught her implicitly how to carry and comport oneself in the world as a Black woman. I think it is a testament to Ann's mother that Ann is scar free and has been able to exist outside of the reductionist paradigm of stereotype and stigma. Her story demonstrates this.

Callie

I always say it was my mom and me against the world. We were just out here figuring shit out, breaking shit, taking care of people who did not deserve to be taken care of, but that's in her spirit.

When compared to other participants, Callie was the enigma. If I had to choose an inanimate object to represent her it would be a Rubik's Cube. Callie has a colorful personality and an equally matched vernacular. She is complex but understandable. Unlike Ann, Callie had been initiated into the Scar Clan. Callie had three distinguishing features to her story: daughter experience, mommy lessons (or lack thereof) and daughter-mother relationship. Her

daughter experience had particular focus on Callie's frustration with aspects of her childhood like financial hardship.

In describing what it was like to grow up with a single mother the two words that stood out in Callie's story were frustration and trauma.

...mostly frustrating, mostly disappointed. A lot of confusion on how things ended up the way they would. We got evicted all the time. We would always have to move and I'd be like yo, what is it? Why can't we figure this shit out? Like what is she doing? ...most of my childhood was dysfunctional which is why I left and never went back.

In contrast to some other participants, Callie was left to learn a lot of life lessons on her own and without the direct guidance and oversight from her mother. This self-teaching was also a point of irritation as a child and adolescent. As an adult, it is an entry point for introspection²¹ and growth.

So, with her, she never really figured out. She never got the proper mental change, mental health training that you needed to raise a daughter in a country that she did not grow up in and she never, never really did figure out how to talk to me about things that mattered. And I think that as single moms [of daughters], when it comes to boys, when it comes to like your first period when it comes to like these really big pivotal moments in life, your mother has to know.

It's hard when you've gone past where your mother can be helpful to you. At the age of 18, I had surpassed everything that she had done.

The third distinguishing feature in Callie's story was her daughter-mother relationship, distinctly her exposure to trauma and her connection and disconnection with her mother. Despite Callie's mom not knowing certain things and being unable to teach Callie how to be a Black

²¹ Callie proactively uses her resources to utilize mental health services to heal any childhood wounds that may have been inflicted.

woman in America, this did not/does not alter Callie's commitment to her mother.

There were times where when I was in like high school and stuff, it was just mom at my graduation. We don't have a big family so it was just her. Everybody else would have like cousins, uncles, relatives, sister, brothers. It's just me and mom.

Callie discussed a role reversal with her and her mom now that she's an adult. Callie is essentially parenting her mother.

Financially she still can't get her shit together. Me having to pay certain things or having to step into regarding her doing dumb shit. To me it's like a never ending cycle when a single mother is forced to take care of herself from like basically 16 in a country that she didn't grow up in to then having a child with a man who is a piece of shit who has whole other family and is not going to help you.

In the nature of a Rubik's cube colors, Callie was able to simultaneously hold a lot of contradictions about her and her mother.

my mother is still like my everything. I still need her. So, to be honest, we do not have a great relationship, but we, I work with her to the best of my ability to like at least let her know that she's loved and I'm here for her but we talk like once a week max. It's more me than her, it's an intentional distance.

While Callie's story could be seen by some as reinforcing stereotypes because her mother fits the mold that Ann's mother did not. She is in fact a prime example of a what I term a vanguard Black daughter²². In Claude Steele's 2011 text *Whistling Vivaldi*, he discusses how stereotypes affect us and what we can do about them. Callie is an example of how are social identities are adaptations to the circumstances of our lives. Steele refers to these circumstances as

²² A more in-depth conversation on vanguard Black daughters can be found at the end of this chapter.

identity contingencies (p. 84). When Callie describes her social identity, she notes that it is an outgrowth of her “upbringing”. Her upbringing served as an identity contingency.

Like I do have a little bit of a chip on my shoulder. I know it's because of my upbringing. Like I know I'm just a little bit harder than most people. I'm a little bit more resilient, I'm a little bit more likely to figure shit out than most people because I just have had to figure out a lot of stuff. To be real I never saw myself as a part of the general population. Um, I was. Again, I've always been a little arrogant.

As I will discuss below in the central themes section of this chapter, each participant was aware, to some degree, of the stereotype of children of Black single mothers and yet all “over-performed”²³. Instead of performing as the rearguard that was anticipated by societal stereotypes, they were the vanguard. To do this each woman had managed at least for themselves to find relief from the pressure of the stereotype. All participants have a social identity and corresponding identity contingencies but Callie’s were the most salient amongst the cohort.

Dani

When I think about the woman I am today, I have to say that everything that I've been through in my life has contributed to who she is. My mother truly only had me because she tried to keep my father. My father wanted a son and my mom knew that. In her heart she felt that she was going to have a boy and that by giving my father a son, it would make my father want to be with her. Clearly, I wasn't a boy. That decision played a large part into our relationship. Me and my mother had a really bad relationship growing up.

Like Callie, Dani is a member of the Scar Clan. Both Dani and Callie’s mothers

²³ There’s a commonly known Black proverb that teaches that part of the experience of being Black is that you must work “twice as hard” to get just as far as someone White. Steele (2011) refers to this proverb in his text and seeks to test it within the context of stereotypes. He notes that what he calls “over-efforting” is a real phenomenon.

emigrated from the West Indies, and their mothers both experienced their own levels of unresolved trauma that I suspect infiltrated their motherhood. Of the cohort, Dani had the most “stereotypical” childhood and yet both her and her mother defied their stereotypes and identity contingencies. Because of her closeness to stereotypes Dani had a lot of insightful commentary regarding the characterizations and (mis)representations of Black women and their children.

Her thoughts on representation were a highlight of her narrative. The remaining highlights to Dani’s story were: mommy lessons, daughter experience, and daughter-mother relationship. In discussing (re)presentation of Black single mothers and Black motherhood in general, Dani offered the following:

[Black single moms are] at the bottom of the barrel. They are the worse of the worst. The Scum. They are the welfare queen. They are the " I don't know who my baby daddy is". They are the worst representation of people in America, not just Black people but all people.

Dani went on to describe how this (re)presentation affects her even though she is married with children and therefore fits the idea of respectability and worth that Black single mothers are not often given:

It's not even that somebody said this to me, ...this notion was already in my mind going out in public when I was pregnant that people can be looking at me wondering do I know who my baby daddy is. Am I on welfare or are they buying my groceries, paying my rent because I'm black and I'm pregnant and I'm by myself [in public spaces]. And it's like nobody has had to say that to me for me to think that...even if they aren't thinking that, I'm thinking that they're thinking that.

One of Dani’s most telling commentaries on Black motherhood was this:

*At work we have this thing called the burden of proof, so you must **prove** to me your*

*innocence or you must prove to me your claim. It's like black mothers have that burden of proof. It's like before they²⁴ see you, they see that you're black and you're a single mother... You have to **prove** to them that you're above all of these notions that they may have had about you... you don't just get to present yourself at face value and be like, "Hey, this is my story. I was married for however many years. I had a baby, we got divorced. This is my child, my child was born in wedlock, my child is legitimate." ... you don't get that chance...you already have that burden on you to prove yourself to the people that you meet, even though you shouldn't have to, but you do.*

Similar to Callie, Dani's mommy lessons were taught implicitly through good examples of bad examples. One lesson that Dani's mother was able to provide was hard work. Dani's mother worked diligently to move from addict to clean, from project to suburbs, from uneducated to educated. Simultaneously, her mother made sure that Dani had access to a good quality education by utilizing scholarships to private schools. Something that my own mother did to ensure I had the best education. Dani's mother was like many participants' mothers in that they taught their daughters particular life lessons through exposure to extracurricular and cultural opportunities and access. These opportunities varied from private school educations to traveling abroad.

Dani's daughter experience had centered on the juxtaposition of hardship and joy that comprised her childhood. As noted in her narrative in the preceding chapter, Dani described her childhood as tragic and yet marveled at her own ability to hold on to and locate good memories. With regard to her daughter-mother relationship, Dani's story centered around her traumatic experiences and redemption. In her narrative, Dani talks about her mother being a better grandmother to her kids than she was a mother to her. She also notes that if a miracle happened

²⁴ In the words of bell hooks, the "they" used by Dani refers to the imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchal society.

and single motherhood was no longer stigmatized, she'd be able to see her mother with clearer eyes.

I think that instead of looking at an addict, I do see the growth that my mother has had. I know that she's grown a lot. Just think about the steps from the projects to the hood to the suburbs. It was a lot that she did to do those things. I think that I will have more appreciation and more like we would have glorified her more or whatever about "do you see how far you have come?"

According to Collins (2000), "despite the obstacles and costs, motherhood remains a symbol of hope..." (p. 198). As both a Black daughter and a Black mother, Dani has experienced Black motherhood from both sides. Her narrative depicts a classical literary tale of triumph over adversity. Despite the numerous obstacles she encountered in her formative years, Dani has grown to be a forgiving and loving, married mother of two. She has been able to overcome repeated and deep-seated traumas. So often to experience trauma is to experience life as a Black woman and yet Dani's story offers a narrative of hope.

Delta

My mom is like literally a ride or die, like 'til death do you part. I'm like at some point you have to choose your children. I felt like at some point she did not choose me.

Several women in the cohort are only children, including Delta. Being a mother-daughter dyad provides an opportunity for close intimacy but can also increase opportunities for friction. Delta's narrative had both. The two themes that were most prevalent in Delta's story were daughter-mother relationship and mommy lessons.

While mothers teach their daughters multiple life lessons over their lifetime one of the most emphasized lessons instilled in Delta was not getting pregnant before/without marriage. In

Delta's family history this had been an unheeded multigenerational lesson. As Delta stated in reference to her grandmother, "*they was having babies out of wedlock in 1960.*" Delta's mother also gave birth to her out of wedlock. The lesson conveyed to Delta was that there was nothing worse than getting pregnant and not being married. Delta was not the only participant taught this mommy lesson nor is she the only Black woman to learn it from their mother. There are a multitude of Black women who are taught a similar narrative. The narrative is presented as a tactic of survival as a Blackgirl within a white hegemonic heteronormative frame.

I was always taught you do not have a baby out of wedlock. Absolutely do not...It was really don't get pregnant if you ain't got no husband. My mom would always be like you mess around and get pregnant I'm take you to the clinic or Ima beat it out of you or something like that end...It was so ingrained in me that I was a college graduate, married, in my own house. In that order. And I was like Oh Lord, how am I going to tell

my mama I'm pregnant. Like literally it was so ingrained "do not get pregnant" that was so scared to tell her as a married woman.

As mentioned in the introduction of this manuscript, part of the single story of Black single motherhood is laziness and yet each woman described how hardworking their mothers were and credited their mothers with teaching them work ethic. Delta was no exception.

She's a hard worker. I saw my mom, you know, she would get off at the post office. She had retired from the military. She would go clean banks after leaving the post office. I remember going with her to like different cleaning jobs that she had...My dad, would not help [financially] because it was a thing, well, "you're in the military so you're making a lot of money" and she was not.

An additional mommy lesson that Delta learned from her mother was ways/ how to mother, particularly around corporal punishment. As a mother of two boys, Delta holds a dual

role, like that of other participants (Dani, Nia, Summer, and myself (researcher)), of being both a Black daughter and a Black mother. This duality provided the space for her to reflect on some of her choices as a parent and to also open up a dialogue between her and her mother.

My mama said recently, I wish I had more patience with you, I wish I had talked to you more than I hit. I would say something to you one time and then the next time I'll hit you. And she was like, I always wanted to say that to you and I never knew how to say it until now.

Unlike my mother, I do more like yelling and fussing than hitting with my boys. There are different little lessons that I learned from her, good or bad, that kind of reflects and manifests itself in what I do in my parenting with them and now she sees it too, how some

of those things that she did kinda still mirror each other in me and I see it too. Sometimes, I say to myself, stop yelling at them, sit down, and stop.

As previously mentioned, the daughter-mother relationship, particularly, between an only daughter and mother can be fraught with tension because of close proximity. When asked to describe her relationship with her mother, Delta said that it was “better and ever evolving. Better than when I was high school. Better than five years ago.” Similar to Dani, Delta spoke of redemption within her and her mother’s relationship, especially when it came to being a grandmother to her children. The transition of daughter to mother for Delta and mother to grandmother for Delta’s mother propelled their relationship to a point of reconciliation and healing of past traumas. During the interview process, Delta shared that she felt that at times she was not her mother’s priority and that her mom had chosen romantic relationship over that of her daughter and the hurt that had caused her. Delta’s mother was eventually able to see the pain those choices had caused her daughter.

What irritated me is that she never once would address it in the moment. I would tell her

these things because she was like, "always tell me whatever." Sharing with her was instilled in me but then it's like, when I told you, you did nothing. She finally did apologize, I would say maybe about two or three years ago, finally say, "you know what? I messed up."

The experiences of/between Delta and her mother had a universality to them. Her narrative offers not only an inside look at being a Black daughter of a Black single mother but of a daughter-mother relationship writ large.

Nia

I think people often will attribute if you do really well in life and you were raised by a single mom, she must've been amazing, right? If you end up fucking up...well single mom.

Each woman's story offered their own distinctive aspects but Nia's stood out to me because she had two characteristics, maternal mental health and death, that impacted the themes I observed in the cohort as a whole. Nia was the only woman in the cohort, besides myself, whose mother was no longer living during the time of the study. The themes observed in Nia's story were support and daughter experience. Throughout her childhood, Nia's mother had mental health challenges which placed Nia in the position to receive care and support from an extended network of caring adults. In large part, support for other participants was limited to family members, mainly grandparents. Nia's grandmother was the main source of support for her and her mother. All three generations lived under the same roof until Nia's grandmother passed away during early elementary school. Nia and her mother continued living in her grandmother's home. After her grandmother's death, Nia's support network broadened to include church members and classmates' parents.

A lot of her raising of me was done in isolation because she pushed people away. She struggled to maintain healthy relationship. So, you know, I was that kid who they were like

different people at church sometimes, like I would spend Sunday with them....it was less that they were part of like my mother's social circle, if that makes sense.

I think growing up I felt really behind, like there were just basic things that I needed in life that I couldn't get...It was easy to kind of cover it up because I went to Catholic school, so I always had uniforms. For other stuff, sometimes, my aunts and uncles would get things for me or even some of my friends' parents in high school. Like if I would stay

with them for the weekend, there would always be a weekend trip to Walmart or whatever and their parents wouldn't even ask me. They would just like say, hey Nia, what do you need?... throw it in the basket.

Nia shared during her interviews that she grew up “relatively poor” and it was “lack of money” that made her feel the most different from her peers than that of being the child of a Black single mother. Nia also attributed her exposure to poverty to the impact her mother’s mental health had on her ability to maintain steady employment. Nia shared that in her youth she was often frustrated by her mother’s illness.

I wanted her to like snap out of it. Like get it together, be normal, go to work and you could be fine. I felt like she wasn't taking advantage of how smart she was. And our lives would be so much different if she would just snap out of being sick, get a job, keep a job, make money. Like there were things she just needed to do. If she just did those things, we would be much better off.

Each of the themes present in Nia’s story were connected. Lack of money was a distinct feature of her daughter experience which was directly connected to her need for support.

I think even I wouldn't even take back like my mother's, like mental illness. I remember I'd started to help my mom do her taxes like when I was in high school and I don't think my

mother ever made more than \$12,000 a year, which, you know, even in the late eighties and nineties wasn't a lot of money.

Nia's mother's mental health permeated each aspect of their relationship.

When she died our relationship was strained, but in a sort of normal way...mostly because I kind of went through that phase from about 13 to 18 of "oh my God, my mother is trying to ruin my life." She was not. I've been pretty convinced of that. And then there's

this stage you go through with thinking that your parents are like not smart, that you clearly know more than they do about life. Unfortunately, she died while we were still in those teenage/twenty something growing pains. Um, so I think that in the end we would have had a much more, like currently if she was living, we would have had a much more positive relationship. Her illness made her at some point turn on everybody. She never ever, ever turned on me.

According to the English Oxford Dictionary trauma is defined as “a deeply distressing or disturbing experience.” More specifically trauma can be defined as “... results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that are experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and has *potentially* lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being” (adapted from SAMSHA, 2018) [emphasis inserted and added]. Several participants experienced trauma by definition in their childhood. While Nia's narrative was not traumatic according to the definition above but I argue that her mother's illness did have lasting effects on her. I do not believe that they were adverse effects but the impact of her mother's mental health cannot be discounted. Nia's story illustrates that the challenges a child of a single mother may experience are not inherent to their mother's marital status. It is the old adage of correlation does not prove

causation. Nia's life course was most impacted by her mother's mental health. Nia has overcome her mother's death and poverty and is a happily married, mother of two, college educated, career woman. Like some of her fellow participants, Nia's narrative also shows that regardless of your challenges, you can thrive.

Summer

So, it's just me and my mom.

I utilized photo elicitation in Interview Two with each participant. I asked each participant to bring three photos of their choosing. Every participant provided three or less except Summer. Summer brought 29. In her exuberance to offer me a full picture of her life she brought as many pictures as she could. As we sat across from one another, Summer showed me picture after picture, in no particular order. She presented me with a Glamour Shots portrait of her and her mother and shared the story behind the picture.

This picture actually was taken a week after me and my mom left. So, this to me represents like our beginning of just me and her. This one is my favorite. We have other poses and outfits but this one was important to me because of what it represents. This was our new beginning right there.

The themes witnessed in her narrative were (re)presentation specifically daughter (re)presentation & mother (re)presentation along with mommy lessons. Summer's story is significant because she was the only participant to experience a mother led home as both a daughter and as a mother.

I think sometimes being a Black single mother can be lonely...because single moms are typically so selfless. They put their child before anything and everyone, and sometimes people can't handle that.

Summer's duplexity of experience came across in this extensive quotation.

When I became a single mom, I was very strict about my daughter and I told people I was dating straight out the gate, including my now husband, wasn't no coming over to my house if my daughter was home. Nobody was in and out because I wasn't raised that way.

My mom didn't have a whole bunch of men around me. It infuriated me once when my daughter's father texted me accusatorily regarding who and how I was dating. My initial thoughts were first of all, how dare you and then I thought that doesn't even sound like me and he of all people should know that. And it doesn't sound like me because again I wasn't raised that way. So, guess what? I don't have a whole bunch of men around my daughter. He and I spoke about it and I explained to him that what I do when my daughter is not at home is my business. Mine. Mine. Mine. And I'm only going to say this this one time because I'm going to give you the fact that you're my daughter's dad and I'm going to give you that respect. She hasn't met anyone and she won't until I am absolutely serious. No one has been over this house unless she is not here and this is my last time ever saying anything else about it.

Numerous mommy lessons have been discussed through the stories of previous participants. Lessons such as blackgirl comportment, hard work, exposure/opportunity, not getting pregnant (before marriage), and ways to mother. One mommy lesson that Summer was taught was the common African American proverb of part of being Black is having to work twice as hard, especially when compared to the work of someone who was not a person of color. Steele (2011) refers to the proverb this way:

the try 'twice as hard and ignore what other people think' narrative that is a general characteristic of African Americans that stems from a socialization process that was emphasized to me by my father—working twice as hard as other to succeed (pp. 105 & 154).

Summer stated: *I've always been taught really early on that I have to be twice as good. I have to work twice as hard and I have to be better in order to get the same things that white people have and, and while, I do those things, twice as hard and twice as good, I do it for myself and not so much for anybody else.*

This twice narrative contributes to identity threat and over-efforting. In Callie's narrative analysis I introduced the concept of identity contingencies. "The identity contingencies that make the biggest difference in our functioning seem to threaten (i.e. identity threat) or restrict us in some way" (Steele, 2011, p. 69). Over-efforting and identity threat are seen in vanguard daughters, also indicated in Callie's narrative analysis²⁵.

Similar to Ann, one of Summer's mommy lessons was blackgirl comportment.

I had been bullied a little bit and whenever she ever had to come up to the school. She had on a skirt suit, okay? It wasn't like a faking the funk type thing, that's what she wore to work. Everybody knew my mom from the mere sound of her heels when she came clicking down the hallway. People knew who she was and she didn't come up there, you know, acting ridiculous, yelling and screaming, hoopin' and hollerin'. That wasn't her thing. She was very professional. She got her point across in a very stern but professional way. And so that was something that I've watched. I watched how she communicated with people. My mom was very business savvy as well. For example, her whole thing of building my credit when I was like 17 years old. I had my own account and when I received my paycheck some money had to be put into savings so I could understand how money worked and could learn to be fiscally responsible. I studied my mother. I watched her. She always made a way.

²⁵ This will be discussed more in the central themes section of this chapter

Summer and her mother were a close-knit duo throughout her childhood and this closeness has continued into her adulthood. Her story offers a holistic look at a daughter-mother relationship that has gone into another generation as Summer mothers her own blackgirl (daughter). Summer's narrative is an additional example of a vanguard daughter within the cohort.

Veronica

I'm sure that everybody's story isn't the same. You know what I mean? I'm sure there's people with different stories, but my mom, she was kind of amazing. You know?

It is fitting that Veronica's narrative is the final one because her story is connective. She shared similarities with several participants. She was also the first participant that prompted several of the codes that I later identified in the larger cohort. Codes such as mother-led home, specifically generational mother-led home and support. Comparable to a majority of the participants, Veronica and her mother received their greatest support through a grandparent. Like Nia, Veronica lived with her grandmother when she was much younger. Similar to Delta, Veronica's grandmother had been a Black single mother due to her husband's abandonment and had showed her daughter (Veronica's mother) how to mother independently. The themes most prevalent in Veronica's narrative were (re)presentation, daughter-mother relationship and mother-led home.

The daughter-mother relationship that Veronica described was very positive. Her story offered a look at what that relationship could potentially look like without trauma, much the same way Summer's does.

Mom and I are close. We literally live like six minutes apart. Like, her house is six minutes from mine. I see my mom every day. We talk at least three or four times a day.

With the close-knit relationship that Veronica had developed over the years it has been challenging to grieve the mother she once had versus the one she currently has. Veronica's story gives a glimpse into the changing dynamic of the daughter becoming the caregiver for the mother.

Growing up my mom was, like I said, just always there, fully involved. She's still loving and kind now, but she's very sick. God, I'm going to cry, I'm sorry. So, in 2010 she had two strokes and a brain aneurism. So, it just, her life changed. She still walks and talks but everything is way slower. I think sometimes that's hard for me because my mom and I were so much alike. We literally sound alike, you know, growing up. Now, her voice is different, weaker. She has limitations now. Now, she don't think she has limitations, but she does have limitations...

In each interview, Veronica made reference to the ubiquitous nature of single motherhood. A concept that Dani succinctly stated in reference to her peers as "all they mamas single too." For Veronica, she said it this way in our first interview:

I guess if I was to tell my story or whatever it was, just say that I grew up with a single mom, but I really didn't notice a difference because it was kinda normal. I mean that was just what it was. I've seen more single moms than married moms. I honestly didn't think anything about it growing up.

The universality of single motherhood is something that I discuss in more detail later in the chapter within central themes.

During the second interview, I asked participants about (re)presentation of Black single mothers and their child in media, specifically television and movies, although social media did come up in some responses. Veronica was particularly struck by this line of questioning. In our final interview where she was reflecting on her participation, I asked her if she had any

culminating thoughts that she'd like to share. She stated this:

the one thing that stands out the most for me was the single moms on TV. Like I literally was calling people after the interview like, "Hey..." and asking them. I never thought about it, but like it just wasn't really seen and still isn't, you know. And I never thought of it until you asked it. I literally in all my life, I never thought of it. I was like, wow. that's crazy. You know what I mean? Turned my little light bulb on. Didn't even think about it.

As a researcher, I was excited that a question about (re)presentation that I asked had prompted her to think more deeply. (Re)presentation is so powerful because it can be insidious. Perhaps the devaluation of women of color and Black women specifically is linked to how they are represented in cultural imagery (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1282).

Jameka (researcher)

I'm my mother's daughter.

I offer a brief self-analysis here. I decided to honor my participants by foregrounding their analysis over my own. As I shared in Chapter One, it was my own lived experience as a Black daughter of a Black single mother that brought me to this work. My mother was the impetus for this study²⁶. I felt a kinship with each of my participants because we are sisters of shared experiences. The theme most prevalent in my own narrative was daughter-mother relationship. Of the participants in my study cohort, Summer's upbringing was the most closely aligned with my own. Our mothers parented in a similar fashion. Most of my participants received support from their grandparent(s). The only woman who did not mention their grandparent(s) was Callie. My mother and I also did not receive grandparent support. We did not live in close proximity to either my paternal or maternal grandparents. My mother built her own

²⁶ See Appendix I for more.

fictive kin community. My mother experienced a lot of trauma in her life prior to becoming a mother but managed to protect me from many traumatic experiences in my own life. Above, I have made reference to how my narrative connects to specific participants. Below, I will continue to show my connection to my participants through the central themes identified through thematic analysis of content.

Table 2: Cross Comparison of Participant Themes

X= Theme is shown in participant narrative

Participant	Daughter Experience	Daughter-Mother Relationship	Mommy Lessons	(Re)presentation	Mother-Led Home	Support
Amelia	X			X		X
Ann			X	X		X
Callie	X	X	X			
Dani	X	X	X	X		
Delta		X	X			
Nia	X					X
Summer			X	X		
Veronica		X		X	X	
Jameka (researcher)		X				

Central Themes

Each participant’s story was analyzed individually and collectively across the cohort. Included in this section are themes that could be seen across narratives. I noticed during the course of analysis, that I was not generating new themes about what it is like to be a Black

woman, a Black mother or the Black daughter of a Black single mother. Those themes already exist both factually and fictionally. Black women writers' and poets including but not limited to Gwendolyn Brooks, Nikki Giovanni, June Jordan to Patricia Hill Collins, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison have articulated themes of Black womanhood and Black motherhood. Existing themes such as the stereotypes often attributed to Black women like Mammy, Sapphire, Jezebel, Welfare Queen, Baby Mama, Angry Black woman and Strong Black woman. Along with themes specific to Black motherhood, specifically those put forth in Collins' (2000) chapter on "Black Women and Motherhood". Her themes include the following: Bloodmothers, Othermothers, and Women-Centered Networks; Mothers, Daughters, and Socialization for Survival; Community Othermothers and Political Activism; Motherhood as a Symbol of Power; and the Personal Meaning of Mothering.

Through participant narratives I have introduced social psychology concepts such as identity contingencies, identity threat, and social identity. Social identity can also be understood as normative identity categories from Butler's theory of performativity. The move back and forth from social psychology to performativity uncovers the narrative and power that seeks to regulate, make legible and diffuse identity threat and stereotype threat to which participants are subjugated. One of the research questions that I have used to guide this study has been how are the adult children of Black single mothers and their mothers understood through the lens of intersectionality? The answer lies within intersectionality as a feminist methodology.

Intersectionality is a tool to interrogate power (Cooper, 2016). At their intersections, my participants are fully legible. While intersectionality is useful as an epistemological mechanism of legibility, it is "most useful for exposing the operations of power dynamics in places where a single axis approach might render those operations invisible" (Smith, 1998, p. xxiii).

My research examines Collins aforementioned themes. I saw several of her themes reflected in in my participants' stories. These included: (1) Bloodmothers, Othermothers, and Women-Centered Networks; (2) Mothers, Daughters, and Socialization for Survival; (3) Motherhood as a Symbol of Power; and (4) the Personal Meaning of Mothering.

Bloodmothers, Othermothers, and Women-Centered Networks

The code of support generated in this study complements Collin's theme of Bloodmothers, Othermothers, and Women-Centered Networks. Each woman and/or their mother had a woman-centered network that assisted them growing up. Specifically, Amelia, Ann, Dani, Summer & Veronica gave examples about how their grandmothers served as othermothers for them. I know from my own experience while I did not live near bloodgrandmothers I had older women from my church who served that role. I continue to have relationships with several of the women, those that are still living. Additionally, my father was a naval officer, during my childhood and my parents' marriage, one of a few Black officers. My mom and the wives of the other Black naval officers started a support group of sorts called the Progressive Officers Wives Club (POWC) and this group of ladies was one of the women-centered networks that supported my mother and I. The women of PWOC continued to support each other through divorces and remarriages. They may have met as wives but bonded as Black women and mothers.

Mothers, Daughters, and Socialization for Survival

The code of mommy lessons was connected to Collin's theme of Mothers, Daughters, and Socialization for Survival. All mommy lessons taught can be summarized this way:

“Black daughters learn to expect to work, to strive for an education so they can support themselves, and to anticipate carrying heavy responsibilities in their families and communities because these skills are essential to their survival and those for whom they will eventually

become responsible” (Collins, 2000, p. 183; Ladner 1972; Joseph, 1981).

The mommy lessons shared supported explanation from Collins such as mothers encouraging their Black daughters to develop skills to confront oppressive conditions and ways to survive the sexual politics of intersecting oppressions while rejecting and transcending those same power relations (Collins, 2000, p. 184).

Motherhood as a Symbol of Power and The Personal Meaning of Mothering

Looking at these two themes jointly they reminded me of my data generated code of mother-led home and a recognized central theme of the reinvention of Black single motherhood. Collins writes about how viewing motherhood as a symbol of power can catalyze Black women to take actions that they otherwise might not have considered and that in doing so (Black)Motherhood politicizes Black women. I immediately thought of the mothers of Mike Brown, Trayvon Martin and Jordan Davis, especially Jordan’s mother who literally entered politics after her son’s murder. Thinking back to intersectionality and how power circulates I can see how motherhood makes you see the world differently and increase the desire to improve oppressive conditions for your children. If Black Motherhood as a whole politicizes, what happens if we focus specifically on Black single mothers? I extend Collins’ thinking of motherhood as a symbol of power to look at how becoming and being a Black single mother politicizes in a particular way. Black single mothers historically have been politicized through politicians using them as pawns from Moynihan’s 1965 report to Reagan’s 1976 presidential campaign to Clinton’s 1992 welfare reform.

Yet when a Black mother makes meaning for herself and chooses to care for herself and her children it should be seen as political warfare, a repeated act of self-preservation and not

merely self-indulgence²⁷. Because all of the possible obstacles, challenges and costs associated with being Black single mother “motherhood remains a symbol of hope for many Black women” (Collins, 2000, p. 198).

My participants’ stories stand alongside the artists’ work mentioned above. A tapestry of Black women’s experience and much like a tapestry each theme is interwoven with other themes. Specific themes reflected in my participants’ narratives are interpellation, the paradox of Black motherhood, shifting and code-shifting, reinvention of Black single motherhood, and vanguard Black daughters. I will detail each of these themes below.

Interpellation (single mother = Black)

When I think of a single mother²⁸, she’s always Black-Nia As mentioned in early chapters One and Two, the single story of Black single motherhood has made the linkage of race and single mother explicit. It is always assumed because the story has been repeated again and again. Society (read: white, hegemonic, capitalist, patriarchy) wants my participants to be recognizable subjects based on known/visible stereotypes of Black women. These known/visible stereotypes are the well-told single story. Yet society fails to acknowledge that as Black women we define ourselves²⁹.

The process of interpellation can be unsettling for the subject because the subject knows themselves beyond being an object but are rendered unknown to others. "Interpellation seeks to introduce a reality rather than report on an existing one. It is an attempt to pull or put someone in "their place" - based on discursive and social norms" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 79). Can the

²⁷ Original quote by Audre Lorde (1988): “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare.” This can be found in her text *A Burst of Light: and other Essays*

²⁸ Throughout this manuscript I have used the term single mother but want to note that “single mother” is a construct founded upon the white gaze. Black motherhood inherently is both simultaneously singular and plural

²⁹ See Collins, P. (1986). *Learning from the outsider within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought*. Social Problems 33 (6) for more.

subject, i.e. single mother, produce her own subjectivity through performance when single motherhood as signified is being performed and acted upon them? Yes, they can, through resistance and self-definition. “Conformity is the anticipated outcome” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 74) yet Black women are always, already self-defining and utilizing agency. The very act of self-definition is a survival tool for Black women.

“People become subjects through repetition” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p.72). Single mothers are constituted and contested in specific ways through the interpellation of being called the name, “single mother”. This hailing extends to (re)presentations of single mothers in society.

Being called a “single mother” constitutes women as particular subjects. Yet “it is not anything intrinsic to the signifier ‘whore’ that gives it its meaning, but rather its difference from other signifiers of womanhood such as ‘virgin’ and ‘mother.’” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 69) How does this relate to (re)presentation and single motherhood? It relates in that single mother has its meaning because of its distinction from (married) mother which is the mothering norm. The (married) mothering norm is married, middle class, white woman. The single mothering norm is unmarried, poor, woman of color. These are social categories that à la Butler, single mothers are not even choosing for themselves but they are constituted by a social world chosen by others. Butler asserts, “If I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose” (p. 77). Are there ways that this social world can be re-made through performativity? I believe so. Butler (1997) wrote:

In being called an injurious name, one is derogated and demeaned. But the name holds out another possibility as well: by being called a name, one is also, paradoxically, given a certain possibility for social existence...that exceeds the prior purposes that animate that call” (p. 2).

It is this “certain possibility” that opens up a new social world for single mothers. It is

this name calling, interpellation, that provides scaffolding for new meaning-making. Butler extends Althusser's linguistic interpellation to assert that interpellation can function without a subject's acknowledgement, or turning "turning around" to respond to the "Hey, you!"; that is, "the linguistic constitution of the subject can take place without a subject's knowing." (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 74). Single mothers are (re)presented and (re)produced in particular ways even without their knowledge. My participants are recognized through the following performative acts:

- Fitting into their hometown environment/community
- Being their mother's daughter
- Fitting into their current adult environment/community
- NOT fitting into the cultural imagery production (i.e. stereotypes) of Black woman and specifically, children of Black single mother
- Defying stereotype threat.

It is only because of the rigid identity categorizations of "Black", "woman", "class", "single", "mother", "daughter" that my participants' subjectivity becomes visible, not as fixed but as an intersection of all of those categories woven together. Subjectivity is produced through a paradoxical process of doing and undoing identity categories.

The paradox of Black daughterhood

In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins writes of contradictions but I argue that what she describing are in fact paradoxes. A paradox is when two opposing things are both true. It is the concept of holding multiple truths. For example, mothers raising their daughters that "they don't need no man" while simultaneously teaching them "how to be a good wife." Butler (2004) argued that there is a paradox of agency. She writes on page 3,

If I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose. That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility.”

Considering this for my own work, being hailed/made legible as delinquent, at-risk, etc. but not seeing oneself as that is a paradox of agency. By being the Black daughter of a Black single mother, you don't choose to be constituted as delinquent or at-risk.

Reinvention of Black single motherhood

What does it mean to reframe and reimagine Black single motherhood? For me, it is the removal of stigma. To remove the stigma, you must ask where does the stigma lie? It lies in the margins. Reframing Black single motherhood removes stigma by placing Black single motherhood in the center. There is no stigma when you are at the center. The stigma comes in being moved to the margin. For my participants and myself, being raised by a single mother is the norm. Several participants echoed the sentiment of being raised within a community of Black single motherhood. Dani put it this way: “all they mamas single too.” Summer shared that “most of my friends were products of single mothers.” Veronica explained that she didn't experience stigma from being raised by a Black single mother because “it was so many more like me.” A

majority of my participants, myself included, were in community with other children like ourselves and mothers like our own. We were recognizable and felt a sense of normalcy amongst our peers. This sense of belonging was unrecognizable by society. This illegibility is not unique to my participants but can be extended to the Black community as a whole. The subjugation of Black people makes them unseen and thus (mis)represented.

To reiterate, for this cohort, Black single motherhood is the center and it took being in a school setting, sometimes not until college, for a participant's center to be marginalized. While

for society, white, heteronormative marriage is the assumed center. Because of this assumption, Black single motherhood and other familial configurations are deemed deviant. For example, the villainization for Black families and specifically Black mothers in the Moynihan report.

Dani commented during one of her interviews that she's never "heard about or read about anything that actually has to do with single motherhood on a *positive note*." (emphasis reflects Dani's delivery). Moving the center, shifts the narrative. In the center, you have space to spread and broaden conceptualizations of Black single motherhood. There at the center, you can expand and move away from limiting stereotypes etc.

Vanguard Black daughters

I believe that they think that children raised by black single mothers are delinquent. - Dani I was going to be pregnant by the time I was 16. I wasn't gonna go to college... that I pretty much wasn't gonna amount to squat diddly. -Summer

The above are just two examples that participants offered of their awareness of stereotypes attached to children of Black single mothers. As mentioned in Callie's narrative, each participant has a social identity that is affected by identity contingencies and stereotype threat. Vanguard daughters are an example of the paradoxical conformity of being the Black daughter of a Black single mother. For example, the cohort in this study, myself included, along with others like us are/have been hailed as "at-risk" into the social imagination but we resist, persist and thrive. We contest the norms³⁰. In part we contested the norms ascribed to us through academic over-efforting. Steele limits over-efforting to academic spaces but I think it can be seen

³⁰ Butler (2004) explains that norms are called into question and reiterated at the moment in which performativity begins its citational practice. One surely cites norms that already exist, but these norms can be significantly deterritorialized through tile citation. They can also be exposed as nonnatural and nonnecessary when they take place in a context and through a form of embodying that defies normative expectation (p. 218).

in various aspects of life. Although it should be noted that all participants excelled academically. I think it can be seen outside of academic spaces because participants are never not aware of the stereotype of being the Black daughter of a Black single mother. Over-efforting is made evident when there is a stereotype to disprove (Steele, 2011, p. 107). According to Steel (2011) disproving a stereotype is a Sisyphean task that must be done over and over again as long as you are in the domain where the stereotype applies. Each participant over-efforted and outperformed the expected single story outcome of what a Black daughter of a Black single mother is supposed to be and worked “twice as hard” to do so in every domain of their lives.

So, what could be done for current minor children of Black single mothers? If you want to change the behaviors and outcomes associated with social identity—for example, too many children of Black single mothers labeled as at-risk in K-12 education—don’t focus on changing the internal manifestations of the identity, such as values and attitudes. Focus instead on changing the contingencies to which all of that internal stuff is an adaptation. It’s less about reinventing Black single motherhood and more about changing the contingencies that Black single mothers and subsequently their children have to operate within.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter Seven concludes this text. In this chapter, I summarize what has been presented throughout the text and offer suggestions for future projects that I would like to pursue. I also include recommendations for academia, particularly those studying Black women. In addition, I have included ethical considerations that I encountered during this research process. The questions that I was seeking to answer were as follows:

1-How are the adult daughters of Black single mothers and their mothers understood through the lens of intersectionality?

2-In what way do the perceptions and (mis)representations of daughters of Black single mothers in the U.S. affect their lived experiences and quality of their lives?

3-How do the narrative accounts of Black daughters of Black single mothers provide an enhanced understanding of Black single mothers?

Stigma

Each of the aforementioned research questions fall under the umbrella of stigma. Stigma is insidious. The perceptions and (mis)representations of daughters of Black single mothers provide a relentless surveillance operating under the auspices of stereotype threat (i.e. stigma). These daughters are both hyper visible and yet invisible, which is true of Black women as a whole. How do you intervene in something that is meant to be hidden? You shine a light on it. Intersectionality is a flashlight that “rends the veil” (Cooper, 2016, p. 392) and illuminates stigma’s impact on Black single motherhood. The narratives presented in Chapter Five show how Black daughters raised in mother-led homes are understood more fully through

representational intersectionality. Participant narratives provide new cultural image representations of daughters of Black single mothers that push back on the single story put forth by Moynihan. These narratives are not the single story repeated by politicians of the last forty years and media producers like Tyler Perry. Instead these narratives serve as anti-stigma motif.

Future projects

For myself:

As mentioned in Chapter Three, I conducted support interviews during this study that were not used in this work. During the data collection process, I was able to interview three of the participant's mothers (Dani, Summer, along with Amelia & Ann's mother). Each of the mothers spoke about what it was like raising their daughters as single mothers. I would like to utilize this unused data in future work to gain insight into Black single motherhood from mothers whose children are now adults, taking a retrospective approach, especially since this looking back seems to be a gap in the literature. From past reviews of the literature a majority of the material that looks at Black single motherhood from the mother's perspective is conducted while her children are still under the age of eighteen.

Another focus for future work is the role of fathers in children raised in mother-led homes. This is what I call "the daddy dynamic". It is something that came up in a majority of conversations but since this case study focused on daughter-mother relations, I did not include any of this data in this particular text. In addition, early on in the data collection process I interviewed sons that were raised in a mother-led home but found that the male perspective was unique and worthy of its own study and analysis. Two aspects of this perspective are "raising men" and "the *need* for a father." I was familiar with "raising men" concept. It is the idea that a Black single mother cannot properly raise a man and yet each son I spoke with declared that they

were men and that their mother was instrumental in this outcome. I have labeled this “raising men” as woman-led manhood. I was also familiar with “the *need* for a father” and that boys *need* their fathers in their lives, if not their homes. I would like to look at Black masculinity and children raised by Black single mothers with sex-specific focus.

I am also interested in completing a more detailed media analysis that looks at television and the representation of Black single mothers and their children. One participant asked if there were any current scripted shows that have/feature/center Black single moms and I would like to give this question proper attention and look at past scripted shows that centered on Black single moms, such as the 1968 television show *Julia* and the 1993 television show *Thea*. A question that was generated through co-inquiry with my participants is: Are Black single mothers or looking more broadly single mothers of color, being *actually/accurately* represented in society through media?

Additional data I chose not to use for this project due to saturation was gleaned from a focus group I conducted. During the focus group and reiterated in an individual interview was experience and effect of colorism. Because colorism is such a wide-reaching concept, I believe it warrants its own inquiry within daughter-mother relationships.

For others:

For those researchers who work in the discipline of education, additional inquiry is need to look at stigma of children of Black single mothers and/or single mothers in general, within school settings. All participants reported feeling “most different” from their peers or cognizant of difference within educational settings whether it was K-12 or postsecondary.

Mother-led homes and their children need support and often have support. For my participants, grandparents were the most consistent source of help/support reported. There is a

need to explore the role of grandparents and single motherhood. I can see this inquiry being initiated within the disciplines of social work or human development.

Recommendations for academia and those studying Black women

Both in and outside of the academy, we must recognize the value of Black women, their intellectual history and knowledge production, specifically the use of intersectionality. There has been a move to separate intersectionality from Black Feminism but in doing so moves intersectionality from its goals and aims. Intersectionality is not one size fits all and should be used with intention. As researchers, we must approach research from a position of assets and not deficits. For far too long, Black single mothers and their children have been looked at solely through a deficit lens. We must also resist stereotypical narratives of Black single motherhood and the outcomes of their children. It is imperative that we produce rich, thick, data that fully represents our participants. Taking a longitudinal look at child outcomes into adulthood will help with this.

Ethical Considerations

I would remiss if I ended this text and did not address ethical considerations in storytelling. As a researcher using ethnographic methods I was both sharing my own story and sharing the stories of others. I was extremely conscious of authorship and also accurately portraying a community of which I am a part, Black women and Black daughters, particularly those raised in mother-led homes. I wanted to be true to my participants and what they shared with me and I also wanted to be true to myself as a Black woman academic.

I asked myself several questions throughout the research process. Questions such as, who gets to tell what story? Whose story is it? Does it belong to me, my participants or both? Where am I going to put myself into this research? Whose story gets foregrounded when and how? To help me answer these questions I sought out what other qualitative researchers have used as

guidelines. A guideline that Norm Denzin (1997)³¹ offers is that when making ethical decisions when we study others, researchers should pursue a feminist, communitarian, and moral ethic. Another guideline he proposes is that ethnographers should operate under an ethic of care, solidarity, community, mutuality, and civic transformation (Ellis, 2004, p. 148). I took these guidelines to heart when asking myself the questions referenced above.

I found additional guidance in knowing the difference between procedural ethics, situational ethics and relational ethics and considering them all. Procedural ethics are the types of questions and mandates that arise from Institutional Review Board committees. Situational ethics are the “kind that deal with the unpredictable, often subtle, yet ethically important moments that come up in the field” (Ellis, 2007, p. 23). For example, when a participant shares something that you didn’t directly ask them and you have to decide whether to delve deeper or to redirect the line of questioning. This would fall under situational ethics. While relational ethics are operating with kindness and care to what has been entrusted to you as the researcher while also taking responsibility for what is offered.

From a relational ethics standpoint, the question I asked myself more than any other was “whose story is this?” I was aware that the answer to this question could, and probably would, change throughout the process but the idea is to ask continually and “seek the good” (Ellis, 2007, p. 23). In asking myself this question throughout this project I felt that there were aspects of my participants’ stories that were not mine to share and that if I chose to share them it would not adhere to an ethos of care. Given that, there are story bits and anecdotes that participants shared with me that are not included here. There may be an instance in the future where I would

³¹ See Denzin’s 1997 text, *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century* for more.

approach a participant about sharing the “untold story” but would not do so without implementing procedural, situational and relational ethics. Withholding parts of participants’ stories does not take away from the impact or completeness of the stories offered. Every story told is complete in its incompleteness. Writers leave words on the cutting room floor. This text is no different.

Culminating Thoughts

What I now know from this study is that more attention needs to be given to Black single mothers and their children, especially in regards to outcomes. Each of the participants has “defied the odds”. All participants were aware of the stereotypes attached to children of Black single mothers and of the mothers themselves and yet none of the participants reinforced the stereotypes but instead disputed them. Additional attention is also needed within media, in particular social media. A large amount of our media consumption comes through apps such as Facebook or Instagram and is helping to shape our societal imagination. More than one participant referenced memes, gifs, and images from social media as places that (mis)representation occurs with Black single mothers and their children.

According to Jackson & Mazzei (2012), “to rework categories is to challenge the historicity of them and expose the falsehood of their origins” (p. 82). Mine and my participants’ lives undo and rework the category of “Black daughter of a Black single mother” despite constant interpellation that wants to limit the possibilities of existence to lack and deficit. “Black daughter of a Black single mother” is not a signifier that is solely imposed upon my participants and women like them. Instead it is a “double move of subject production, it is a signifier that becomes heavy with multiple and contradictory meanings in social, historical, and political spheres” (p 82). Spheres where power relations cannot be ignored and intersectionality is a tool

to be used. In this work, I have reworked “delinquent”, “lack”, “deficit” into “mother-led homes” and “vanguard Black daughters”. My dissertation used narrative and poetic representation to shift the stigma paradigm that surrounds the (re)presentation of Black single mothers and their children, regardless of age. My own experiential knowledge helped me to shape this study. I have been privileged to be an "expert" voice in this case study as I am also a part of the case. It is my hope to use my expertise to dismantle the single story that has been told of Black single mothers and their children and to be a storyteller that shares many more now and in the future.

I am ending this text much the way it began by using poetic representation. Two of the culminating questions that each participant was asked was *if you woke up tomorrow and a miracle happened and Black single mothers were no longer stigmatized, what would you see differently about the world and what would be the first signs to you that the miracle had occurred?* Through poetic representation I have shaped participants’ responses into the following poem.

BlackMamaWoman

Take a deep breath
Feel the air expand your lungs
Not like when breath doesn't come easy gets caught
Making your chest burn

Breathe deep, Blackmamawoman
Breathe in and out
From soul to sole.

You are strong
And not in the strongblackwoman archetype
But in the mold of the endurance of the Middle Passage
In the strength that builds bodies within wombs
And communities within cities.

You and I.
We've changed the narrative
We've changed the song.
No longer are you without, Blackmamawoman
But within.

Now is a different plot, different movie.
You're working on your third degree
and I'm not talking karate

Your kids are well?
Of course, they are.
For they are yours.

I see your growth.
Refusing to shrink
instead you bloom
For far too long you've been treated like a weed that grows between cracks
But you are a flower, Blackmamawoman
Watered by the tests of time.

I see you out here shining.
Glowing up and out
Exuding light even in the darkness.

If no one has said it to you, let me be the first to say
I appreciate you, Blackmamawoman
Sacrifice ain't easy
If it was, everyone would do it.

Do you see how far you've come? All that you have done?
I glorify you.

You've been talking back. Pushing back.
Talking Black. Feeling Black.

You thought you were talking to yourself
Pushing against the door, labeled "Pull"
But no, I was listening.

Resources are here. Judgment banished.
It didn't come easy
It didn't come quick
But here we are, on the precipice of change

Yes, Blackmamawoman, you are raising these kids on your own
Raise them without worry
No one is talking about you
Not like that
They speak of you Positively.

Raise those babies high
Lift them up off of pride rock
Rafiki them skyward
You, Blackmamawoman,
You raise(d) them up

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APPENDIX I: A POSITIONALITY STATEMENT

“Positionality refers to the stance or positioning of the researcher in relation to the social and political context of the study. The position of the researcher affects every phase of the research process...the ways in which knowledge is constructed and acted on and, finally, the ways in which outcomes are disseminated and published.” (Rowe, 2014, p. 628). Included here is my research positionality statement. I felt that this statement was useful to the reader but not well placed within the text.

My position is as a Black (grieving) daughter and Black mother. I think it is important to note that grief, is not stagnant. It is alive, moving and changing. Prior to her death, my mother was my biggest cheerleader, especially when it came to educational pursuits. She used to say “*no one can take away the knowledge that's in your head.*” My mother was the inspiration for my dissertation research. Her. Her life. Our life. Together.

I started my doctoral journey in 2013 as a part-time student taking one class at a time. At the time, my mom was living in my home state of Virginia, where she'd spent 30 plus years of her adult life. A year after I started my doctorate my mom packed up her entire life and moved to Alabama to be physically closer to me. Having my mom live 15 mins away from me was a tremendous blessing especially since we had not lived in close physical proximity since I left home in 2002 for college. Despite our physical distance during that time, we were in constant communication. If we weren't talking on the phone, we were texting. If not texting, then emailing. Her presence in my life was hyper present. Not suffocating but secure.

For me, my week starts on Sunday. The week that I was scheduled to take my comprehensive exams my mom died, on a Sunday, suddenly and unexpectedly. Her death came

at a point in my doctoral journey where I was at an ending and a beginning. Coursework was completed but I had not yet started truly “dissertating.” But now I was grieving, planning a funeral, managing her estate, packing her belongings, dissertating while continuing to be a wife and a mother.

My mother inspired this study yet I would be remiss if I failed to point out how her physical absence has affected this project. I do not believe *this* is the dissertation that would have been produced had my mother been alive because I'm different. I've had to learn to live a different life. A life where I'm Earthside and she's Starside. I believe that my dissertation has been a grief production because I have been actively grieving throughout the entire dissertation process from comps to manuscript. Grief has never been absent from me. Grief has colored this study because it has in some ways become a preservation project for my mother's memory/legacy and it has also been an exercise in archival memory mining as I unearth memories that I had not thought of in years but in the interactive nature of conversation where our mothers are centered, memories come to mind again and again.

When I write that this dissertation has been a grief production, I mean that every aspect of this project has been marked by grief, from the way the questions were conceived of and constructed in my interview guide, to how the study was conducted and participants gathered to the analysis and writing of the manuscript. I base my researcher assumptions on knowing the ways in which grief impacts a life. I also base it on being in “insider” to my research. As a Black daughter raised by a Black single mother who studied her peers, I want to be transparent about engaging in participatory and reflexive practice that involved myself and my participants in a process of co-creation and inquiry (Rowe, 2014, p. 628). It is a mind trip when your literal project hinges on a singular person and then that specific door, falls off the hinges.

APPENDIX II: POETRY

Included here are relevant poetic representations that I wrote from field notes and interviews with my participants. Each poetic representation is in response to either specific interview questions or high sensory/descriptive answers that specific participants gave. These poems are offered in no particular order. I felt that they were useful to the reader but did not fit within the manuscript.

Mother Rainbow³²

She is red/yellow/caribbean blue/purple/ brown/grey.
Fucking grey.

She is sunshine and happiness.
Vibrant and relaxed.
She is dangerous and unreadable.
She is soft and hard.

She is prism.
Reflecting various shades. Sometimes red. At times blue.
Then you look again she is green.

Now.
Look now.
She is yellow.

Like a painter's palette, each color sits next to another. Creating new colors.
Mixed together they are muddled brown.

A rainbow is she. Each color is mother.

(Inspired by all participants)

³² Both Mother Rainbow and Sis is Black are written in a cento style. Cento is from the Latin word for "patchwork," the cento (or collage poem) is a poetic form made up of lines from poems by other poets. For more see: <https://poets.org/text/cento-poetic->

Sis is Black

Single mother = Home/ An everyday Black superhero/courageous and powerful/warm and loving/cradled in a buxom bosom of nurturing care and education/A balance of sacrifice and strength/multitasking & creativity/laughter on the back of hard work.

Single mother = projects/ government aid(s)/absentee fatherism/hardship/trauma

(Inspired by all participants)

Chicken on Sundays

Big Mama had five kids. All of 'em got kids.

Big Mama's house was the family house

Every Sunday, Big Mama would get up and cook Homemade biscuits and fried chicken

E'erybody would come

All the aunties and they kids All the uncles and they kids All to eat chicken on Sundays

At Big Mama's house

(Inspired by Veronica)

Watermelon

We never had nothing/Even if we had cans of vienna sausages, crackers, cheese, baloney, anything we could cook for ourselves to eat/When we got home from school we had canned fruit/ it was cheaper than fresh/ Fruit cocktail, pears, peaches and all that stuff/Mom would leave us notes/ what take out for dinner before she got home/So when she got home from work, she could cook us damn dinner/We were never hungry/ Like even if all we had there was some cereal/

Once when we lived in the projects I remember one night something happened with the food stamps/ we were all hungry/that night for dinner we had watermelon and some ice with salt sprinkled on it /It was like fun/we ate ALL the watermelon/We had all this ice in a pile/a big hunk of it/Mom let us hit it with a hammer to break it up/ we put some salt on it and ate it just like that/We had a good time/I wasn't hungry anymore/I got so full off of watermelon and ice.

(Inspired by Dani)

Hood ≠ Projects

You know that the hood and the projects, ain't the same, right? / People be trying to make them the same thing/They not/ In the hood, you can go outside and play/ Make friends with your neighbors and have fun/In the projects, you gotta really be paying attention because you might get shot/if people are shooting up outside your stoop, then there's no going outside/Plus, you gotta watch out for folks like crazy Mary in her wedding dress...calling out for her children/ Mary ain't got no children/She always had pee on herself/Folks would always call the police/the police would come get her/soon she'd be back out there with her dress on.

(Inspired by Dani)

When the projects were home...

It's the summertime/Everybody is outside/You can smell the heat/ it would be so hot/the fire department would come over and they would open up the hydrants/all us little black kids in the projects would be out there playing in the water/Mamas would go to the dollar store and they would buy us the cheap little water guns/Having water fights in our homemade cutoff shorts/those too small jeans that are too short at the ankles but still fit in the waist/ so Mama just cut 'em off at the knee/

We lived in a U shaped courtyard with metal poles in the middle/Big grassy area between the project apartments surrounded by iron rail gate and lined with real big trees/Beauty in the middle of the ghetto/Everybody's Moms would use the little metal poles to hang out their clean laundry after returning from the laundromat/I loved it because it would so smell so fresh/As kids we'd run through the billowing sheets/even though we was living in the projects/ the summer heat and being outside was a communal experience/

Right on the other side of the courtyard there may be hard stuff going on/but I will always remember the sheets blowing in the wind.

(Inspired by Dani)

APPENDIX III: ADDITIONAL (NON-NARRATIVE) FINDINGS

I wanted the participants stories to be the focus and therefore did not feel that the tables presented below fit neatly within Chapter Five.

Table 3. Black single mother media (re)presentations generated by participants³³

Type of Media	Title	Frequency of mention
Movie	Baby Boy	twice
Movie	Boyz n the Hood	once
Movie	Just Another Girl on the IRT	once
Song	My Baby Daddy	once
Television	Good Times	twice
Movie	Losing Isaiah	twice
Movie	Waiting to Exhale	once
Movie	Kingdom Come	once
Television	Martin	once
Television	Fresh Prince of Bel-Air	once
Television	In the House	once
Television	Girlfriends	once
Movie	Women of Brewster Place	once

³³ Some participants provided more than one example. One participant was unable to think of any

Table 4. Writing Prompt responses chosen by participants

Prompt Option³⁴	Number of participants completed
Letter to Mom	2
Letter to Dad	1
Dear Past Me	1
Dear Future Me	0
10 things I love(d) about my mom	3
Free write	1

³⁴ One participant completed two prompts and another completed a free write and used the prompts as a starting place

Table 5. Single Story Smash

Never married is an assumption made in the single story and yet in my case study their mother's marital status for almost half and half. All participants whose parents were married at conception eventually divorced.

Mother's marital status at conception	Quantity
Married	4
Unmarried*	1
Not married and never got married	4

*This participant's parents were not married when she was born but eventually married and divorced within her first 3 years of life.

APPENDIX IV: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL DOCUMENTS

THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA®

Office of the Vice President for
Research & Economic Development
Office for Research Compliance

February 28, 2018

Jameka Hartley
Gender and Race Studies
Box 870272

Re: IRB#: 18-OR-090 "Lives of Adult Children of Single Mothers of Color: An Ethnographic Case Study"

Dear Jameka Hartley:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. You have also been granted the requested waiver of written documentation of informed consent. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

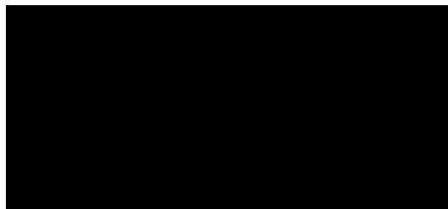
(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies

Your application will expire on February 27, 2019. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Request for Study Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped consent form to provide to your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.



358 Rose Administration Building | Box 870127 | Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127
205-348-8461 | Fax 205-348-7189 | Toll Free 1-877-820-3066

January 8, 2019

Jameka Hartley, MSW
Department of Gender and Race Studies
College of Arts & Sciences
The University of Alabama
Box 870272

Re: IRB # 18-OR-090-R1 "Lives of Adult Children of Single Mothers of Color: An Ethnographic Case Study"

Dear Ms. Hartley:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your renewal application. Your renewal application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. You have also been granted the requested waiver of documentation of informed consent. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your application will expire on January 7, 2020. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Study Closure Form.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

